

Imagined, Movable Worlds:
An Anancy Aesthetic and Creating Narrative Spaces in the Storytelling
of British Writers of the Caribbean Diaspora

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I, Natalie Anna Lucy, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

The shapeshifting Spider God, Anancy, was transported to the Caribbean within the imaginations of those who survived the Middle Passage. Spontaneous and immersive, a panoply of aural and visual features accompanied the stories, which were adapted to offer a unique, multisensory, language on the plantations. Within a spiritual, impregnable circle, they not only reaffirmed a sense of community but provided a semblance of escape. Anancy, the central protagonist of the tales, was also recast as more human and earthbound. His many audacious escapades suggested liberation from the brutal conditions of the plantations, and his intuitiveness and linguistic agility offered attainable methods of resistance.

In this thesis, I follow Anancy's metaphorical and literal journey through the principal stages of his reinvention to his emergence within British writing of the Caribbean diaspora. A primary focus of my research is Anancy's legacy and, specifically, whether a unique narrative style, which I describe as an 'Anancy aesthetic', can be identified within that writing. It encompasses specific facets of both Anancy as he was reinvented within the Caribbean and the many synaesthetic features that informed the tales. Substantially rooted in heritage, their celebration of fluidity and hybridity offered inspiration for those who did not conform to rigid, traditional categories. Significant within a Britain that has historically projected itself as 'white,' the tales now inform a host of cultural traditions which are associated with contemporary ideas of Britishness.

This thesis represents an inquiry. It seeks to identify and understand the multifarious ways that Anancy has been shaped by the circumstances of his reinvention. Critical

to this is why the superficially anodyne trickster provided inspiration for myriad transnational writers across generations, not only through a multisensory style of storytelling but in centralising themes of resistance, heritage and, perhaps most significantly, of voice.

Impact Statement

Despite a wealth of research into the many aspects of Anancy and the tales, I am unaware of any that specifically addresses the concept of an 'Anancy aesthetic', that is, the ways that those specific features can be deemed to inform a style of storytelling. These tales, which are intrinsic to ideas of heritage and identity, are also intertwined with contemporary constructions of 'Britishness'. While there is an established quantity of recognised work about Anancy's role on the plantations, most notably by academic Emily Zobel Marshall, there has been a limited focus on any impact of the tales upon storytelling traditions of the Caribbean diaspora. In this thesis, I attempt to define how the Anancy Tales have shaped a specific form of storytelling, both in their style and themes.

The research within this thesis straddles several fields, which include Folklore, Anthropology, Literature and Language. An essential aspect of this research concerns writers of the Caribbean Artists Movement, who adopted and moulded Anancy as a diasporic figure, positioning the stories as relevant to a sense of heritage and identity. Andrew Salkey was a founding member of CAM. Before completing this thesis, I did a placement at the British Library. The project was to visually 'map' the Caribbean diaspora through the correspondence that was retained within Andrew Salkey's archive. I was able to access the many well-documented letters from writers, including Samuel Selvon and Kamau Brathwaite. I was particularly interested in demonstrating the literary and cultural networks within this correspondence for which Salkey acted as a central point. As part of a small team, we developed ways to visualise the information digitally and proved able to make the archive more dynamic, interactive, and accessible and to enhance its educational

potential. As part of the project, I wrote two blogs for the British Library website, co-hosted a workshop and am co-writing a paper for the British Library Electronic Resource. The project has a potential impact not only within academia but also in schools as an engaging, visual introduction to the Caribbean Artists Movement. Further, it has an appeal for other libraries seeking to enhance the presentation of information within their archives.

The British Library placement offered an opportunity to consult numerous documents and personal letters not currently available to the public, affording an insight into a number of writers' processes, motivations, and sources of inspiration. I had the privilege of accessing Andrea Levy's notebooks, which contained handwritten marginalia, and James Berry's ideas for future stories. While at the British Library, I also personally communicated with several individuals who were connected with Andrew Salkey and who represent some of the few remaining contributors to the Caribbean Artists Movement, including Louis James. Such insights have enriched my research in ways which are arguably unique. This thesis adds to current criticism of Caribbean Literature, specifically positioning Anancy as a storytelling device, or aesthetic, which permeates the work and examines the impact of the folkloric character on British literary and cultural traditions.

'Writers are given their preoccupations at birth. I am the descendant of enslaved Africans who were forcibly denied the right to the written word, or to express themselves through art or song and yet held onto aspects of their African heritage in both.'

(Winsome Pinnock, introduction to *Leave Taking*, Bush Theatre, 2018)

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my grandmother
who told me to carry it always
on my person, concealed, so
no one else would know but me.
That way they can't steal it, she'd say.'

(Roger Robinson, *A Portable Paradise*)

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Introduction

The regime that confronted those who survived the brutalities of the slave ships encompassed policies which were designed not only to dehumanise but to eradicate all memory of an African homeland. Such measures extended to substituting 'slave' names for the often symbolic, given names, as well as separating those who spoke common languages and banning the drum amid concerns that it could help to facilitate rebellion. Despite the abject barbarity of the system that operated on the plantations, a wealth of cultural traditions remained embedded within the imaginations of those who survived the Middle Passage. Prominent within this rich resource were the multitude of stories that featured the trickster Anansi.¹

The shapeshifting Spider God was not the only West African folkloric character to be stowed aboard the ships, able to emerge, relatively intact, upon Caribbean soil. Retained within the memories of the newly enslaved, deracinated, and desolate Africans were a host of other mythological figures who had featured in their night-time stories. However, the series of trickster stories about the spirited and brazen Anancy exerted a compelling influence on the plantations, a tradition that has not only survived in the Caribbean but within its diaspora.

Primarily a source of entertainment which afforded some escape from the daily psychological and physical brutalities of life on the plantations, Anancy's energetic antics, particularly in his audacious displays of linguistic virtuosity, also suggested

¹ Anancy is spelt in numerous ways. Walter Jekyll uses 'Annancy'. However, Louise Bennett and Andrew Salkey later use the spelling 'Anancy'; Rattray uses 'Anansi' when referring to the Ashanti tales, which is the form which Martha Warren Beckwith also follows. I have used 'Anansi' when referring to his role in African folklore and 'Anancy' when describing his characterisation and role within the Caribbean, unless quoting directly from material.

modes of resistance. Despite Anancy's popularity, when compared with the potency of many of the other trickster Gods of West African mythology, the playful, occasionally ridiculous character might be mistaken for a somewhat inert hero. A perceived ineffectuality, combined with the fact that he has historically been defined by a litany of negative characteristics, has resulted in his precarious status as a 'folk hero'. However, Anancy has not only survived but continues to exert a profound influence on a literary and cultural identity, not only within the Caribbean but within its diaspora.

Any attempt to comprehend the reasons behind Anancy's enduring appeal necessitates a metaphorical journey back towards his origins in West Africa. The multifaceted tales served numerous cultural and educational functions in the oral tradition of the 'Gold Coast', a region which approximately equates to what is now Ghana. Many of these were adopted within the Caribbean and have proved integral to the Spider Trickster's legacy. One of the most compelling features of Anansi, both to Akan tradition and to his continued relevance to storytellers, can be found in the pivotal tale in which Anansi won the stories of the world. In the Ashanti legend, there were no stories until Anansi determined to acquire them. After negotiating with the God Nyame, he was set a series of ostensibly impossible tasks in exchange for the stories. His unanticipated success in the challenge was achieved through a combination of skills which included linguistic agility, an intuitive understanding of behaviour and an aspirational indefatigability.

Transported to the Caribbean, Anansi was reinvented in a more human guise than his Akan ancestor. Various described with both a 'lisp' and a 'limp' and, therefore,

both physically vulnerable and verbally stifled, he became a representative for the enslaved. His acts of rebellion and triumph suggested vicarious successes while demonstrating the potential power of his armoury of linguistic and intellectual skills, assets which, significantly, were also at the disposal of those enslaved within the Caribbean. Historically both a 'God' and a 'spider' within the Caribbean his lack of physical or political power added further to his potential as a hero. Anancy's embodiment of flawed 'humanity' contributed to his survival, enhancing his potential as a narrative device, with many of his 'superhuman' abilities, including shapeshifting, later replaced by more attainable forms of disguise.

Several other attributes also suggested Anancy's suitability as a pertinent, multifaceted narrative device. Essentially a nomad, he was both portable and fluid. His ambiguities and, at times, ambivalence offered alternatives to the traditionally rigid preoccupation with classifications. Malleable and accessible, he also afforded an essential device through which to say something about culture and belonging and has been reinvented at critical political moments, both within the Caribbean and in Britain, to assert ideas that are profoundly intertwined with heritage. As a narrative device, particularly one so bound up with identity, Anancy had the potential, therefore, not only to stimulate an artistic, particularly literary, imagination but to represent a uniquely Caribbean experience.

In this thesis, I attempt to trace Anancy through his many shapes at different points in history in an effort to understand his resonance for British writers with Caribbean heritage. For those of a 'Windrush' generation, Anancy offered an appealing resource through which to interrogate ideas of heritage, particularly when his fluidity

and ambiguities lent themselves to discussions about ideas of belonging within a country that had traditionally asserted itself as 'white'. However, Anancy's 'legacy' in Britain has extended beyond those early iterations and now emerges in a diverse array of artistic and creative forms, including a plethora of contemporary Anancy stories for children. His influence also emerges in a specific storytelling style, which encompasses distinct themes or characteristics of Anancy himself, which can be grouped into what I would term an 'Anancy aesthetic'.

The Origins of a Caribbean Anancy and His Tales

In order to extrapolate features of an aesthetic, it is essential to first distinguish the Caribbean Anancy and the elements of those tales from other, superficially similar, trickster stories from an oral tradition. Many share certain overlapping traits with the Caribbean trickster but, in other respects, are distinct from Anancy. Originating in West Africa, Anansi meant 'the spider' in the Twi dialect. Transported to the Caribbean, the stories helped to preserve a sense of an African homeland through a multi-sensory cultural form which encapsulated theatre, music, and sound. Whereas the origins of African American folklore have been contested, in the Caribbean, the stories have historically been accepted as fundamentally West African. The wealth of evidence that supports this includes the accounts of Matthew Gregory Lewis, a plantation owner in the 1810s and a renowned Gothic horror novelist and diarist, who ascribed many of the customs and practices of those enslaved on his plantation to African heritage, including the existence and nature of their spiritual beliefs. Contradicting the commonly held perception that there was a lack of religious practice, Lewis noted in his diary that 'the Africans generally believe that there is a

life beyond the present,'² observations which he made alongside a series of other pronouncements on what he perceived to be (West) African practices. Lewis is also credited with being one of the first Europeans to document any 'Anancy' stories, usefully describing them as 'African Nancy-Stor[jies]'.³ However, it is interesting that the titular trickster was rarely present in Lewis's recorded tales, with Lewis instead defining the 'requisites' as 'a witch or a duppy or, in short, some marvellous personage or other.'⁴ While Lewis's versions of the stories also habitually neglect to convey certain key features of the tales, including the additions of music, song and sound, he nevertheless admired the stories and made some attempt to convey something of the sense and nature of the tales.

Other, more comprehensive, attempts to disentangle the history of Anancy tales are found, albeit much later, in folklorist Alice Werner's introduction to Walter Jekyll's collection of tales and songs in the early 1900s when she discusses its 'network of interwoven strands of European and African [origin]'.⁵ A quantity of further evidence also underlines the essential 'Africanness' of the stories, including the accounts of a host of European visitors, which, while undoubtedly inhibited by a limited knowledge of the symbolism of the storytelling practices, nevertheless convey something of their vividness. For example, Mrs Henry Lynch, whose account, *The Wonders of the West Indies*, was published in 1856, describes 'hear[ing] an African slave drawl out [a] tale in a melancholy tone, making it strangely impressive by suddenly lowering her voice

² M. G. Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Journal Entry: January 13th, 1816, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵ Walter Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Ring Tunes And Dancing Tunes* (New York: Dover Books, 1966).

to a whisper, and then all at once swelling out into wild earnestness.⁶ Such broad acceptance of the origins of the tales is in marked contrast with the American *Brer Rabbit* tales, which have been repeatedly misappropriated, often to detrimental effect, and most notably by Disney's controversial and demeaning *Song of the South* (1946). When also considered alongside Henry Louis Gates's efforts to establish the connections between the 'Signifying Monkey,' the figure of many vernacular tales of his childhood, and the tricksters, particularly Esu, of West African legend, the relatively uncontroverted heritage for the Anancy tales must, at times, have appeared as a distant but unwavering light emanating from Africa.

Despite such persuasive evidence for the origins of the Anancy tales, any attempt to follow a distinct thread back towards their Akan ancestors is predictably complicated by their oral nature. The lack of written sources for the West African stories makes it necessary to rely on later versions of the tales for any meaningful comparison, the best known of which are those of colonial officer and anthropologist R. S. Rattray who made efforts to accurately transcribe them in the 1920s.⁷ In Rattray's versions of the tales Anansi is a liminal, transformative, being, a character that defied description. At times genderless, at others both predator and prey, Anansi moved fluidly between worlds. Rattray explains the tales as a way to shape and understand the universe. A feature of this was that they could provide the rationale for why animals lived in a particular dwelling or exhibited specific characteristics. One of the stories in his collection seeks to explain: "How it came about that the hinder part of

⁶ Mrs Henry Lynch in *The Wonders of the West Indies*, reproduced in Roger D. Abrahams and John F. Szwed (eds.) *After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries Concerning the Slaves, Their Manners and Customs in the British West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 119.

⁷ R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folktales*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

Kwaku Ananse, the spider, became big at the expense of his head, which became small”, whereas another describes: “How the Babadua reed got joints on its stalk”. Other, more conceptual, tales explain how ‘jealousy’, ‘disease’ or ‘contradiction’ entered the ‘tribe’⁸ with the stories presenting a moral framework, which Robert Pelton describes ‘as a way of imparting tradition and renewing the present world.’⁹ The Ashanti Anansi tales also served two further functions, which proved of critical importance when they were transported to the Caribbean. They provided a means to name and explain the world and a forum to comment upon the excesses or tyranny of the powerful behind the dual masks of animal characters and humour.

The regime which governed the Caribbean plantations was sufficiently brutal that it encompassed policies designed to separate those who spoke the same language. However, the Anancy tales were indigenous to significant segments of West Africa, and a similarity in theme and function meant that they could be understood by many on the plantations despite the linguistic challenges. The widely held misconception that the tales were anodyne, or even childish, operated as a strength in this context and resulted in a rich cultural resource that was not only capable of aiding communication but creating a life-affirming sense of community.

In the Caribbean, the portable and malleable Anancy was adapted to serve the extreme challenges of their circumstances. The liminal being who conversed with Gods became more obviously human, aligning him with the oppressed of the plantations. His potential to serve a subversive role, which had existed in the Ashanti

⁸ Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folktales*.

⁹ Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 69.

stories, was further emphasised in the Caribbean, with Anancy remoulded as a figure of resistance. Ostensibly physically weak and politically inert, the linguistic agility that had been celebrated in the original tales survived as a central characteristic. In the Caribbean stories, Anancy repeatedly triumphed against the analogous plantation owner, Tiger, successfully humiliating and outwitting his dim-witted adversary with Anancy's antics suggesting a 'formula' or strategies to exploit opportunities for independence or liberty. That he did so through a combination of language, intuitiveness and music demonstrated the potential of the skills at the disposal of so many of his fellow enslaved Africans. These were not merely 'available' tools or devices through which to seize some degree of power but reflected the strengths of the oral tradition, which placed a value on storytelling and linguistic agility. In marked contrast with the rhetoric that was cultivated to justify slavery, and which relied upon repeated assertions that those who were enslaved were intellectually inferior, such skills were highly specific and relied on both an impressive linguistic virtuosity and acuity.

Emily Zobel Marshall has comprehensively explored Anancy's role as a figure of resistance in her work, most notably in *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance* (2012).¹⁰ His audacious and cunning exploits suggested a means by which to achieve a degree of power which, for Anancy, derived from an awareness that, despite the brutality of their treatment, the plantation owners were reliant upon their labour and skills. It afforded them, and by extension, Anancy, a limited yet available source of power, with the potential to further exploit it through a

¹⁰ Emily Zobel Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2012).

combination of cleverness and manipulation. Despite its importance, to place too great an emphasis on Anancy's role as a resistance figure risks oversimplifying not only the multi-layered potential of the stories but Anancy himself, who was morally ambiguous and, at times, unapologetically selfish or even cruel. An advocate for the enslaved, he was also contradictory, an essential facet within the myriad stories in which Anancy posed complex, frequently ambiguous, questions within a 'problem' space. His stories rarely conveyed a simplistic, overt, message but stimulated debate. Conveyed in caricaturist sequences, their absurdity and humour permitted a further degree of licence through which to explore multifaceted issues which were traditionally prohibited.

Intertwined, yet distinct, from Anancy's influence as something of a diverting and, at times, inspiring character were the many discrete features of an oral tradition that shaped and enhanced the tales. In the foreword to his seminal, *The Signifying Monkey*, which was first published in 1988, Henry Louis Gates, argued that, in the New World, African slavery 'satisfied the preconditions for the emergence of a new African culture, a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as a colourful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical and formal threads.'¹¹ Not merely linear tales, the storytelling sessions on the Caribbean plantations represented a multidimensional performance with rhythm, music, and song constituting essential parts of the tales. Many accounts from European visitors describe the peculiarities or, on occasion, adornment of the host of sounds that accompanied the stories, which included the simulation of animal sounds and music. Despite such impressive

¹¹ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.4.

displays, the presumed superiority of European written literature blinded many to the significance of this oral tradition.

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates explores the influence of this oral tradition on African American literature and culture, crediting fellow academic, the Nobel Prize-winning Wole Soyinka, with whom Gates was well acquainted at Cambridge, as a source of inspiration partly through his refusal: 'to give ground to the ancients as being somehow "superior" in achievement or complexity to this branch of the African tradition.'¹² At a time when the formal study of African American literature was in its infancy, Gates proffered ideas of an 'aesthetic' that referenced features of an oral tradition with its origins in Africa and which, he asserted, was capable of providing a valid framework through which to explore and interrogate African American literature.

An Anancy Aesthetic

This thesis draws upon some of the ideas raised in Gates's pioneering work and, most notably, in its attempt to distil aspects of the tales which emerge in the themes and narrative style of many prominent, predominantly black, British writers of the Caribbean diaspora. What I term an 'aesthetic' and the factors which have contributed to its evolution demonstrate many parallels with an African-American literary tradition, particularly through its origins in the storytelling practices of the plantations. Particularly notable is Gates's contention that 'slave narratives' created an important foundation for an aesthetic and reflected the necessity for enslaved people 'to represent themselves as "speaking subjects" before they could even begin

¹² Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, p.4.

to destroy their status as objects, as commodities, within Western Culture'.¹³ Many African-American writers, including Zora Neale Hurston, built upon this foundation, creating a distinct literary voice. It represented what Gates describes as a 'double voicedness'¹⁴ through manipulation of both European and African oral narrative styles and offered a cogent way to 'write back' against rigid forms of literature with their roots in a distinct European experience. Before he found his own unique literary voice, which notably referenced American trickster figures, Ralph Ellison similarly described his initial frustrations at finding an adequate medium to tell his story, with Ellison contending that neither the novel of manners, 'the tight, well-made Jamesian novel' nor the 'hardboiled' novel with its dedication to physical violence, social cynicism and understatement met his needs.¹⁵

In the attempt to identify the influence of what I term an 'Anancy Aesthetic', I am conscious that certain aspects of the narrative style of many British writers with Caribbean heritage represent recognisable features of a wider Black aesthetic, as is notably explored in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*¹⁶ as well as other oral tales, including Brer Rabbit and the Signifying Monkey. It was a style of storytelling that necessitated a specific form of investment in the literature through those broader, aural aspects which required participation and which Nicole Brittingham Furlonge describes as the need to 'shift emphasis away from the visual toward the aural, thereby suggesting aural literacy as a significant modality of identity, representation

¹³ Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, p. 141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁵ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Harlow, England: Penguin Books, 2014), Introduction, p. x.

¹⁶ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso Books, 1993).

and engagement.¹⁷ Despite some degree of overlap, however, the ‘Anancy Aesthetic’, which I seek to explore, represents a coalescence of discrete features which specifically stem from the Anancy Tales.

The habitually dismissive attitudes towards the oral practices that originated in West Africa permitted a particular style of language and storytelling to evolve on the Caribbean plantations. A composite of West African and European languages and influences, and shaped to reflect its Caribbean climate and conditions, it offered a new language that was capable of encapsulating a particular experience and history. The West African Anansi tales prescribed certain formalities, including the fact that the telling had to be at night and that they should contain a ‘disclaimer’ at the end of each story. Such features afforded a degree of licence and can still be found in many of the retellings. Other characteristics of the tales were specific to their reinvention on the Caribbean plantations and were precipitated by, and provided, a creative and powerful response to the conditions of slavery. In the Caribbean, sound acquired an additional emphasis, offering a possible solution to the increased difficulties of language. Animals and simulated noises also enhanced the performance, and several visitors to the plantations described hearing a ‘tapping’ and ‘meter’¹⁸ alongside a prevalence of songs so that the stories representing a specific, artistic amalgam of words, music, humour, and rhythm. Within a context in which communication was frequently prohibited, or at least stymied, by the forced separation of those who spoke the same languages, the non-verbal elements of the

¹⁷ Nicole Brittingham Furlonge, *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018) p. 2.

¹⁸ Including Mrs Henry Lynch in *The Wonders of the West Indies* (1856), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p 119.

stories, which included exaggerated visual and aural aspects, became even more relevant to their accessibility.

Perhaps predictably, a defining feature of the Caribbean Anancy tales was also the nature and character of the central trickster figure. One of Anancy's most prominent skills was his shapeshifting. This ability to alter and reconfigure himself made him a pertinent metaphor for those within the Caribbean and its diaspora, with its obvious parallel to ideas of reforming and adapting to survive within a hostile, alien environment. Another unique aspect of Anancy, which is intertwined with ideas of shapeshifting, was his embodiment as a Spider, which suggested physiological characteristics and offered a powerful motif within a host of performative and artistic forms. These arachnid traits were frequently highlighted in calamitous and ridiculous sequences in which Anancy is forced to extricate himself from a 'tight spot'. In such episodes, humour embellishes and informs the story, aspects of absurdity which are not only conveyed through Anancy's audaciousness but through his spider-physiology, which see him running and scurrying to try to implement a deceitful plan or to evade disaster.

The unique physiology of the spider has other connotations relevant to Anancy's survival. His agility and physical versatility permit him to enter places which are usually prohibited, providing a potent metaphor through its symbolic analogy to socio-economic or geographical spaces. However, Anancy's many limbs suggest further artistic manifestations, including dance, with the Jamaican academic and

performer, Rex Nettleford, celebrating the spider's physicality as a potent symbol through his: 'fleet-footed, high-jumping, frisky, shifting plastic being.'¹⁹

This agile, energetic 'spider' potential, particularly as it relates to his multiple, shifting limbs, has been extended to other forms of performance. Recalling the acrobats he watched in childhood, Wilson Harris described performers on high stilts, which Harris perceived to be suggestive of Anancy's limbs. Others, similarly reminiscent of the spider, moved spread-eagled on the ground, images which Harris describes as: 'limbo spider and stilted pole of the gods were related to the drums like grassroots and branches of lightning to the sound of thunder.'²⁰ Poet Kamau Brathwaite also referenced the connection of Anancy to styles of movement in his poem 'Limbo', which is contained within his collection of spoken poetry, *Rights of Passage*.²¹ It was a dance style that Harris contended was: 'born it is said on the slave ships of the Middle Passage. There was so little space that the slaves contorted themselves into human spiders.'²² Wilson Harris and Kamau Brathwaite both emphasise this aspect of Anancy, and their work is punctuated with allusions to webs and threads, the suggestions of deceit and storytelling embodied within the theme. The spider becomes something of a metaphor, therefore, a subtle signifier which enhances his characterisation as vulnerable, terrifying, malleable, and rapid, creating webs of creativity which DeFrantz and Gonzalez encapsulate as: 'black expressive

¹⁹ Walter Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. xiv.

²⁰ Wilson Harris, 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 54.1-2 (2008), 5-37, (p. 11).

²¹ E. K. Brathwaite, *The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

²² Wilson Harris, 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', (p. 11).

performance (which) springs from the need to communicate beyond the limited events of words alone.'²³

Perhaps the most compelling feature of the Anancy tales that emerges as part of any aesthetic is the tradition and power of storytelling. In Akan tradition, Anansi sufficiently valued stories that he was impelled to perform seemingly impossible feats in order to 'win' the stories of the world. This role, together with the potential of language, has proved a predictable source of inspiration within storytelling. Anancy was not only moulded to represent a champion for the dehumanised and brutalised enslaved people of the Caribbean, but subsequent generations have appropriated and shaped him to say something meaningful about language and identity. Within the Caribbean diaspora, another facet of Anancy which emerged with a great emphasis than was relevant on the plantations was his role as a liminal figure. Capable of straddling worlds, he suggested an obvious analogy for those of the diaspora, with Stuart Hall describing Anancy as: 'exploit[ing] the ambiguities of belongingness. He is a genius at manoeuvring between irreconcilable tasks.'²⁴ However, Anancy could also serve a further purpose for writers of the diaspora. By manipulating the format and function of the Anancy tales as a storytelling device, they could portray an alternative picture and story from the traditional, restrictive narrative. In a country which defined itself in the 1940s and 1950s and beyond as a 'white' country and where constraining 'boxes' were frequently used to shut people out, Anancy's fluidity could suggest a metaphor through which to signify possibility. In contrast with the singularity of voice that has traditionally been asserted in British

²³ Thomas F. Defrantz and Anita Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 3.

²⁴ Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Islands* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018), p.199.

literature, Anancy was, and still is, capable of suggesting the potential richness of hybridity and of a multiplicity of 'voices.'

In this thesis, I follow the sometimes-meandering path of Anancy as it crisscrosses on a historical and literary journey, from the earliest incarnations on the plantations to the features of an aesthetic that emerge within contemporary works of fiction. In doing so, I attempt to identify significant, common features of the early versions of the tales which can be deemed to be encapsulated as an 'Anancy aesthetic.' Jeanne Rosier Smith defined what she termed a 'trickster aesthetic'²⁵ as encompassing a diverse range of aspects, including a prevalence of central, nomadic figures. 'Consummate storytellers' they existed at borders, capable of operating as a rhetorical device. While useful and suggesting an overlap with a specific 'Anancy aesthetic' in this thesis, I seek to distinguish Anancy and the traits of his tales from any, more general, 'trickster' features.

Although inconsistencies abound, my primary focus remains those aspects that were common to the earlier Caribbean Anancy stories and which represent a useful way of interpreting the literature that builds upon those original foundations or, as Gates might term it in relation to African American literature, 'signifies' upon them. Such features can loosely be divided into the characteristics that specifically relate to Anancy, most prominent of which is his 'wordsmithery,' or his linguistic agility, as a means to acquire power, and those specific aspects of both the stories and the storytelling tradition, which encompass aural and visual features. It is worth

²⁵ Jeanne Rosier Smith, *Writing Tricksters* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997), p. 199.

emphasizing that Anancy's 'wordsmithery' also reflects what is frequently a delight in storytelling and the language together with its potential manipulations.

Anancy's other principal characteristics include flamboyancy and the use of disguise or shapeshifting to enhance his social mobility. Notable within Anancy's panoply of 'unique' features is his physicality, which is often manifested through references to webs and threads, as well as his peculiar physiology and mythology which renders the spider both potent and, for many, terrifying yet vulnerable. The early stories also reveal a preoccupation with names, probably in reference to the significance of Akan names and the deprivation of those names as a brutal ritual of enslavement.

A principal aspect of the aesthetic is also what I would describe as 'theatre.' Some of these are facets of a broader oral tradition and, as such, feature in many other 'trickster' tales, including call-and-response, alliteration, and rhyme, aspects which are often conveyed through the method of telling and which demand an immersive, multi-sensory, approach and a need, above all, to listen. However, in the Caribbean, because of the circumstances of their reinvention, such 'theatrical' characteristics became even more pronounced with music, comedy, and disguise integral to ideas of an aesthetic.

As a whole, this thesis spans narratives which stretch from the Middle Passage to the post-colonial present. It follows a specific literal and metaphorical path in an effort to identify and understand the factors which informed both the various stages of reinvention of the Anancy tales and the reasons behind Anancy's endurance and continued potency. As such, it takes as its starting point the ways in which the West

African versions of the tales were appropriated and reinvented for the conditions of the plantations, culminating in a specific set of themes which informed a distinct, storytelling aesthetic. This thesis then follows the various reiterations of Anancy and the tales at critical political points within the Caribbean to the various reinventions of the tales and their principal protagonist which can now be identified in a host of cultural traditions in Britain, several of which are now intertwined with ideas of Britishness.

Any pursuit of Anancy's path requires what is, at times, a non-linear approach. This presents some difficulties with structure, and while much of the thesis follows a chronological trajectory, I occasionally deviate from this stringent approach in an attempt to reflect the significant stages of Anancy's reinvention, which frequently correspond to key historical, or political moments. Prior to independence for many countries in the Caribbean, Louise Bennett prominently reinvented Anancy. Her versions of the tales, which were reimagined through a unique form of performance which placed emphasis on music, sound, and theatre, represented a celebration of folklore and language. Post-independence, in the mid to late 1960s, the Caribbean Artists Movement built upon some of Bennett's work, particularly as it utilised a form of Caribbean dialect, which co-founder Edward Kamau Brathwaite later termed 'Nation Language'. An objective of the Movement was to identify a Caribbean aesthetic, but it was also pivotal to the legacy they created. At a CAM conference in 1968, Stuart Hall asserted that: 'The task of any intellectual and any writer in relation to that [Caribbean immigrant] group of people in Britain now [is] preeminently to help them see, clarify, speak, understand and name the process that they're going through...The language of that experience will be different significantly from the

language of the West Indian novel and West Indian poetry to date because it comes out of a new matrix. And it's crucial that this period does not go past without the language being forged...' ²⁶ This 'new matrix' had hybridity and transition at its roots, with Anancy and the stories emerging as central to questions of heritage and identity.

Despite the portentousness of Stuart Hall's comments and the foundations which the Caribbean Artists Movement laid, what emerges in a 'Second Generation' is something of a disconnect with the Caribbean. It is signified by the sense of 'unbelonging' of many of this generation, growing up in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. In part, it was engendered by an education system that left no place for those who did not conform to narrow perceptions of a white, imperialist society, with Caryl Phillips recalling the discomfort of being: 'the only black boy in the school, sit[ting] cross-legged on the floor,' at the feet of his teacher 'as she read them a tale about 'Little Black Sambo.'²⁷ The accounts of many 'Second Generation' writers reveal woefully similar experiences. Distinct moments of alienation and rejection, they informed a particular perspective compounded by what was frequently a limited knowledge of their Caribbean heritage. For many, these cultural chasms were eventually, and gratifyingly, filled by the oral influences of many black writers, and particularly the initiatives of the Caribbean Artists Movement, including the Book Fairs founded by New Beacon Books.

²⁶ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 164.

²⁷ Caryl Phillips, *Color Me English* (New York: The New Press, 2011), p. 107.

In seeking to identify a cohesive, logical structure for this thesis, I have, therefore, divided it into two principal parts. Broadly chronological and by way of a brief overview of its proposed arc, the first part of the thesis follows Anansi's journey from West Africa and through his main stages of reinvention in the Caribbean. This frequently coincides with critical political and social events, particularly as questions of identity became more urgent, and concludes with the foundations laid in Britain by the Caribbean Artists Movement. In essence, in this first section of my thesis, I am interested in understanding how Anancy and the tales evolved on the plantations and how, through the idiosyncratic features of the tales, they became intrinsic to ideas of a Caribbean 'Voice'.

The second part of the thesis explores Anancy's evolution within a specifically British context. Part of my focus is how Anancy, and an aesthetic, emerge within the literature of British writers, whose perception of Anancy was formulated at some distance from his Caribbean roots. Relevant to this is an understanding of the imperialistic, hostile, and unwelcoming environment in which many of a 'Second Generation' were educated and forced to formulate their identities.

Divided into those distinct parts of the thesis, the individual chapters broadly correspond to the specific points at which Anancy, and the tales, were significantly reinvented. It is notable that the stages of his evolution also frequently coincide with patterns of movement. Therefore, in Chapter One, I examine the role and purpose of Anancy and tales on the Caribbean plantations. In understanding their West African origins, I am forced to rely primarily upon Captain R. S. Rattray's attempts to accurately transcribe the tales of the Ashanti both in English and in Twi. In respect of

the Caribbean version of the tales, I rely principally upon the tales recorded by Walter Jekyll, versions which both Louise Bennett and Rex Nettleford endorse, as well as the collections recorded by Martha Warren Beckwith. I also consider the accounts of early European diarists and their observations of storytelling events and ways of speaking, which, despite the many regrettable and predictable distortions, still offer valuable insights. In an effort to provide context for the stories, I have also consulted the available diaries and journals of those who experienced life on the plantations during slavery, which include Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano, in addition to the disturbing account of the British overseer Thomas Thistlewood and that of British plantation owner and novelist, Matthew 'Monk' Lewis, who, as detailed earlier, is credited as the first writer to record the Anancy tales.

In this section, I am also much indebted to Emily Zobel Marshall's comprehensive work on Anancy and, in particular, his role as a figure of resistance. It was during this period that Anancy was adopted and reasserted with a function that was distinct from that of his Akan ancestor. He became more 'human' and more closely aligned with the people for whom he offered a source of escape and inspiration for ways to survive and even prosper. These themes, together with the particular eccentricities of the central protagonist, Anancy, form the most compelling aspects of a distinctive narrative style.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the work of folklorist, poet, and performer Louise Bennett, and her role in preserving and, to some extent, reinventing and reasserting the tales. In the years approaching independence, the popularisation and celebration of Anancy stories at a time when Jamaica and the wider Caribbean were questioning

their identities served an important political function. Like Anancy, Bennett's veneer of lightness masked a more serious purpose by her insistence on the cohesive role that the Anancy tales could serve and through her determination to reassert the tales as humorous, accessible, and entertaining. It was a legacy which related mainly to language and to the celebration of Jamaican dialect, a foundation that profoundly influenced the Caribbean Artists Movement, crossing the waters to Britain in the opposite direction to Bennett when she returned to the Caribbean, intent upon further exploring the potential of folklore. Her achievement was such that Rex Nettleford credits Bennett with 'carv[ing] designs out of the shapeless and unruly substance that is the Jamaican dialect – the language which most of the Jamaican people speak most of the time – and rais[ing] the sing-song patter of the hills and of the towns to an art level acceptable to and appreciated by people from all classes in her country.'²⁸ Part of her accomplishment was in redefining and remoulding a personality, or character, for Anancy, thereby resurrecting him as a folk hero. In doing so, she emphasised both his African heritage and the oral tradition in which performance, sound and language were essential elements. However, despite some shift in his focus, Bennett's versions of the stories reasserted many of the themes which existed in the earlier tales, reinforcing a 'language' that drew on folklore and was intrinsically related to the culture and people of the Caribbean.

In the third chapter, I consider the specific ways in which Anancy was reinvented by the writers of the diaspora, particularly within Britain. Anancy provided a key source of inspiration for the Caribbean Artists Movement, whose manifold objectives included support for and the promotion of Caribbean artistic talent. At its centre was

²⁸ Louise Bennett, *Jamaica Labrish* (Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Book Stores, 1966), p. 9.

the consolidation of a Caribbean 'voice'. Informed by the ideas of dialect asserted by Louise Bennett, the writers who were part of CAM built upon the work of pioneers Samuel Selvon and George Lamming. However, it is significant that when identifying a suitable Caribbean 'voice' or aesthetic, many of these writers and artists focused on folklore and, most substantially, Anancy and the tales. Part of what Stuart Hall described as a 'new matrix', the Caribbean Artists Movement, together with their unique perspective as it straddled cultures, laid an essential foundation for further generations of British writers with Caribbean heritage. Although they sought to identify a 'Caribbean aesthetic,' it is notable that many principal members of that movement remained in Britain, including Andrew Salkey, John La Rose, James Berry, and Wilson Harris. It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that a substantial focus of Anancy's reinvention within Britain would be as a diasporic figure, with Anancy suggesting a trope for the displaced or exiled.

In the second part of the thesis, I explore the ways in which Anancy and what I have termed an 'Anancy aesthetic', carved and moulded as it was by previous writers, emerges in British writing of the Caribbean diaspora. One of the questions for subsequent generations draws upon Stuart Hall's contention that it might only be in a second or third generation that the realities of being 'fully immigrated' would be evident.²⁹ Although representing something of a departure from a strictly chronological approach, in order to properly consider this question, it is essential to

²⁹ Addressing the Caribbean Artists Movement Conference in 1968, Stuart Hall stated: 'It is the next generation of young boys and girls for whom the return to their historical past has for a second time...been cut off, whose way home is genuinely blocked: whose expectations and definitions of themselves as black has been formed and forged in the teeth of the immigrant experience... It is only the very deep breaking of links with that complex past which I think happens not in the first but in the second and third immigrant generations that we begin to see what the truly immigrated West Indian is actually like.' Cited in Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966 -1972* (London: New Beacon, 1992) p. 163.

understand the context in which many writers of a Second Generation attempted to forge a path, at something of a 'disconnect' with their Caribbean heritage. For this reason, in Chapter Four, I consider the foundations for what was a profound sense of 'unbelonging' for many of the Second Generation, as well as the eventual efforts towards change. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Britain was a society in which the educational system used its literature to symbolically shut out many of its citizens through repeated attempts to reinforce and celebrate its imperialistic past. Many of the 'staples' within schools, including *Peter Pan* and *The Secret Garden*, were lauded as 'classics' despite perpetuating harmful racist stereotypes. Such a skewed reflection of a country in all its media forms profoundly impacted the childhoods of Caryl Phillips, Andrea Levy and Alex Wheatle, who have all described being unable to recognise themselves within the narrow and divisive texts that existed in schools.

The problems of 'belonging' which plagued many of this generation were significantly based upon race, with the challenge of being both Black and British requiring, as Paul Gilroy described it: 'some specific forms of double consciousness'.³⁰ An absence of inclusive stories was eventually remedied by Beryl Gilroy's contributions to the ground-breaking 'Nippers' stories, which portrayed and celebrated a breadth of children in their racial and socio-economic diversity. Although the stories did not specifically draw upon Anancy, it seems significant to his legacy and influence that his multifaceted complexity can still be glimpsed behind the colourful and diverse canvas that Beryl Gilroy created. Gilroy's insights and expert storytelling succeeded in bridging a chasm, and the stories laid a foundation for many other writers who more explicitly remoulded Anancy to offer a source of inspiration to those who were

³⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 1.

shut out of the stories of Britain. It is also notable that many of these writers had profound connections with the Caribbean Artists Movement, utilising Anancy to introduce a more inclusive landscape for children. Andrew Salkey, James Berry and Faustin Charles all reinvented Anancy, specifically for younger children, to say something about heritage in the stories which followed in the decades after Beryl Gilroy's 'Nippers' stories and which eventually found their way into the libraries and schools.

In Chapter Five, I explore the ways in which an 'Anancy aesthetic' emerges within the literature of a Second Generation and to what extent those writers utilise any Anancy 'aesthetic' to negotiate ideas of belonging. The majority of accounts, including Ferdinand Dennis's descriptions of how he came to understand his pluralistic, protean, identity coincided with a variety of initiatives that emanated from the Caribbean Artists Movement. Within this context, Anancy, alongside other trickster figures from African mythology, emerges as significant in work which includes that of Andrea Levy, Ferdinand Dennis, Alex Wheatle, and Winsome Pinnock. While this does not represent a neat, rigid category, I have selected writers who might be termed 'Second Generation' in that they were born in Britain or came as young children to parents who migrated from the Caribbean. Born between the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was a generation in transition. With limited knowledge of their Caribbean heritage or history and with an absence of any representation within the literature and culture of Britain, these Second-Generation black Britons notably pursued their own spiritual and physical journeys in an effort to understand their 'place'. The impact of the sense of heritage and identity appears in their writing in multiple ways, including within a prominence of stories that seek to recover

history, reasserting it from a non-Eurocentric perspective, and with a shift in focus towards themes of rebellion and resistance. In exploring this writing, I am interested not only in identifying the existence and presence of Anancy as an archetype but in any wider features of an 'Anancy aesthetic,' which emerge either as a celebration of oral tradition or as a symbol of heritage.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider the ways in which Anancy appears within contemporary British writing for children and what this might say about any 'legacy' of the trickster figure. In essence, this examines two distinct aspects: firstly, the themes which predominate within contemporary reinventions of the Anancy tales and, secondly, the influence of any aesthetic on the writing for children of those with Caribbean heritage. In this chapter, I focus on the work of writers Alex Wheatle, Alexandra Sheppard, Benjamin Zephaniah, Catherine Johnson, and Dean Atta, although I am conscious of the distance both chronologically and conceptually from the factors that informed the work of the writers of CAM. A primary question for this generation is whether there is greater ease in negotiating identity in Britain and whether this has affected any reliance on the liminal trickster in pursuit of place.

Ultimately, this thesis represents an inquiry. It follows a physical and metaphorical journey in the attempt to understand Anancy's significance to the generations of writers for whom he demonstrated a profound resonance. It is a thread that starts from his earliest iterations within the storytelling traditions of West Africa and follows a meandering, at times problematic, route towards his re-emergence within the diaspora and, most notably, Britain. At its starting point is the existence of a specific, significant, and multifunctional set of characteristics which originated with the Anancy

Tales of the plantations. Shaped by those challenging, often brutal, conditions, they offered a connection to a sense of an African homeland. They also suggested ways to appropriate and develop some agency within an alien world. The circumstances in which they evolved meant that the tales foregrounded particular aural and visual features.

Key to any aesthetic with its roots in the Anancy tales is the versatility of the central figure of the tales, the multi-accented Anancy, who, masked behind a playful veneer, could connect, and unite artists and writers from distinct, diverse experiences.

Anancy offered a portable, malleable device that could be used in multifarious ways. Capable of straddling generations, nations, and seas, paradoxically perhaps, he also suggested a particular rootedness, which continues to provide a source of inspiration.

Whether or not it is possible to identify a specific 'Anancy aesthetic' within the breadth of writing that I explore in this thesis remains a difficult question. However, evidence of Anancy's profound influence on a host of writers from different generations and within distinct genres emerges with greater frequency and more disparately than I originally anticipated when I first embarked on this path. The multiple tributaries that have emanated from my original subject have both enhanced and complicated the journey. The result is that Anancy's impact seems both more significant and even more difficult to quantify. Existing at the borders, he can occupy a liminal, 'problem' space between worlds and categorisations, providing a voice for those who hover within those hinterlands. He is also a device available for manipulation within a particular space. Ultimately, Anancy's multi-layered complexity

makes him difficult to fix or interpret. Yet, it also points to his creativity. The storyteller, he is also the central, creative, player in the story: shaping, aggravating, persuading, deceiving, agitating, and calling out those who exhibit vices, which include displays of arrogance or corruption. Within the myriad circles in which Anancy stands at the centre, he acts as a provocation: a way to ask questions and, at times, a demand to understand the shape of things and the nature of justice. He might not always provide the answers.

Part One: Foundations and the Creation of an 'Anancy Aesthetic'

'It is in the nature of the folk culture of the ex-African slave, still persisting today in the life of the contemporary 'folk' that we can discern that the 'Middle Passage' was not, as is popularly assumed, a traumatic, destructive experience, separating the blacks from Africa, disconnecting their sense of history and a tradition, but a pathway or channel between this tradition and what is being evolved, on new soil, in the Caribbean.'

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Folk Culture of the slaves in Jamaica

Chapter One: Recovering the Stories

In this chapter I examine the ways in which Anancy and the tales were adopted and remoulded to provide an essential resource on the Caribbean plantations. Any attempt to comprehend the specific nature and impact of their reinvention first requires an understanding of the scope and function of the West African versions of the tales. For this reason, I follow Anancy's journey from those early iterations, through the Middle Passage to his new home on the Caribbean Plantations, where Anancy and the tales were cultivated to serve a more urgent purpose. Within those alien and brutal conditions Anancy was reasserted with a function that was distinct from that of his Akan ancestor. He became both more 'human' and more transparently aligned with the enslaved peoples of the plantations with the format and 'language' of the stories affording multiple additional functions. The multisensory theatre of the tales not only offered a means of escape but Anancy's antics suggested forms of resistance despite an ostensible lack of agency. Together with the particular eccentricities of the central protagonist, Anancy, these features formed the most compelling aspects of a distinctive narrative style.

Unlike many trickster figures who found their way to the New World, including the guileful Brer Rabbit, who enlivened many of the stories of the American Plantations, Anancy's origins have generally been accepted to be West African. The flamboyant figure who featured within a panoply of tales scuttled onto the slave ships, his appearance in the night-time stories of the Caribbean plantations offering a tenuous rootedness for the deracinated West Africans. The fact that Anancy shared a name with his Ashanti ancestor made it difficult to dispute his West African heritage, but other clues to the origins of the stories can also be found in the rich culture of the

Caribbean plantations. Perhaps most incontrovertible is the survival of certain esoteric words, including 'nyam', meaning 'eat', but indicators of their African origins can also be found in the distinct features of the oral tradition, which both support and animate the stories.

At the centre of the tales, the titular character, Anancy, assumed a new significance within the peculiarities and horrors of the plantation setting. The audacious wordsmith was moulded to demonstrate modes of resistance and the quintessential features of the stories, which encompassed elements of performance, gained a particular symbolism and function on the plantations, offering a distinctive language and creating a foundation for what the Caribbean Artists Movement in the 1960s attempted to distil, creating a recognisable Caribbean 'voice'.

The Anansi of the Ashanti Tales: From the Life-affirming to the Absurd

Before attempting any analysis of the development of the trickster figure on Caribbean soil or, as is critical to the themes explored in this thesis, the impact of Anancy within Britain, it is essential to follow a notional thread back further towards Anansi's energetic escapades in the Ashanti stories of what was known as the Gold Coast. It is perhaps predictable that any attempt to recapture the nature and function of those tales is riven with difficulties. Many of the 'problems' centre around the orality of the stories and the challenges of accessing reliable, authentic versions of the tales. Their oral nature, which so enriched the stories and ensured their endurance, also makes it impossible to reliably reconstruct the tales. Aspects of the storytelling sessions are invariably diminished on the page, in part through the dilution, or even negation, of the additional, theatrical aspects of the stories,

signifying something of a 'death' to the story and the possibility of its further evolution.

In respect of the Ashanti tales, the best-known sources are those that colonial officer and anthropologist R. S. Rattray made efforts to transcribe in the 1920s.³¹ Despite the limitations of these versions, Rattray provided both English and Twi transcripts of the stories, bolstering them with references to music and sound. Rattray also insisted that West African artists should be commissioned to create the illustrations which accompanied the tales, in deference to the significance of the stories as: 'the great commonplaces of everyday life in the African bush, a life which still continues in great part [and which] our illustrators themselves know to the core.'³²

In Rattray's collection, Anansi is a transformative being. A character who defied description, he existed in the spaces between classifications, at times genderless and, at others, both predator and prey, moving fluidly between worlds. The Anansi stories occupied an essential place within Akan culture. They provided the rationale for a host of phenomena, which comprised the banal as well as the more metaphysical concepts. For example, many tales offer an explanation for the animal kingdom and its sense of order, including why animals reside where they do or are shaped by their physicality or character. Others explain more tangible concepts, including 'disease'.³³ A breadth of themes within the stories seek to delineate a human, social, world which include didactic tales which seek to establish a set of societal rules, including why children should understand their 'place', or "How it came

³¹ R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*.

³² G. A. Stevens, in his Note on Illustrations, in Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, p. xvi.

³³ R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*.

about that children were first whipped” alongside others which are designed to help children to interpret their worlds. Rattray’s collection represents a diverse body of work, therefore, as it weaves in stories in which the frequently morally flawed Anansi stands at the centre of the action. Although the sequences are often farcical, with Anansi positioned as a humorous, at times, absurd figure, his role is vital. Anansi helps to create, structure, and define the world, with his flawed humanity offering an essential aspect to any message. Robert Pelton describes the stories as an attempt to address ‘its doubleness, its closeness and distance from the “wild,” its absurdity and delightfulness.’³⁴ Such contradictions can be perceived in certain of the ‘lessons’ which are conveyed within the tales, which are often demonstrated by Anansi’s ambiguous, and duplicitous antics. For example, Anansi’s confidence is not always supported by wisdom, a theme illustrated by the Ashanti tale, which describes “How Wisdom Came into the Tribe” when Anansi attempts to ‘sweep up all knowledge’. Despite believing that he has ‘finished’ with ‘all wisdom’, he is ultimately humbled by his son, who, pointing out Anansi’s lack of logic, proves that he has not dispensed with *all* wisdom. At times, such flaws become his strengths. They are responsible for his boldness and indefatigability, which facilitate Anansi’s important role as the rebel who audaciously breaks boundaries, able to disrupt, agitate and question.

Anansi’s determination to challenge taboos encompasses a preoccupation with the crass, and, at times, the scatological, a theme within many of the stories. In the pivotal Ashanti story, “How Kwaku Ananse (the Spider) Got Aso in Marriage Here”,³⁵

³⁴ Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 69.

³⁵ Rattray, “How Kwaku Ananse (the Spider) Got Aso in Marriage Here”.

Anansi duplicitously 'attains' his wife Aso from her current, 'jealous' husband via a series of ploys, which include placing a purgative in the husband's drink. His subsequent absences from a notional 'matrimonial bedroom' leave Aso alone and (in Anansi's perception) available for him to sexually coerce. The story is unsettling when perceived through the lens of modern sensibilities, which concludes with Anansi and Aso's child being 'cut up into pieces and spread around'. However, the extremeness of the denouement operates as a reminder that the story is intended to be figurative. In the Akan stories, despite his roguish appeal, particularly in his audaciousness, Anansi, therefore, serves as a device. He is able to demonstrate the shape of things and to find a way towards truth. Crass and outrageous, his flaws suggest a 'human' quality, yet he is also emphatically *not* human, as a caricaturist parody of the part-formed adolescent whose exploits inevitably lead to mistakes. This childlike energy which, in one story, is epitomised when Anansi is described as 'turning cartwheels' can also, however, be productive, particularly when directed towards achieving some form of change through action. It is one of many contradictions of Anansi's character, within tales which remain challenging and complex, the manifold threads of meaning metaphorically stretching out into a multitude of directions, in a symbolical suggestion of webs.

One vital purpose of the stories, however, which became essential to their reinvention in the Caribbean, was as a covert means to voice criticism or to express unpalatable truths behind the dual masks of nightfall and animal characters. In this way, the tales suggested viable strategies by which the notionally weak could attain a semblance of control over the alien, unbidden world.

One of the most significant tales within Ashanti folklore, is when Anansi exhibits a bravado which allows him to negotiate with the Sky God Nyame for the stories of the world. This quest is initially dismissed, with Nyame protesting that: ‘great and powerful towns like Kokofu, Bekwai, Asumengya have come, but they were unable to purchase them, and you who are but a mere masterless man [say] you will be able?’ Undaunted, Anansi seeks the price of the stories and, after consulting his wife, Aso, who suggests several methods for tackling the task, ultimately performs each challenge on Nyame’s ostensibly impossible list. He does so through an amalgam of skills, which include confidence and verbal agility which allow Anansi to *persuade* each of the animals to succumb to his will. The story has a predictable appeal within the set of tales. It also provides an explanation for the historical connection between storytelling and Anansi when the Sky God applauds Anansi for his skill and talents with the grandiose: ‘No more we shall call them the stories of the Sky-God, but we shall call them Spider-stories.’³⁶ The tale not only emphasises the multiple strands of the stories but demonstrates their potential as a device, with Anansi cast not only as the possessor of the stories of the world but the story’s central figure. It is Anansi who drives and shapes the action, manipulating language to create possibility, thereby becoming the storyteller himself. Metaphorical riddle and Riddler, the stories suggest a rich, creative resource through which to change and challenge the existing world for which the intersecting strands of the web offer a potent symbol.

A New Anancy: Preservation and Metamorphosis

As a device, the Anansi that remained imprinted upon the memories of those forced to endure the horrors of the Middle Passage, offered both a source of entertainment

³⁶ Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, p. 57-59.

and a metaphorical means of escape. A vivid, mischievous and, at times, endearing character, Anansi, and the stories helped to create an illusion of a homeland.

However, the tales also suggested other, more important, functions. Against the panoply of brutal policies designed to dehumanise those who were enslaved on the plantations, the Anansi stories, with their malleable central character, suggested a multifunctional storytelling device which proved critically important not only to a sense of community but as a means of resistance.

As with the Ashanti tales, any attempt to recover the content of those early tales on the plantations is problematic. Oral in nature, the Anancy stories were not designed to be confined to fixed, written, texts and were known and understood almost exclusively by people for whom reading and writing were prohibited. As a consequence, there is a dearth of reliable records of either the stories or the experience of enslavement. It is a deficit which, as Saidiya Hartman complains, has resulted in: 'not one extant autobiographical narrative of a female captive who survived the Middle Passage.'³⁷ Any autobiographical accounts that do exist were undoubtedly shaped by the circumstances in which they were produced, which invariably included pressures to satisfy Eurocentric standards of culture and literacy. Within many of the available written records, details of the exploits and subversive potential of Anancy, or his counterpart, Brer Rabbit, are also woefully scant, perhaps in the attempt, conscious or unconscious, to preserve the symbolism and power of the stories. Therefore, most early accounts of the Anancy tales are those which the visiting Europeans or plantation owners produced. The fact that those diarists were unlikely to have been invited to participate in a cultural 'inner circle' means that many

³⁷ Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26th June (2008), 1–14, (p. 3).

versions of the stories lack either dimension or reliability and is limited to what Sterling Stuckey argues to have been: 'just a small portion of that which died on the night air or continues to live, undetected by scholars, in the folk memory.'³⁸

Despite their perceptible deficiencies, the journals of the early European visitors illuminate certain fascinating details, and support Roger D. Abrahams's assertion that: 'often the most racist literature is replete with accurate, if highly selective, descriptions of cultural practices of the stereotyped group.'³⁹ Most notable amongst the early European diarists was the prominent novelist, Matthew 'Monk' Lewis. An author of Gothic Horror of some renown, Lewis visited his plantation in Jamaica in 1817 and 1818, making detailed accounts of both visits. He recorded his thoughts on a range of cultural practices including folklore and Lewis's diary contains one of the first recorded references to the Anancy stories. Despite his evident enthusiasm for the stories Lewis's ignorance of their multiple functions, including a possible subversive meaning for the tales, is, at times, glaring. For example, on 26th March, 1817, Lewis writes that: 'since [he] heard the report of a rebellious song issuing from Cornwall, [he] ha[s] listened more attentively to the negro chants; but they seem[...]to relate entirely to their own private situation and have nothing to do with the negro state in general.'⁴⁰ Matthew Lewis's journal is also fascinating for providing some evidence of the many acts of resistance on the plantations although, again, Lewis frequently exposes what is, at times, a risible lack of awareness, when he describes certain, clearly calculated, resistance tactics as 'incompetence' or

³⁸ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 9.

³⁹ Roger D. Abrahams, *Man-of-Words in the West Indies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 27.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*, p. 142.

'laziness'. Despite this, Lewis's evident enthusiasm for the stories and the aspects of a culture which he acknowledges as West African provide valuable written evidence of the tales.

The other principal sources for the stories are those recorded by Walter Jekyll and Martha Warren Beckwith some years later. Jekyll's versions of the tales were first published in 1907. While occasionally ignorant of some of the brutal realities of slavery, Jekyll was at least convinced of the power of the language of the tales. His appreciation for the dialect was such that he is credited with encouraging his 'mentee', the prominent poet Claude McKay, to utilise Jamaican dialect in his poetry. Following extended visits to Jamaica in 1919 and 1921, Martha Warren Beckwith also made efforts to accurately convey the sense of the tales to the page, including the music and sound, in addition to any purely textual 'meaning' of the tales. Even allowing for the deficiencies within the available resources the evidence suggests that, despite similarities with his West African ancestor and namesake, Anancy evolved into a distinctly Caribbean folkloric figure on the plantations, his purpose becoming more significant and urgent within the context of slavery. While the physically weak wordsmith of Ashanti tradition offered an obvious source of inspiration, therefore, suggesting an easily accessible analogy for the metaphorical battle of wits against physical strength, in the Caribbean, he was whittled and shaped to showcase a plethora of skills and characteristics. He became more 'human' and more invincible, as he forged ahead, sufficiently clever, and resourceful to triumph against a range of adversaries, the most notable of whom was the obtuse but physically powerful Tiger.

Alongside his inspiring qualities and skills, in many ways, the reinvented, Caribbean Anancy was a more ruthless, determined, and unsympathetic figure, which was in contrast with the 'teachings' of certain Ashanti tales which had promoted a sense of community, encouraging loyalty towards others. In the Caribbean, Anancy eschewed almost all familial responsibility and his wife, Aso, from whom Anansi sought advice in the Matrilineal Akan culture, seems to have almost disappeared. Aso's significance in the Ashanti tales was such that, in the pivotal tale in which Anansi wins the stories of the world, it was Aso who suggested many of the ways in which Anansi might succeed in Nyame's challenge. However, although Anancy's nameless 'wife' is assigned only a minor role in the reinvented versions of the tales, Aso seems to have been absorbed by Anancy, his characteristics suggesting a combination of their skills. While Aso's apparent silence within the Caribbean versions of the tales seems disappointing, therefore, the symbolic union of these characters, together with his gender fluidity made Anancy's alignment with all of those on the plantations still more pronounced.

Anancy's character was not the only aspect of the West African stories to be reinvented in the Caribbean. A prescribed feature of the Ashanti tales was that they were told at night. As a backdrop to the stories, it offered an extra layer of meaning. In many of the Ashanti tales, critical sequences occur during the night, with the words, 'when it was visible' signalling the denouement. It is this lack of visibility that accounts for some of the richness of sounds and music that accompanied the tales and for the sharply realised visual descriptions of Anansi, brisk and energetic, and dressed in fine and elaborate clothes. In the Caribbean, the performance aspect of the tales provided an additional accent to the stories which offered a metaphorical

door to another world, a spiritual, impregnable place in which the impossible could become possible. Martha Warren Beckwith suggests an additional facet to the accompanying sense of mysticism when she discusses the theory that 'Anansi once a man, was now leader of the dead in this land of shades.'⁴¹ However, as Sterling Stuckey asserts, the spiritual symbolism of the storytelling circle was itself a 'ritual' which Stuckey deemed to be 'so powerful in its elaboration of a religious vision that it contributed disproportionately to the centrality of the circle in slavery.'⁴² The circle also suggested unity, bolstered by a sense of a shared identity which Stuckey attributes to the experience on the ships, which he describes as: 'the first real incubators of slave unity across cultural lines, cruelly revealing irreducible links from one ethnic group to the other, fostering resistance thousands of miles before the shores of the new land appeared on the horizon.'⁴³

As well as their crucial role in bolstering a sense of community on the plantations, the structure and style of the stories offered a further, invaluable, device. Via the mouthpiece of Anancy, the stories could be adapted to construct an alternative version of the world, portraying it from their own, unique, perspective rather than as a reflection of the often-skewed, Eurocentric values. Part of this was through the emphasis on the aural and visual aspects of the stories which had two further advantages, by both enhancing the entertainment value and making the stories more readily comprehensible within a context in which there was no common language. Both Walter Jekyll and Martha Warren Beckwith acknowledge the significance of those additional, artistic, and performative aspects to the stories and, in the foreword

⁴¹ Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Stories*, Kindle Book, Preface, paragraph 3, n.p.

⁴² Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, p. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

to her compilation of tales, Beckwith discusses the inevitable limitations of her written versions: 'the original style of the storytelling, which in some instances mingles story, song, and dance, is as nearly as possible preserved, although much is necessarily lost in the slow process of dictation. The lively and dramatic action, the change in voice, even the rapid and elliptical vernacular cannot appear on the printed page.'⁴⁴ Distinct from the frequent barbarities which governed life on the plantations the stories emerged as a testament to the resourcefulness and rich creativity which both built upon and transcended those conditions.

The Foundations of an Aesthetic

*'And yet the folk tradition persisted. The drums beat from the blood, the people danced and spoke their un-English English until our artists, seeking to paint themselves, to speak themselves, to sing themselves, returned, like Jean Price-Mars, to the roots, to the soil, to the sources.'*⁴⁵

Anancy's metamorphosis within the Caribbean was driven by a host of factors which were rooted in a historical and physical context. In a sense this amounted to a change in emphasis, with certain features of the storytelling emerging with greater urgency, and need, than others, but it culminated in something which derived not only from a West African heritage but from a uniquely Caribbean experience. This was not merely a response to the conditions of slavery but reflected the realities of life in the Caribbean, its wildlife, and its climate.

⁴⁴ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, Kindle Book, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Folk Cultures of the Slaves in Jamaica* (London: New Beacon Books, 1981), p. 34.

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the broader features of what I term an 'aesthetic'. In identifying the specific features of an 'Anancy aesthetic' particularly as it was moulded within the Caribbean, I have attempted to distil themes that broadly fit within four identifiable categories and offer a useful structure through which to explore its impact on writers and artists in subsequent generations.

The first aspect concerns the potential legacy and character of the Anancy who featured in the Caribbean versions of the tales, eventually evolving into a recognisable archetype capable of being adapted and further reasserted within myriad contexts. Any attempt to quantify and describe Anancy requires consideration not only of the nature but the purpose of his reinvention in the Caribbean, particularly as a figure of resistance. This also encompasses the 'problems' that Anancy invariably presents through his unique combination of qualities and vices. A significant feature of Anancy is his manifestation as both a Spider and Man. His ability to shapeshift created layers of additional meaning, not only through his agility, but through the potential symbolism of the intricacy of spiders' webs and the fact that they are linguistically intertwined with storytelling and deceit.

The second feature of any aesthetic references an important function of the tales within the Caribbean as a means by which to appropriate the world through naming, a facet which acquired additional significance within an alien world.

A third aspect of any aesthetic concerns the 'theatre' of the tales, which places emphasis on the auditory features, including music, and distinguishes them further from their West African ancestor. The theatre created a new form of 'language'. A

consolidation of aspects that stemmed from oral tradition, they were also influenced by the conditions of slavery as well as the wider, Caribbean, landscape.

Finally, humour represented a significant feature of the Caribbean Anancy Tales. Farcical and absurd at times, it provided a form of escape and a 'mask' behind which truths could be conveyed. Any attempt to define, and extrapolate, elements of that 'humour' are, however, invariably complicated, and encompass a broad range of behaviours and oral patterns, including competitive wordplay. Perhaps most commonly, humour informs the many sequences of the tales and are illustrated by a host of capers which animate the stories. Humour is also inextricably connected with Anancy's arachnid form which is frequently linked to ideas of freneticism and the potential for escape. As with so many characteristics of Anancy and the tales, certain lines are blurred, making identifying specific themes problematic. Despite this, the numerous elements of a storytelling aesthetic that feature in the writing of subsequent generations, can be glimpsed in these early stories, emerging at times in fascinating and compelling patterns.

The Negotiation of Power: Anancy as a Resistance Figure

The failure to annihilate all vestige of a West African heritage was founded on a miscalculation of the cultural richness that had informed the lives of those who were enslaved on the plantations. In defiance of the forced separation of those who spoke a common language, the stories afforded some means of communication through the widely understood principles and format of the Anancy tales. They offered a linguistic code partly because they were well-known as a device by which to criticise, or comment, on tyranny, behind either a mask, or the guise of an animal. These

features of the tales provided an opportunity for resistance within circumstances in which any agency, let alone the means to rebel, was either impossible or untenable. Numerous disturbing examples of the punishments meted out for any perceptible misdemeanors can be found in the accounts of those enslaved in the Caribbean. Mary Prince, who was born into slavery in Bermuda in 1788 and whose account was the first of a black, enslaved woman when it was published in Britain in 1831, wrote that 'to strip me naked – to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence.'⁴⁶ Unsuccessful runaways were invariably subjected to severe punishment as is revealed in a plethora of contemporaneous accounts. The journal of Thomas Thistlewood, an overseer in Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century, contains numerous similarly chilling episodes. In one entry in his journal, he records, without any apparent contrition, that: 'Punch caught at Salt River and brought home. Flogged him and Quacoo well, and then washed and rubbed in salt pickle, lime juice and bird pepper.'⁴⁷ Elsewhere he describes, with degenerative zeal, 'floggings' and other even more humiliating punishments, which were meted out for minimal transgressions.

Despite such literal and metaphorical shackling, enslaved people were not entirely powerless, although recognising the extent of that power and how it might be exploited required careful manipulation. Orlando Patterson contends that there was some availability of choice for enslaved people, unappealing as many of those options might be: 'he might react psychologically, play the slave, act dumb,

⁴⁶ Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince A West Indian Slave* (London: F. Westley & A. H. Davis, 1831), Kindle Book, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Douglas Hall, ed., *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1999), p. 73.

exasperate. He might lie or steal. He might run away. He might injure or kill others, including his own master. Or he might engage in armed revolt. Barring all these he might destroy his master's property by destroying himself.'⁴⁸ Similar examples emerge in Olaudah Equiano's autobiography when he recounts that: 'preferring death to such a life of misery, [two people] somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example.'⁴⁹

The consequences of such choices, including the threat of the many horrific punishments exercised by overseers and plantation owners, meant that forms of resistance were frequently utilised in other, sometimes less conspicuous, guises. These included: 'acts of sabotage such as damage to machinery, the wounding or poisoning of animals or arson in the cane fields [which] caused great concern too, because they were attacks upon the economy and were often difficult to trace to specific culprits or even to identify as intentional acts.'⁵⁰ Matthew Lewis's *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* hints at similar 'weaponry' when he describes the ingredients of certain poisons: '[the] gall of the alligator, [which] if not extracted carefully, will render the whole animal unfit for food, and when this gall is reduced to powder it forms a poison of the most dangerous nature, as the negroes know but too well.'⁵¹ Acts of resistance within the written accounts also emerge in less obviously aggressive acts. Unable to properly seize a runaway, Thomas Thistlewood writes: '5 Negro men, and 3 women, strangers, went over the bridge and would by no means

⁴⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 173.

⁴⁹ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* (Kindle Book), p. 48.

⁵⁰ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 53.

⁵¹ Matthew G. Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*, p. 207.

assist me, neither for threats nor promises, one saying he was sick, the others that they were in a hurry.⁵² Matthew Lewis similarly criticises the apparent apathy amongst those that were enslaved on his plantation. Describing a circumstance in which some cows had made their way into the cane fields Lewis complains: 'although perfectly aware of the detriment which the cattle were doing to my interests, not a negro could be prevailed upon to rouse himself and help to drive them out.'⁵³ Such examples of resistance were often subtle, yet effective, and it is significant that they often depended upon an ability at play-acting. In his journal, Matthew Lewis, repeatedly misconstrues blatant acts of resistance as examples of incompetence, asserting that: '[the negroes] never can manage to do anything *quite* as it should be done, if they correct themselves in one respect to-day they are sure of making a blunder in some other manner tomorrow.'⁵⁴

Sidney Mintz comments upon what he deems to be a historical failure to appreciate the extent to which enslaved people demonstrated acts of resistance on the plantations which, he speculates, arises from a lack of 'explanation of what constitutes resistance.' As Mintz explains: 'the way that I have couched this before – and one can think of other examples – the cook of the master's family that faithful lady who prepared the meals three times a day, sometimes put ground glass in the food of her diners. But she had to become the cook before this option became available.'⁵⁵ Lewis's own failure to detect examples of resistance was undoubtedly compounded by a miscalculation of his workers' intelligence which, Craton argues,

⁵² Douglas Hall, ed., *In Miserable Slavery*, p. 55.

⁵³ Lewis, *The Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*, p. 127.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁵⁵ Sidney Mintz, 'Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?', in *Plantation Societies in the Era of European Expansion* (London: Routledge, 2008) ed. by Judy Bieber, pp. 305–22, (p. 95).

could prove advantageous for those enslaved, the majority of whom, he contends: 'discovered a pattern of behaviour that, by fulfilling the white man's pejorative image of the African, progressively lowered the masters' expectation while providing room for maneuver by the slaves.'⁵⁶ Such misconceptions have sometimes extended to notions of 'contentment' amongst enslaved people. Even Walter Jekyll, explaining the origins of the story "Dry-Bone", which describes the horrifying practice of carrying outside the old or incurably ill to 'leave out to die', argued that this form of barbarity: 'was not practised by owners living in Jamaica. By them, the slaves were well treated, and such a thing would have been impossible.'⁵⁷ Jekyll does concede the prevalence of brutality, but attributes it to the overseers, people he describes as being: 'of low caste who had neither scruples nor conscience.'⁵⁸ His conviction that the majority of plantation owners were 'decent' is surprising and suggests that Jekyll was also blinkered to many of the practices of slavery. Even without any overt brutality, however, as Craton asserts, 'slavery itself was in the most crucial sense, an irreducible absolute,' emphasising the realities of 'the chains of slavery' as 'always galling, even at their loosest.'⁵⁹

Within the constrained circumstances of the plantations, Anancy and the tales suggested an alternative means through which to achieve a semblance of power. The series of devices, or mechanisms which originated in the Ashanti stories of West Africa permitted covert forms of protest behind a series of 'masks', most notably that of anonymity and darkness.⁶⁰ R.S. Rattray's versions of the tales and the

⁵⁶ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 35.

⁵⁷ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 52.

⁶⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. xxiv.

accompanying analysis illuminated one of the functions of the tales as a form of satire. As a device, it offered a vehicle through which to criticise others, usually those in positions of power who might evade any meaningful accountability. The tales' conventions required that a specific format and practices should apply. One of the most visible 'rules', which was similarly replicated in America with the Brer Rabbit tales, required that: 'the names of animals, and even that of the Sky-God himself, were substituted for the names of real individuals whom it would have been impolitic to mention.'⁶¹ In its new incarnation, as in the earlier tales of West Africa, this 'recognised custom,' allowed individuals with any grievance, to hold any adversary or aggressor, 'up to thinly disguised ridicule, by exposing some undesirable trait in his character – greed, jealousy, deceit.'⁶²

Within their new home, the intuitive, brazen and linguistically agile Anancy was pitched against the 'rough' Tiger. It is a power dynamic highlighted in the first of Beckwith's tales when the story establishes that: '[Tiger was] a very rough man an' Anansi 'fraid him.'⁶³ Although the choice of 'Tiger' is surprising for an animal in either the Caribbean or West Africa, his physical strength and reputation for solitude and fierceness provide an easily discernible parallel for either the plantation owners or overseers, the latter of whom often possessed substantial power, a reality which is evidenced by overseer, Thomas Thistlewood, who meted out gruesome punishments without obvious recourse to the Master. However, the Ashanti tales provide a further point of reference for this Tiger/Anansi dynamic. In "How it came

⁶¹ Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. xii.

⁶² Rattray, p. xi.

⁶³ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, Kindle Book, in 'Animal Stories: Tying Tiger a. The Fishing-basket by George Parkes, Mandeville, n.p.

about that the Sky-God's stories came to be known as Spider Stories," Tiger is presented as the strongest animal with Anansi described as the weakest.

While Tiger is frequently portrayed as greedy, or foolish, it is interesting that the extent of his brutality is not always obvious. Despite the apparent dilution of Tiger's aggressions, which might merely have represented an attempt to further conceal the intended target of the ridicule, his identity would have been easily recognisable to those who were enslaved on the plantation. Perhaps more significant, Anancy's alignment with the enslaved meant that his triumphs offered some semblance of justice for the numerous instances of violence which they typically endured.

Within the Caribbean stories, physical strength represented political power and, despite his relative physical weakness, Anancy frequently achieves power through his verbal or intellectual prowess as well as his ability to outwit and even humiliate the lumbering, foolish Tiger. Part of Anancy's success relies upon an understanding of the source of any power, or 'worth,' and the extent to which it can be exploited. This 'value' was a relevant consideration for many on the plantations who often acknowledged that, in addition to their labour, they possessed specific skills which were essential to the working efficiency of the plantation. Roger D. Abrahams references a commonly recognised skill as 'master tropical gardeners', stating that: 'the journal keeper noted again and again the remarkable abilities of the slaves not only in working the cane fields and melting houses but also in providing their own foodstuffs, even to the point of marketing the excess on their one day off, Sunday.'⁶⁴ Within the plantation workforce any 'ranking' reinforced such estimations of

⁶⁴ Roger D. Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies: Performance and the Emergence of Creole Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 45.

commercial value and created a further hierarchy: 'elite slaves – domestics, craftsmen, derivers – were separated from ordinary workers, labouring slaves were divided into three or four gangs, according to age and strength, and infants, the aged, and the infirm were separated from more useful slaves.'⁶⁵ At times, this also extended to more unsettling quantifications of worth with Bryan Edwards, a 'British West Indian merchant' observing in his journal in 1793: 'the Negroes[...]commonly make a long preface before they come to the point: beginning with a tedious enumeration of their past services and hardships. They dwell with peculiar energy (if the fact admits it) on the number of children they have presented to Massa (Master).'⁶⁶

While any power dynamic on the plantations was primarily sustained by violence and threats of violence, therefore, it was complicated by an awareness of an intrinsic value, not only in crude marketing terms but through consideration of their critical role in the operation of either the house or plantation. Throughout the tales, Anancy repeatedly exploits this contradiction, relying upon a combination of skills, including resourcefulness, flattery, intuition, and a brazen authoritativeness. Many of these features are illustrated in "Eating Tiger's Guts", when Anancy commands: "Brer Tiger, tak out you inside an' wash it out," a ridiculous suggestion which is nevertheless immediately heeded.⁶⁷ However, Anancy varies the skills in his armoury and, whereas in Beckwith's version of the tale he relies upon an intellectual

⁶⁵ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 43.

⁶⁶ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 82.

⁶⁷ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, Kindle Book, in 'Eating Tiger's Guts' a The Tell-tale by Simeon Falconer, n.p.

authority, in Jekyll's, markedly similar, story, "Anancy and Brother Tiger", he flatters Tiger, describing him as 'such a big man'.⁶⁸

In "Tiger as Riding Horse", Anancy again demonstrates his cerebral superiority when he convinces some young women that Tiger is his 'fader ol' ridin'-horse.' Indignant, Tiger persuades Anancy to dispel the lie but Anancy, pretending to accede to his request, complains that he is unable to do so because he 'can't walk.' In a typical display of foolishness Tiger offers to carry him to the deceived 'young misses,' whereby Anancy, ostensibly agreeing to the plan, consolidates the story by placing a saddle on Tiger's back. As they approach the women, the humiliating reality for Tiger of being ridden, and whipped, by Anancy, seems to confirm the deception; that he is indeed a 'riding horse'.⁶⁹

Anancy, Wordsmith

While Anancy attempts to manipulate any available sources of power, it is through his use of language that he is both most successful and experiences most evident enjoyment. It is also where Anancy is aligned most closely with those enslaved on the plantations. Throughout the tales, Tiger's lack of judgement is exploited by Anancy's superior intellect and linguistic skills instead of any physical means. However, Anancy's ability to level any disparity in power, through methods which rely upon his verbal agility is not merely a means of vicarious escape. It has a more significant symbolism, particularly within a context in which the justification for slavery was reliant upon the creation and sustainment of stereotypes, including

⁶⁸ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, in 'Tiger as Riding-horse' by William Forbes, Dry River, n.p.

allegations of intellectual inferiority. Examples of this can be found in many of the accounts of European visitors which are peppered with pejorative descriptions including that of Rev Scoles in his 1885 *Sketches of African and Indian Life in British Guiana*: 'After a few more questions, all wrapped up in long unintelligible words, our friend warns [his friend] not "to be lated" on the morrow, but quickly "one time" perform the important commissions entrusted him, emphatically reminding him that "prochristianisation is the tief of time."'70 With similar disdain, Charles William Day, whose account was published in 1852, alludes to 'negroes of both sexes [having] voices so harsh, coarse and stunning, that they create unutterable disgust. At the same time, their language is horrible in the extreme.'71 Such harmful descriptions purported to provide compelling evidence for European intellectual and cultural superiority with many visitors apparently unable to appreciate what Roger Abrahams describes as a 'different system of performance and verbal behaviour'.72

Despite a prevalence of misinformed, offensive, observations within these accounts, numerous fascinating insights still emerge, and demonstrate something of the richness of the oral speech patterns on the plantations. Writing in the late Eighteenth Century, Bryan Edwards refers to an ostensible 'fondness' amongst Caribbean enslaved people for 'exhibiting speeches as orators by profession.'73 Similarly, in her account, *Antigua and the Antiguans*, which was published in 1844, Mrs Lanigan contends that: 'the negroes are indefatigable talkers[...]they talk to themselves

⁷⁰ Rev J. S. Scoles, *Sketches of African and Indian Life in British Guiana* (1885), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 89-90.

⁷¹ Charles William Day, *Five Years' Residence in the West Indies* (1852), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 86.

⁷² Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, p. 26.

⁷³ B. Edwards, in *The History* (1793), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 82.

maintaining different characters and answering their own questions.⁷⁴ Certain accounts also provide evidence of a style of speech which can be aligned to a call-and-response pattern, while emphasizing the performativity inherent in many of these practices. As Charles Day writes in 1852: ‘When negroes quarrel, they seldom look each other in the face. Nay, generally they turn back-to-back and seem to appeal to the bystanders, who usually answer each speech made by the belligerents at each other with a shout of laughter...’⁷⁵ Such descriptions highlight the cultural importance of oratory, a fact which, Charles Daniel Dance, writing in 1881, provides some evidence for when he identifies riddles and word puzzles as an important element of death wakes.⁷⁶ They also underscore the linguistic emphasis and skills which are central to the Anancy tales and upon which the titular figure frequently relies. Anancy outwits not only Tiger but Kings. His array of skills extends to an ability to manipulate language for a multitude of purposes, which include an ability to pose, or solve riddles, or to cunningly elicit essential information. In his displays of linguistic success, Anancy not only symbolically ‘matches’ the presupposed superiority of the European’s linguistic and literary prowess, but surpasses it, demonstrating skills which afford him a currency, or form of power. In certain stories he uses it to obtain freedom including in the aptly themed, “The Riddle”⁷⁷ when Anancy’s friend, Tacoomah, is arrested and sentenced to hang by the King. In response to his plea for help, Anancy, who describes himself as a ‘good liar’ approaches the King, eventually reaching an agreement that, if he is successful in

⁷⁴ Mrs Lanigan, *Antigua and the Antiguans* (1844), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p.86.

⁷⁵ Charles William Day, *Five Years’ Residence in the West Indies* (1852), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Charles Daniel Dance, *Chapters from a Guianese Log-Book* (1881), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 133.

⁷⁷ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, ‘The Riddle’ by Moses Hendricks, Mandeville 4, n.p.

his challenge, which is to devise a riddle that the King cannot solve, he will show clemency towards Tacoomah. Interestingly, perhaps, “The Riddle” is reminiscent of a fairy tale, suggesting a hybridity of sources for many of the tales. With echoes of *Rumpelstiltskin*, Anancy is pitted against a King who, unlike Tiger, has some intelligence so that the story establishes a contest of wits in which Anancy’s audaciousness in negotiating with the King is reminiscent of his legendary confrontation with the Akan God, Nyame. The fact that Anancy ultimately triumphs through a reliance upon a style of language and speech which is fundamentally oral, undoubtedly offered some vindication for those in the storytelling circles.

Anancy is not merely linguistically skilled, however. He also enjoys its creativity. For example, Anancy uses ‘bungo’ talk, which Jekyll refers to as a ‘delight’ in language which, he contends, accounts for his embellishment of words. In Jekyll’s notes on the story, “Yung-Kyum-Pyung”, he explains this further, writing: ‘Anybody else would have said: “Me mus’ have fe find them ya (those here) gal name,” but Annancy likes to add a few more syllables. His speech is Bungo Talk.’⁷⁸ Jekyll’s own sensitivity to the orality of the tales is reinforced by his further note on “Annancy, Puss and Ratta”, when he instructs: ‘this story should be rattled off as quick as possible.’⁷⁹ In fact, “Annancy, Puss and Ratta,” where Anancy arranges a ball and proceeds to play frenetically on a violin, is amongst several in the various collections which demonstrate the breadth of Anancy’s skills. Not solely reliant on his linguistic skills, Anancy typically identifies the best available means to achieve his objective, which includes his musical ability. For example, in “The Dumb Child”, the King offers a

⁷⁸ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Stories*, p. 12.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

financial reward for anyone who can make his mute child talk.⁸⁰ Anancy opts to do so by playing his fiddle, relying upon his ability to charm with his mesmeric smiles and intoxicating music, through which he ultimately succeeds in coaxing the child to talk. In this tale, it is significant that Anancy attempts to reflect, or mirror, the child's actions. The child is mute and so the linguist, Anancy, does not speak. However, it is also notable that Anancy uses a medium outside any cultural boundaries, a decision which reinforces the extent of his intuitiveness.

An emphasis on music was a significant feature of the Ashanti tales, including in "How it Came About that Many Diseases Came Among The Tribe", where Anansi was able to mesmerize through his drums, but in the Caribbean it becomes something of a leveller, representing a viable means to achieve power and the fiddle, which became an important instrument on the plantations and was frequently relied upon to accompany dances and songs afforded a degree of social mobility.⁸¹ Prominent to his transformation in the Caribbean, Anancy's prowess with music provided a further, notable, accent to his characterisation. As a principal means of

⁸⁰ Beckwith, "The Dumb Child", George Parkes, Mandeville, Kindle Book, Chapter 95, n.p.

⁸¹ Roger D. Abrahams and John Szwed, ed., *After Africa, Chapter 7: Music, Dance and Games*. This chapter includes many accounts of the variety of instruments that were used by the African slaves. In 1796, J G Stedman described the range of musical instruments which he perceived to be commonly used in Surinam and which he described as 'not a little ingenious (and) all made by themselves.' Of the eighteen instruments described several of which are forms of drums, none resembles the violin with those instruments which would more conventionally be recognised in Europe at the time including a 'Creole-bania' which is 'like a mandoline or guitar,'; a 'trumpet of war', a horn and flute. (p283-5) Amongst others, James Stewart in Jamaica in 1823 talks about witnessing country dances which accompanied music on the violin and tambourine. However, something of an enthusiast, J B Moreton, writing from Jamaica in 1790, refers to the music he witnessed most commonly as singing, which he describes as 'witty and pathetic' but also comments on the occurrence of 'Saturday night balls' which have a prevalence of music composed by 'anything that makes a tinkling sound' (p290) with more 'grandy balls' sometimes being honoured 'with a violin.' Whether changes, perhaps predictably, occurred over time with a greater distance from Africa is not known, or whether the differentiations were largely regional, but James Stewart in Jamaica in 1823 posits that: 'in a few years it is probable that the rude music (here described) will be altogether exploded among the creole negroes who show a decided preference for European music,'(p301) and in 1825, H. T. De La Beche, also in Jamaica similarly talks about 'fiddlers' accompanying dances who were also paid a small sum (p302).

obtaining power, the portability of the fiddle re-emphasised Anancy as a symbolic outsider and a nomad. In centralising these dual characteristics, the stories further underlined Anancy's potential as an aspirational diasporic figure.

Anancy as Multi-Limbed, Multi-faceted Being

Despite his notional 'spider' form, in the Caribbean stories, Anancy's association with the arachnid seems to be more in name than through any physical manifestation. It follows, therefore, that while several of Rattray's versions of the stories provide explanations for how the Spider acquired certain features, including: "How it came about that the hinder part of Kwaku Ananse, the spider became big, at the expense of his head, which became small," or "How the spider got a bald head"⁸², within the Caribbean the tales do not 'explain' the reasons behind Spider's appearance or physicality. There are 'explanatory' tales which focus on why Anancy, or, more aptly, the spider, dwells in 'crevices' or in rafters, but this seems to refer to a sometime alter ego with limited applicability to the Anancy of the stories. Despite this, the Caribbean Anancy demonstrates an energy which conjures something of the essence of the spider. He occasionally scuttles, or climbs trees, hiding in holes and, in "The Grave", when Anancy's dishonesty is exposed by his more intelligent son, ashamed at being fooled, Anancy's retreat to the rafters references the spider's 'place' in the natural world. However, in the majority of the stories, Anancy's behaviour is 'human', his triumphs achieved through his 'human' skills of cleverness and linguistic or musical skill.

⁸² Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*.

Although Anancy is rarely manifested as a 'spider,' the spider physiology offers a layer of meaning which seems absent from many of the other 'trickster' tales, including the Brer Rabbit stories. I have previously discussed some of the potential of the spider analogy. In addition, to physiological factors, Anancy's ability to shapeshift offers a further, potent, symbolism. Anancy rarely utilises it, more typically adopting a disguise, or mimicking a voice or song, to achieve his objective, yet this ability to shapeshift and transition consistently underlines Anancy's adaptability. As a metaphor, the spider has further symbolism, both through its suggestion of transformation and rebirth and through the, more mundane, advantages of agility and speed, with the spider's web evoking connotations of entrapment or storytelling and deception. Despite these potent, transformative qualities, Anancy most typically appears within human guise, a physical manifestation which still presents a series of contradictions within the tales. One is his somewhat perplexing 'lameness'. Emily Zobel Marshall details Anancy's distinctive physical features as: 'a limp (he often walks with the aid of a stick) his lisp, and his high falsetto voice. His shape is that of both a spider and a man.'⁸³ Perhaps equally confounding for a 'man of words' is his lisp. European visitor to the plantations, Charles Daniel Dance, alluded to this style of speech as a feature of the transitional state between spider and man, so that Anancy: 'combine[d] the agility and craftiness of the insect with the intelligence of the man and is always represented as speaking in a snuffling indistinct manner.'⁸⁴ However, an alternative explanation of Anancy's shapeshifting between spider and human suggests an additional nuance to his characterisation. Folklorist Alice Werner asserted that: 'in the Gold Coast stories, too, Anansi is quite as much a spider as

⁸³ E. Z. Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance*, Kindle Book, Chapter 2, n.p.

⁸⁴ Dance, *Chapters from a Guiana's Log-Book*, in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 133.

Brer Rabbit is a rabbit; but in Jamaica, though he still retains traces of his origin, they are somewhat obscured – so much so that Mr Jekyll speaks of the “metamorphic shape, that of the Spider” which he assumes as though the human were his real form, with the other representing only an occasional disguise.⁸⁵ In addition to Anancy’s arachnid skills and associations, therefore, Anancy’s fluid existence, as he transmutes between states and forms, is capable of suggesting the liminal, with a freedom to move between classes and worlds, adaptable and metamorphic.

Despite a variety of theories which seek to explain its possible origins, it still seems paradoxical that the verbally agile Anancy, is affected by a ‘cleft palate.’⁸⁶ Abrahams asserts that this style of speech is a feature of the ‘nonsense’ that the stories convey which, he contends, is related to his inability to speak correctly: ‘Nansi not only speaks as the other animals do, in conversational creole, but his speech is even more *bruck-up*, for he lisps and stutters.’⁸⁷ While these apparent physical challenges seem at times to be contradictory, there may be another purpose to them. Aligned with those enslaved on the plantations, Anancy’s ‘muffled,’ or ‘defective’ speech may be a reference to the derision with which their speech was habitually judged.

The typical portrayal of Anancy with a stick may have a similar reference, by providing some outward manifestation of his alignment with those enslaved on the plantations and the conditions in which they were forced to exist. Henry Louis Gates contends that, in Yoruban mythology, Esu is: ‘said to limp as he walks precisely because he has a mediating function, his legs are of different lengths because he

⁸⁵ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. xxix.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, p. 164.

keeps one anchored in the realm of the gods while the other rests in this, our human world.⁸⁸ However, while Anancy's significance as a liminal figure suggests a similar possible reason for his 'lameness', there may be another explanation. Matthew Lewis writes in his journal that the 'most general of negro infirmities appears to be that of lameness.'⁸⁹ However, despite his apparent infirmity, Anancy typically demonstrates versatility and motility. Not only does he outwit and out talk his opponents, but he frequently outruns his rivals, a feature which seems intertwined with his arachnid physiology with its potential to retract and hide in corners, only to emerge again with almost terrifying speed. As a response to the brutally constraining conditions of the ships, Anancy's dexterity offered him a semblance of freedom. A potent symbol for those who were enslaved, his speed and ability to shapeshift also provided some evidence of his 'magic.' With a potential to enhance elements of the theatre it was also symbolic of the necessity to 'transition' for those who had to survive within the habitually oppressive, brutal regime of the plantations.

There is a further feature to Anancy's manifestation as a Spider/Man within the Caribbean. In circumstances in which Africans were often deemed inferior, and even subhuman, in an effort to justify the barbaric practice of slavery, Anancy's transitioning between human and animal may have some additional resonance. Anancy was not merely a verbally dextrous, intuitive, and clever being, but could suggest a 'superhero' alter ego, through his reassertion of the 'animal' as a form of rebellion. In a sense, a 'virtue' could be made of its perceived inferiority. By being judged as 'less than,' those within the storytelling circles of the plantations could find

⁸⁸ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Journal*, p.132.

a way to redirect that prejudice into something powerful and extraordinary and manifestly 'more than.' In this guise, Anancy, and by extension, enslaved people, could display incredible and fearsome feats, emphasizing not only their physical and intellectual superiority but their superhuman skills.

The 'Problems' with Anancy

Despite his appeal as a flamboyant and bold figure of resistance, Anancy has traditionally provoked controversy. At times this has diluted, or even nullified, his qualities as a folk hero. Many of the misgivings about his status, primarily stem from the litany of vices commonly associated with Anancy and which, when removed from the extreme conditions of the Caribbean plantations during slavery, seem difficult to justify. In his introduction to *Jamaican Songs and Story*, Walter Jekyll defined Anancy as: 'a legendary being whose chief characteristic is trickery. A strong and good workman, he is invariably lazy, and is only to be tempted to honest labour by the offer of a large reward. He prefers to fill the bag which he always carries by fraud or theft. His appetite is voracious, and nothing goes amiss to him, cooked or raw. No sooner is one gluttonous feast over than he is ready for another, and endless are his shifts and devices to supply himself with food[...]He is perfectly selfish and knows no remorse for his many deeds of violence, treachery, and cruelty.'⁹⁰ In his *Letters from Jamaica* in 1873, Charles Rampini similarly derides Anancy as: 'the personification of cunning and success.'⁹¹ Such criticisms seem to reflect a misunderstanding of aspects of Anancy's character and dismiss much of the 'meaning' implicit within the tales. For example, the accusations of his 'laziness'

⁹⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 1.

⁹¹ Charles Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica* (1873), reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 121.

which, frequently directed at Anancy, seem wholly at odds with the innumerable accounts of Anancy running, or scurrying along. In many of the stories Anancy demonstrates an enthusiasm to organise balls or to perform the violin and to immerse himself in every potential project, an essence which is founded on energy, bordering on freneticism. If Anancy is in fact 'idle' it seems likely that such laziness is consistent with a form of resistance.

As I have already discussed in this thesis, the conscious decision to avoid work was an available means of rebellion, examples of which can be found in contemporaneous accounts, including Matthew Lewis's journal, when his apparent naivety, or prejudice, prompted him to bemoan the 'incompetence' of his slaves rather than recognise modes of resistance. In fact, what defines Anancy is not the 'laziness' alleged by Jekyll but that he does everything only on *his* terms, patterns of behaviour which Emily Zobel Marshall describes as part of: 'the amalgamated practices of defiance [which were] executed by both the mind and body,' with Zobel Marshall further explaining that 'slave resistance at a psychological level (exemplified in folklore) influenced practical, physical tactics of resistance.'⁹²

Anancy is similarly scorned for his 'deceit.' However, within the circumstances of slavery any attempts to equate 'dishonesty' with 'immorality' are also problematic. For example, in "Throwing away Knives," Anansi pretends to discard his knife, inciting Tiger to copy him. When they later arrive at a fruit field intending to eat pineapple, Anansi gorges on the fruit in front of Tiger, chiding him with the line: 'Brer

⁹² E. Z. Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2012), Kindle Book, in Introduction, paragraph 4, n.p.

Tiger, no man a knife nyam pine; no man no have knife no nyam pine!”⁹³ In this tale, Anancy’s deceit is a ploy to obtain a greater share of food. This is not merely an example of Anancy’s ‘greed’ but references the hunger which was a prominent feature of life on the plantations. The story, and Anancy’s actions, act as a ‘fantasy’ reversing the state of affairs which normally prevailed where the plantation owners, for which Tiger is an analogy, were able to eat well on the labour of those enslaved on their plantations who were, conversely, hungry. Sydney Mintz describes food as: ‘a prime preoccupation of Caribbean slave systems,’ the lack of which was identified as a principal cause of flight,⁹⁴ and numerous of the tales contain references to ‘hard times.’ In the Anancy tales, examples of ‘deceit’ are almost invariably interwoven with attempts to seize power or control in circumstances in which it was necessary to survival and, within the enslaver/enslaved person analogy, such stories would have been perceived as a justifiable, vicarious, triumph.

Any interpretation of what might constitute ‘deceit’ is further problematised when considered alongside the synonymous word, ‘lies’. Anancy describes himself as a ‘good liar’ in “The Dumb Child,” a word which is frequently used to describe storytelling. In response to the pioneering African American anthropologist and folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston’s, request to some of the residents of her childhood town to record some of [the] ‘old stories and tales,’ she was asked: ‘What you mean, Zora, them big old lies we tell when we’re just sittin’ around here on the store porch doin’ nothin’?’⁹⁵ Such notions of deceit or dishonesty have historically been

⁹³ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, Kindle Book, ‘Throwing Away Knives a. Tiger and Anansi’ by Benjamin Collins, Mandeville, n.p. (NB: Nyam means ‘eat’).

⁹⁴ Sidney Mintz, ‘Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?’ In Judy Bieber, ed., *Plantation Societies in the Era of European Expansion* (Routledge, 1997), p. 91.

⁹⁵ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harperennial Modern Classics, 2008), p. 2.

intertwined with ideas of verbal dexterity, with phrases which include 'webs of deceit' conveying not only pejorative associations but the skill which informs their intricacies.

Anancy's sexual 'swagger' is also frequently cited as both an appealing trait and a vice. However, in the Caribbean tales, any sexual 'conquest' seems less to do with amorousness and more with a desire for power. This is in contrast with some of the Ashanti tales in which Anansi's sexual antics are referred to explicitly. For example, as already discussed, in "How Kwaku Ananse (the Spider) Got Aso in Marriage Here," Anancy tricks Aso's first husband into taking a purgative, seizing the opportunity to spend time with Aso during the husband's emergency absences, when he succeeds in impregnating Aso. In the surviving, written, Caribbean tales, Anancy's sexual conquests seem to relate more to his rivalry with Tiger than any sexual appetite. Notably, in these stories, Anancy pursues women who would usually be deemed unattainable. For example, in "Gaulin"⁹⁶ his focus is a 'girl' who was born with a gold ring on her finger and, in "Dummy"⁹⁷ Anancy pursues the King's daughter, with his ultimate 'success' translating into a tangible form of power.

Any attempt to justify Anancy's actions becomes more complex when considering those tales in which Anancy does not merely trick Tiger but also his family or friends. In "Food and Cudgel. The Handsome Packey,"⁹⁸ Anancy deprives his hungry family of their share of the food. While allocating pieces of food to each member of his family, under the pretence that he has selflessly forgone his own share, Anancy deviously asks each of his family members for a 'piece-piece.' Each of them

⁹⁶ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 73.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁸ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "Food and Cudgel: a. The Handsome Packey", by Moses Hendricks, Mandeville, n.p.

immediately obliges, unaware that Anancy, having now received seven pieces, has managed to secure the greatest share. Later in the tale, Anancy compounds his crime by hiding in the loft to gorge on his secret store of food while his family eats 'rubbish.' Such displays of selfishness emerge in many of the tales including "Dry-Head and Anansi"⁹⁹ when Anancy pretends to be sick in a ploy to prevent his wife from selling their pig to buy a piece of land. Concerned about his health, Anancy's wife departs to consult a doctor. However, in a visually comical sequence, as soon as she leaves the house, Anancy darts out of his bed, hastening to the surgery, where he shapeshifts into the guise of doctor, and advises his wife to kill a whole pig as a form of cure for her ostensibly ill husband's (Anancy's) 'consumption'.

Although such character traits problematize Anancy's status as a 'folk hero,' any judgement based on a strictly moral framework appears misdirected. Anancy is not a fully formed 'human' but two-dimensional. Essentially a caricature within stories that serve multiple functions, he demonstrates forms of behaviour which are variously aspirational and a warning against the consequences of misdeeds. Lawrence Levine describes the tales as: 'painfully realistic stories which taught the art of surviving and even triumphing in the face of a hostile environment. They underlined the dangers of acting rashly and striking out blindly.'¹⁰⁰ Such 'dangers' are illustrated in a host of cautionary tales in which Anancy's misdeeds do not always evade censure. In "The Grave," a Caribbean story with numerous parallels within both the Ashanti tales and Brer Rabbit stories, Anancy is again motivated by 'greed' and pretends to be dead so that he can spend his nights darting out of his grave to steal vegetables from the

⁹⁹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "Dry-Head and Anansi", by George Parkes, Mandeville, n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 115.

fields. His plan falters when, following a bout of thefts, Anancy's son, suspecting his father's deception, determines to expose him. He does so by positioning a 'tar creature' in the field, correctly anticipating that the inquisitive and attention-seeking Anancy will touch the creature, thereby becoming stuck. The tale becomes cautionary when his failure against his son, who emerges as his intellectual superior, prompts the humiliated and defeated Anancy to 'climb up beneath the rafters [where] he is to this day.'¹⁰¹ The story has another significance within the canon. 'Tar creatures' featured in African American Brer Rabbit trickster tales including the 'Tar Baby' story. As a device, the 'tar creature' can exploit an entertainment value which is both visual and auditory, and any sense of humiliation for the 'victim' is compounded by the fact that the wrongdoer has been 'tricked' by a simple, innocuous method. However, the stories also allude to something more sinister, a connotation which is suggested by Frederick Douglass's description of 'tarring' as a method of entrapping thieves: 'the last and most successful [method is] that of tarring his fence all around, after which, if a slave was caught with any tar upon his person, it was deemed sufficient proof that he had either been into the garden or had tried to get in... This plan worked well; the slaves became as fearful of tar as of the lash.'¹⁰²

Although there are numerous tales in which Anancy is able to outwit his adversaries, such triumphs undoubtedly representing banners of hope, examples of his failures also dominate the stories. Typically, these underline the specific power dynamics between certain characters. For example, Tiger never outwits Anancy, but his son, Tacuma, and Monkey occasionally succeed. In "Fling-a-mile" Anancy attempts to

¹⁰¹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "The Grave" by Stanley Jones, Claremont, St Ann, n.p.

¹⁰² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York, Dover Publications, 1995), p. 10.

trick Monkey to put his hand into a hole, the first stage of a plan to kill and eat Monkey, which has already proved successful against both Dog and Goat. Monkey, having observed Anancy's antics refuses and, in a humorous reversal of roles, inverts the trick against him.¹⁰³ In another example of the Monkey-Anancy dynamic, in "The Yam-hills," Monkey exclaims: 'You can fool the others, but you can't fool me.'¹⁰⁴ Folklorist Laura Tanna, who diligently recorded the oral stories in Jamaica in the 1970s argues that a hierarchy informs such relationships and that the relevant classifications are defined by habitat. Those living above ground, 'have all the foibles of human beings'; those in water are 'mindless [and] inferior,' and those who live in the air 'are more intelligent and ethically superior to Anansi.'¹⁰⁵ However, the exchanges between Monkey and Anancy are distinguished by further oral performance features, including traces of 'broad talking', or 'rhyming'. Roger D Abrahams describes these oral performance patterns as: 'practiced, unlike more complex verbal traditions, by most young men in West Indian villages, though some are regarded as better talkers than others. In combination with the teasing and taunting also found as a well-developed verbal art among black children in many communities, this rhyming type of verbal interplay develops into two kinds of folklore activities and two kinds of men-of-words: good talking or talking sweet; broad talking or talking back.'¹⁰⁶

Historically derided, one of the strengths of the stories is that they resist traditional tendencies towards Manicheism. Anancy exists outside conventional, easily discernible, societal borders. He is a liminal figure, his shapeshifting and social

¹⁰³ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "Fling-A-Mile" by George Parkes, Mandeville.

¹⁰⁴ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "The Yam-Hills" by George Parkes, Mandeville, Paragraph 2, n.p.

¹⁰⁵ Laura Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales and Oral Histories* (Kingston: Jamaica Publications Limited, 1984), p. 81.

¹⁰⁶ Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, p. 3.

mobility demonstrating a fluidity which extends to gender, with Anancy described as both 'he' and 'she'¹⁰⁷ within the tales, echoing a 'genderlessness' which was a feature of the Twi language. The combination of these factors affords a freedom of movement capable of suggesting the achievement of the impossible, particularly within the constrained circumstances of the plantations. His fluidity allows Anancy to represent a breadth of humanity through his flaws and strengths. Irrepressible and verbally dexterous, the source of much of Anancy's inspiration lies most prominently perhaps in an audacious determination, which allows him to metaphorically transcend any constraints.

Did Anancy Mek it? The Significance of Naming to the Construction of a New World

*'For it is through our language that we know, and name, the world. True, the African slave – despite the horrors of the Middle Passage – did not sail to the New World alone. These African slaves brought with them their metaphysical systems, their languages, their terms for order; their expressive cultural practices, which even the horrendous Middle Passage and the brutality of everyday life on the plantation could not effectively obliterate.'*¹⁰⁸ (Henry Louis Gates)

Although Anancy's character, with his determination to be heard, together with his playfulness and humour, represent some of the most immediately captivating

¹⁰⁷ This may reference the lack of gender in some of the original languages Alice Werner states in the introduction to Jekyll's *Jamaican Song and Story*, that: 'the Tshi, Ewe and Yoruba languages are genderless, like the Bantu,' (p. xxv).

¹⁰⁸ Ed Goss and Linda Barnes, ed., *Talk That Talk, An Anthology of African-American Storytelling* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 16.

features of the tales, their endurance owes much to the format and manifold functions of the stories which, in oral cultures, were significant as a way to make some sense of their world. The Ashanti stories explained the sometimes peculiar physical features of animals and their function alongside more theoretical concepts which included 'contradiction' or 'jealousy'. In the Caribbean, the stories also helped to explain the world with certain tales describing, for example, why Spider was 'confined to rafters' or 'live(d) in crevices.' However, whereas in the Ashanti tales, there are tales which prescribe aspects of behaviour, the Caribbean tales are notable for their absence of simplistic, overtly didactic stories. The reasons behind the shift are difficult to surmise but may reflect the relative fragility of the new world and their limited sense of control of many aspects of its governance. Where tales which 'explain' the world do exist, they frequently relate to animals, a preoccupation which may be explicable on two principal counts: firstly, the types of animals in the Caribbean varied from those that had existed in Africa (although the use of 'Tiger' suggests some departure from the literal in any event) and, secondly, that they were significant in providing something of a mask, behind which it was possible to covertly comment, or to seek a semblance of escape.

A theme which emerges with greater frequency is a preoccupation with names. 'Naming' was a feature of the Akan Tales and Anansi is named 'Kwaku' a day name which means 'Wednesday' drawing upon the Akan tradition of giving 'day names' to children. However, within the Caribbean versions of the stories, naming emerges with greater prominence. This emphasis may be explained by the significance of renaming as what Orlando Patterson describes a 'ritual of enslavement,' and a

'symbolic rejection by the slave of his past and his former kinsmen.'¹⁰⁹ Its calculated effect was to further dehumanize, by systematically eradicating the West African names which were so significant to the marking of life and death that the announcement of a person's name after birth was accompanied by the resounding beat of the drum. Names serve a variety of functions in the Caribbean Anancy Tales. For example, the notable absence of a name given to 'Tiger' symbolically strips the analogous enslaver of his identity while underscoring the relevance of specifically assigned animal characteristics. Perhaps the greatest indicator of its importance, however, can be found within the multiple stories which allude to the significance of names. In "Cunnie-More-Than-Father"¹¹⁰ an assumed name is intended to describe characteristics of the individual, a declaration which proves particularly galling to Anancy when referring to his son. In "Yung-Kyum-Pyung", Anancy succeeds in the King's challenge by guessing the name of his daughter,¹¹¹ and, perhaps most closely paralleling the treatment of those enslaved in the Caribbean, in "New Names"¹¹² the act of acknowledging the existence of their children's adoptive names proves the determining factor in whether their mothers will be killed. It is notable that the last of these stories stands out in this collection with Anancy showing uncharacteristic family loyalty in his decision to save his Mother through warning her of the ploy. This emphasis on names also suggests a further symbolic purpose through its attempt to reconstruct something of their significance to a sense of heritage, identity and rootedness. Perhaps most poignantly, their potential importance can be glimpsed in an anecdote told by Robert Armstrong, who, while researching drum language in

¹⁰⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 2nd Edn. (USA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 52.

¹¹⁰ Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Tales*, in "Cunnie-More-than-Father" by George Parkes, Mandeville.

¹¹¹ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 11.

¹¹² Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Tales*, "New Names" by Samuel Christie, St Ann's, paragraph 1, n.p.

Nigeria in the early 1950s, was informed by an Idoma friend that: 'When an African hears his name drummed, he must jump up for joy even from his sick bed.'¹¹³

The 'Theatre' of the Tales

While Anancy's often frenetic physical exploits indisputably added to a sense of entertainment, the most prominent features of the stories relate to what I describe as its 'theatre'. Such features of the story undoubtedly stemmed from African storytelling traditions, immersive, auditory, and visual occasions with a focus on celebration and ceremony. Sound and music were prominent features of storytelling within an oral tradition, encompassing other aspects, including the shape and rhythms of language, the lyricism of the narrative and an 'enjoyment' of words. In the Caribbean sound had an even greater emphasis and, in many of Jekyll's versions of the tales, songs convey significant aspects to the plot. However, Beckwith alludes to a further symbolism of the songs when she describes how 'magic songs' were used in communicating with the dead,¹¹⁴ an association which may have enhanced the sense of spirituality of the stories.

Other facets of the Caribbean versions demonstrate an emphasis on the aural 'accents' to the tales, a panoply of sounds which was not limited to the creative choice of words, but to a host of other noises, which included simulated animal calls, music, feet tapping the ground in rhythmical beat, and laughter. Many of the stories also alluded to animal characteristics including the candle fly which Jekyll described as making a 'roaring sound with its strong, swift flight,'¹¹⁵ or the snapping of a

¹¹³ Robert Armstrong, 'Talking Drums in the Benue-Cross River of Nigeria', *Phylon*, 15.4 (1954), (p.355).

¹¹⁴ Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Tales*, Kindle Book, Preface, Paragraph 3, n.p.

¹¹⁵ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, Notes on p. 89.

crocodile, lolloping tiger, a hissing snake, or the clip clopping of hooves. In certain stories Anancy also 'sneezes'; he 'cries out'; he laughs out loud; he plays his violin while Tiger plays the tambourine; he sticks to the tar scarecrow; lashes a whip when riding Tiger as his 'fader's horse', and sings. References to drums thudding, or beating, did more than enhance the story, providing a backdrop or soundtrack, which, in some cases, included the literal addition of a beat or rhythm. For example, Mrs Henry Lynch, a European visitor to the Caribbean, describes hearing an Anancy tale where the narrator: '[gave] a kind of emphasis to the meter with her foot, regularly striking the earth with it at every pause.'¹¹⁶ Walter Jekyll similarly recalled the importance of sound to the stories, adding an additional nuance in his claim that the music: 'gain[ed] a peculiar and almost indescribable lilt from a peculiarity in the time-organisation of the Negro. If you ask him to beat the time with his foot, he does it perfectly regularly, but just where the white man does not do it. We beat with the time; he beats against it...'¹¹⁷

Walter Ong describes such rhythmic aspects as critical within oral traditions, offering a means to consolidate thought and ideas, because of the impossibility of pausing on a word, or revisiting an idea, so that 'it is advantageous for the speaker to say the same thing, or the equivalent of the same thing, two or three times.'¹¹⁸ However, the Caribbean tales went further, helping to construct, and preserve a unique language. A version of 'English' its rhythms were changed, adding a distinct, phonetic emphasis which represented something of a hybrid, combining West African linguistic rhythms with English vocabulary. Such patterns are also evident within the

¹¹⁶ Mrs Henry Lynch, *Wonders of the West Indies* (1866), reproduced in *After Africa*, p. 119.

¹¹⁷ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 40.

structure of the tales. The sentences are typically brief, with an emphasis on aesthetic features which include alliteration and dialogue and a lilting sound of the words. While this is common to all the stories, an example can be found in Jekyll's "Tacoma and the Old Witch Girl" and is illustrated by the passage: 'One day there was a gal, an' Anancy really want that gal fe marry, but he couldn't' catch him. An' Anancy ask an old-witch man had a 'mash-up side, an' him was the only man could gotten the gal for Anancy.'¹¹⁹ Similarly, in "Why Toad Croaks" the tale continues: 'One man got a darter. He said, "Got one cotton tree; de man cut dat cotton tree, he marry to me darter.'¹²⁰ The Anancy stories characteristically utilise the present tense and colloquial phrases, creating the impression that the listener and storyteller are in dialogue.

Many of the stories, particularly those recorded by Walter Jekyll, also incorporate songs, including the previously discussed: "Yung-Kyum-Pyung;" "Brother Anancy and Brother Deat" and "Dummy".¹²¹ In the Caribbean, music informed and moulded the tales, helping to preserve a sense of tradition. It was also able to encapsulate memory, distinctly connected as music was to place or time, so that the songs and stories had the potential to conjure up the dimensions and emotions of a moment, preserving an essence of Africa. Martha Warren Beckwith and Walter Jekyll made efforts to faithfully record the tales, placing importance on these aural aspects, suggesting that any reading of the tales should be participatory, requiring a sense of the sound, not just the appearance of the words, but the ability to listen.

¹¹⁹ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 65.

¹²⁰ Beckwith, *Jamaican Anansi Tales*, in "Why Toad Croaks", by Richard Morgan, Sonia Cruz Mountains, paragraph 1, n.p.

¹²¹ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*.

Humour and the Shape of the Many-Limbed Spider/Man

‘Jamaican slaves were not alone in seeing through the ideological inversion of reality yet behaving as if they did not. All slaves like oppressed peoples everywhere wore masks in their relations with those who had parasited them.’¹²²

In 1873, Charles Rampini wrote in his diary that: ‘no pleasanter picture of peasant comfort and enjoyment is to be seen in Jamaica than that of a circle of negroes seated around some village storyteller as he recounts the cunning exploits of Anancy.’¹²³ Walter Jekyll similarly described the ‘peals of laughter’ which accompanied the Anancy stories.¹²⁴ Such presumptions of ‘happiness’, or laughter can, of course, be jarring, particularly when expressed by outsiders. Historically intertwined with allegations of intellectual inferiority or vacuity, they reinforce pejorative stereotypes, an example of which can be found in the diary of Charles William Day (published in 1852) when he posits: ‘Negroes and the coloured tribes generally, are given to immoderate bursts of laughter, without any sufficiently exciting cause.’¹²⁵ However, humour was utilised in the Anancy Tales for a different purpose. It not only enhanced the performance but acted as a device, or mechanism which, novelist and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston, describes as a form of resistance: ‘the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, “Get out of here!” We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what

¹²² Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 338.

¹²³ Charles Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica*, reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 121.

¹²⁴ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Charles William Day, *Five Years’ Residence in the West Indies* in *After Africa*, p. 87.

he is missing[...]. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.¹²⁶ Within both the Ashanti and Caribbean Anancy tales humour offered a further purpose, through its degree of licence. Beneath the veneer of a humorous tale, the plantation owners or overseers could be mocked, and metaphorically subjected to the harshest of punishments. It offered vicarious enjoyment through, what Lawrence Levine describes as: 'expressions of the slaves' unrestrained fantasies: the impotent become potent; the brutalized are transformed into brutalizers.¹²⁷

Outside social convention and with no discernible ties of either responsibility or loyalty, Anancy is uniquely positioned to perceive and comment upon the absurdity of the world. Despite this, Anancy is frequently *part* of the absurdity with numerous tales drawing on a farcical form of humour. In "Tiger as Substitute. The King's Two Daughters,"¹²⁸ Anancy's attempts at 'courting' the King's daughters fail, resulting in the daughters tying him up and proceeding to lay a fire beneath him. Finding himself in an ostensibly insurmountable predicament, Anancy manages to persuade the passing Tiger to untie him, with the lie that, such is their admiration for him, the King's daughters have bound him in ropes to ensure that he cannot leave. Irked by the apparent preference for his perceived inferior, Tiger entreats Anancy to tie *him* up over the fire instead so that the sisters will 'keep' him but, when the sisters return, it is Tiger that is subjected to their brutality, being burnt so that Tiger, struggling against the restraints, is forced to 'jump an' jump,' until he 'pop[s] de rope'.

¹²⁶ Hurston, *Mules and Men*, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, p. 118.

¹²⁸ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, "Tiger as Substitute. A. The King's Two Daughters", by William Forbes, Dry River, Paragraphs 2-4, n.p.

Eventually becoming free, Tiger falls on the ground near Anancy, who is described as laughing, or “Tissin, tissin, tissin!” at Tiger’s misfortune. This tale exploits the absurd, a sense of the ridiculous played out through a sequence of physical events. In doing so it offered some vicarious enjoyment for the audience through witnessing Tiger, not only punished, but placed in his unfortunate predicament by his own vanity. Yet, Anancy, equally foolish and mistreated by the sisters, is free from the indignities of the scene and can laugh at Tiger’s stupidity.

Again, in “Grace Before Meat a. Monkey and Anansi,”¹²⁹ Anancy’s cunning permits him to trick Monkey. He does so through flattery, persuading the conceited Monkey to send his: ‘plenty cunnie an’ long tail,’ to Tiger. When Tiger catches Monkey, threatening to eat him, Anancy is again described as ‘on the tree laughing.’ Anancy’s laughter punctuates the story; providing a signal for the audience’s response and, while these stories detail barbaric punishments, any perceived sadism is countered by the knowledge that Anancy’s victims are not arbitrary. Tiger is ‘rough’, positioning him as the analogous enslaver/master. His attempts to subjugate Anancy are only obviated through Anancy’s cleverness and, although Anancy’s rival, Monkey, frequently eludes or even outwits Anancy’s attempts at trickery, if he exhibits a ‘crime’ it is that of being ‘a great boaster,’ which prompts Anancy to challenge him: ‘You boast well; I wonder if you have sense as how you boast.’ To this, Monkey retorts: ‘Get ‘way you foolish fellah you, can come an’ ask me if me have sense. You go t’rough de whole world you never see a man again have the sense I have.’¹³⁰ In

¹²⁹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, “Grace Before Meat. a. Monkey and Anansi”, by Samuel Christie St Anne’s Bay, n.p.

¹³⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p.77.

this way, Anancy's laughter at outwitting Monkey, who often triumphs against him, seems justified within a canon of stories which overlap and reinforce each other.

In many of these stories, Anancy acts as a mouthpiece, an instrument through which to expose vanities, or even wrongdoing, within a context in which such 'levelling' is permitted. Roger Abrahams contends that Anancy: 'enacts something of an antiritual for the community: he produces a needed sense of classless liminality.'¹³¹ Through their particular use of humour, the Anancy tales provide a forum, a space between worlds where complex, contentious issues can be addressed. However, humour not only provides a form of immunity or license but enhances the 'theatre' of the tales. In addition to the element of sound that punctuates the stories, it is significant that much of the humour in the tales is derived from the visual aspects, including images of Anancy 'riding' Tiger like a horse, or hastily shapeshifting to scuttle to the doctor's surgery via a shortcut only to pose as a doctor to dupe his wife. Absurdity was a feature of the sometimes-farcical Ashanti tales, but in the Caribbean, where the need for escape and masked mockery of the oppressors became more urgent, it provided an accent to the storytelling. Such vignettes occupy the comedy of the ridiculous, reminiscent of the exaggerated actions in silent comedy, or modern-day versions of similar 'scrapes' including those of the hapless heroes of Mr Bean or Fawlty Towers, conveying the absurd, illogical scenarios in which it is the character's own flaws that bring about their unfortunate predicament, yet still rooting our sympathies firmly with the principal protagonist which, in this case, is Anancy. Roger Abrahams argues that such humour: 'provides license to community members to impose a new sense of order upon the social and natural environment, an order that is so different from that

¹³¹ Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, p. 58.

of the everyday that it produces laughter through manipulating discontinuities and contrasts.¹³² It is a style of humour which seems pre-emptive of a tradition of Bugs Bunny or the Road Runner and is derived from the behaviour of figures who are essentially caricatures who, like cartoons, even when eaten by tiger or burned over a fire, are symbolically reborn again and again.

Another feature of the Caribbean versions of the tales is that the form of humour is frequently used to illuminate the underlying power dynamic between the characters and, most notably, Tiger and Anancy. In the Ashanti tales there were similar sequences in which Anansi pretended to be dead, or gorged on food in a field, or hung from rafters, episodes in which Anansi was active and energetic and the comedy was enhanced by a swiftness in movement as Anansi was determined to execute his plans. However, the form of humour was rarely specific and was primarily a feature or consequence of the story, with Anansi frequently positioned at the centre, yet rarely part of a directed plan so evidently pitted against a specific adversary, or victim. In the Caribbean, Anancy's rival is the physically powerful plantation owner, who is thinly veiled as Tiger, battles in which physicality becomes important. When being burned over a spit, Tiger's strength eventually allows him to literally break the ropes, whereas Anancy succeeds at talking his way out of the 'scrape'. In this series of tales, the humour is shaped by the familiar battle of the weak against the strong, a forum in which Anancy's cunning and cleverness with words prove critical to his ability both to extricate himself from potentially harmful situations and, at times, to achieve a semblance of agency. Further nuance is added to the dynamic between Tiger and Anancy by the nature of the punishments which

¹³² Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*, p. 58.

are so frequently meted out to Tiger. Tiger is bound with ropes, burnt at the fire, whipped, or humiliated, in a probable allusion to the many similar horrific, unjust, punishments which were routinely enforced against enslaved people. Levine asserts that: 'The need to laugh at our enemies, or situation, ourselves, is a common one, but it often exists with the most urgency in those who exert the least power over their immediate environment, in those who have the most objective reasons for feelings of hopelessness.'¹³³ Superficially cruel, such moments of humiliation, or punishment, within the tales represent specific fantasies, with Tiger degraded and mistreated within an invented, alternate, world.

In addition to offering some vicarious relief, the visual aspect of this type of humour and its exaggeration of the sequences went some way towards compensating for the darkness of the notional Amphitheatre in which the tales were performed. In the Ashanti tales, many of the stories include a line: 'when things were visible,' the advent of morning light typically prompting some revelation. Transplanted to the Caribbean, there was a greater justification for, and potential function of, any exaggeration. The inevitable difficulties with communication amongst those who spoke different languages compounded the issues which resulted from a lack of light prompting the need to further emphasise the non-linguistic aspects of the stories either through gesture or music.

A final, but important, aspect to the humour within the tales, which features in both Ashanti and Caribbean tales, is the spider's physiology. Absent from the American counterpart Brer Rabbit stories, this physical manifestation adds a crucial dimension

¹³³ Levine, *Black Culture and Consciousness*, p. 300.

to the humorous aspect of the tales. Discussing the source of humour of an African Limba tale, Ruth Finnegan explains: 'a spider is shown taking off his cap, gown, and trousers in a vain attempt to placate his magic pot; in the story he is unquestionably like a man – albeit an absurdly foolish man – with a house, wife, and human garb, but the fact that he is, nevertheless, a *spider* struggling with all these clothes adds just the extra understated touch in the telling which makes the whole story very funny.'¹³⁴

While the Anancy of the Caribbean owed much to his ancestor of the Ashanti tales, he was transformed to serve a more critical role within the Caribbean. Demonstrating an ability to outwit both Kings and the 'rough' Tiger, the web of stories which he spun with his linguistic verve, provided an essential means of escape. However, it is perhaps in his revolutionary potential that he established the most inspiring legacy. In the Caribbean, Anancy became more obviously nomadic, as well as a more human, vocal, 'man of the people'. While his ability with words was suggestive of creativity the stories also offered an important cultural and political function. They provided a forum and a symbolic space at the centre of the world through a unique and vital form of storytelling in which sound, theatre, and humour emerged as essential facets.

The new identity and language that was carved out within that spiritual, storytelling space laid a significant foundation for subsequent generations of writers. Portable and adaptable, it was also capable of being carried further, contained within the

¹³⁴ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2012).

memories of those who listened to and shaped those stories. At the centre of that stage Anancy, the vivacious, malleable 'hero' remained connected by a metaphorical thread to both Africa and the Caribbean. It was one to which he stayed attached as he continued to travel, carrying his bundle of stories, in the unending attempt to go forward, forward, towards the next stage of his journey.

Chapter Two: Louise Bennett, Pretending to be Laughing

*'And though the things that were Black were not encouraged, they were done. The drums were still beating...'*¹³⁵

In this chapter, I focus on the work of the Jamaican folklorist, poet, and performer Louise Bennett, and attempt to quantify her role in shaping, reasserting and, ultimately, preserving the Anancy Tales. Publishing her first versions of the Anancy stories in the Caribbean in the 1940s in the period leading up to independence in much of the region, it was a purpose which was made more important by the political context in which Louise Bennett developed her artistic voice. Part of her accomplishment was in redefining a specific character for Anancy. She did so through a focus on both his West African origins and the oral tradition which she celebrated, recognising its crucial potential as a source of unification. In doing so Bennett not only resurrected a declining folk hero but reinforced a specific, creative and accessible 'language' which was intrinsic to Caribbean culture.

In the 1940s, when Louise Bennett was first recording her versions of the Anancy Stories, Jamaica was at a political and cultural crossroads. Actively seeking its independence, much of the Caribbean was also questioning its identity within a society in which outdated ideas of European cultural superiority continued to be taught in schools. For Jamaicans, the pernicious effect of such policies included what poet, Mervyn Morris, describes as a 'tendency to undervalue African elements

¹³⁵ Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008), p. 28.

in Jamaican culture', despite the fact that over ninety per cent of the population had African heritage.¹³⁶

Louise Bennett was born in 1919. The product of a skewed, Eurocentric, education, she later described her early perception of the stories as: '[having] no social status[...]They were to be deplored and despised as coming from the offspring of slaves who were illiterate, uncultured and downright stupid.'¹³⁷ Accounts of Bennett's early childhood suggest that she was an unusually astute, observant child, qualities that eventually allowed her to reject such erroneous presumptions of European cultural superiority. Fittingly, perhaps, it was a perspective that was cultivated through listening attentively to the language of the women who visited her mother's dressmaking 'parlor'. Acutely aware of the socio-economic breadth of the clients who sought her mother's dressmaking services she recognised that it was their Jamaican dialect that unified them, later recalling that: 'the one strong bond between everybody there was the language they spoke[...]after a few minutes everyone was talking the same language, and this was a Jamaican thing...'¹³⁸ Stories, proverbs, and folklore punctuated Bennett's childhood and, despite a relative scarcity of detailed biographical information, multiple 'clues' suggest the particular resonance of the multi-accented, socially fluid and theatrical Anancy for Louise Bennett. The only child of a dressmaker mother and a baker father who died when she was still very young, Bennett emphatically pronounced herself to be 'working class', yet an unusual abundance of exceptional talents allowed her to access opportunities which

¹³⁶ Mervyn Morris, *Miss Lou: Louise Bennett and Jamaican Culture* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2014), Kindle Book, Chapter 1, Paragraph 2, n.p.

¹³⁷ Julie Pearn, *Poetry in the Caribbean* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p. ii.

¹³⁸ *Miss Lou and the Early Jamaican theatre*, National Library of Jamaica, *Youtube*, 2017.

would typically have been denied to someone of her age and social status. Perhaps more significantly, Bennett's breadth of skills, which extended to music, mimicry, linguistic verve, and theatre, not only conspicuously aligned her with Anancy but positioned her as the perfect performer of the tales.

Although Anancy may have suggested an obvious device for her work, to overstate any superficial parallels between the folk hero and Louise Bennett would represent something of a diminishment of both the extent to which Bennett shaped Anancy and the plethora of challenges which the task of adapting and reasserting the tales presented. Bennett did not merely appropriate the folkloric figure but moulded him and the stories, to reinforce ideas about Jamaican heritage and its connections to West African culture, her specific use of language and performance carving out what became a unique, distinctly Caribbean, 'voice'. Her skill in re-positioning the brazen, linguistically agile, but roguish, trickster at the centre of the neglected and undervalued tales provided critical cultural validation both of the Jamaican language and oral tradition at a pivotal time in Caribbean political history. It also offered a cogent source of inspiration for the writers and artists who followed her and included, most notably, many of the writers of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM). Within the correspondence that survives from the embryonic stages of CAM are references to the importance of Louise Bennett to ideas of an 'aesthetic.'¹³⁹ Her impact was such that CAM contributor Louis James who taught at the University of West Indies in Jamaica in the 1960s still recalls witnessing her 'electrifying performances', in which, 'Anancy's distorted, lisping speech created a being that hovered on [the]

¹³⁹ A letter from Gordon Roehler to E. K. Brathwaite alludes to Louise Bennett and language as key to ideas of the aesthetic 12.1.1967. Louis James also queries the role of folk to the aesthetic referencing *Jamaica Labrish* and later records reference potential plans for Louise Bennett to speak at a meeting or conference.

margins of identity - a being poised in the magical act of transformation.'¹⁴⁰ A significant part of Bennett's achievement, however, derives not only from her performance, which was capable of conveying the multifaceted nature of Anancy, and the stories, but to the fact that she set her inimitable skills to preserving a sense of the theatre on the page. In this, Bennett crafted specific aspects of the stories, directing and emphasizing many of the principal facets of the 'anancy aesthetic' that I explore in this thesis. Her versions of the tales provided a significant foundation for future writers, shaping both their perception and understanding of the stories.

The Dressmaker's Daughter: The Threads of Bennett's Life

Louise Bennett's early conviction about the importance and potential power of Jamaican dialect reveals a certain precociousness in the young schoolgirl. Despite this, her decision to write 'dialect poetry' was reached tentatively and only after she experimented with forms of standard English compositions, in a youthful, misguided, assumption, that any 'success' in writing should be within the revered forms which were taught within schools. While she soon acknowledged that she 'didn't feel all this', opting to write poems in dialect when she was just fourteen years of age, it was a particular experience that provided the catalyst for her career. Boarding a crowded tramcar, she heard one of the countrywomen refer to her as a 'dress-oman', entreating the other countrywomen to 'spread out' so that Bennett, who they perceived to be a middle-class imposter, could not sit down.¹⁴¹ Bennett's recognition of the women's appropriation of social space as a form of protest, which, in this

¹⁴⁰ Email from Louis James to Natalie Lucy, dated 22nd October 2022.

¹⁴¹ Morris, *Louise Bennett and Jamaican Culture*, Chapter 1, paragraph 15, n.p.

context, was literally expressed through physicality, provided a moment of clarity, prompting her to write the poem, 'On a Tramcar' in Jamaican dialect.

Although she was still at school, Bennett's early efforts at dialect poetry attracted considerable attention, precipitating an artistic path which allowed her to combine her many skills, not only in music and theatre, but in an innovative use of language, which she later described as: 'still the strongest thing that's happening.'¹⁴² Bennett's profound interest in language and folklore led her to perform and publish both poetry and her own versions of the Anancy Tales when she was still a young woman, attracting the attention and support of noted Caribbean academic, folklorist and writer, Philip Sherlock. Despite her success, an evolving passion for theatre led Bennett to apply to RADA in London, which resulted in a British Council scholarship. An interesting anecdote about Louise Bennett, which seems typical of her ability to create something of a fanfare, was that, on arrival at RADA, a reported misunderstanding resulted in a further 'audition' where her commanding performance led to the offer of a second scholarship.¹⁴³ In fact, Bennett's impact did not stop with two scholarships, and she insisted upon performing in Jamaican dialect while at the historically elitist RADA.

In the wake of such determination to do things on her own terms, it is perhaps not surprising that Bennett later utilised the power of Caribbean dialect on a 'bigger stage', recalling of her time at RADA that '[she] let them know that [she] didn't come to lose an accent or to lose anything really, but to get some technical knowledge of

¹⁴² Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams*, p. 26.

¹⁴³ Morris, *Louise Bennett and Jamaican Culture*, Kindle Book, Chapter One, Paragraph 32, n.p.

the theatre...'¹⁴⁴ It was this display of individuality, supported by an impressive and esoteric range of skills that, as playwright and broadcaster, Easton Lee, later described, led to Bennett being considered a 'sensation,'¹⁴⁵ with her 'exceptional' skills in mime being recalled years later by colleagues and former instructors.¹⁴⁶ The late 1940s and early 1950s proved an itinerant period for Louise Bennett, including a stint as a broadcaster on the now iconic BBC radio programme, *Caribbean Voices*. Describing the effect of those broadcasts on his family, and particularly his mother, a Jamaican growing up in 'rural St Anne's,' the writer, Kei Miller, mused: 'I wonder what it meant at the time, that this revolutionary pride in Jamaican dialect and language should have been broadcast on the BBC. I wonder what it meant, that on 7th November 1948, Jamaicans tuning in with their transistor radios and listening beyond the crackle of Colonial distance, would have heard Miss Lou's own words telling them: Your language is ok. You are ok.'¹⁴⁷ It was a language that reflected the landscape and environment and could convey its experience from an alternative perspective from the prevailing narrative. It was also a language which not only encompassed its history of oppression but its defiance, resistance, and creativity. Through Bennett's determined use of 'dialect,' which Edward Kamau Brathwaite later termed 'Nation Language,' however, she went further. In a challenge to Britain's presumptions of cultural superiority, she not only asserted the complexities and richness of Jamaican language but its potential for unity.

Despite Bennett's determination and the uniqueness of her insights, it is notable that it was during her peripatetic years of the 1940s and 1950s, spent in various outposts

¹⁴⁴ Morris, *Louise Bennett*, Kindle Book, Chapter One, Paragraph 50, n.p.

¹⁴⁵ *Miss Lou and the Early Jamaican Theatre*, documentary, National Library of Jamaica.

¹⁴⁶ Morris, *Louise Bennett*, Chapter One, Paragraph 50, n.p.

¹⁴⁷ Kei Miller: *The Essay: Caribbean Voices*, BBC Sounds, released on 30 Jun 2021.

and most notably Britain and America, that Louise Bennett was able to further experiment with her sound and voice. It proved to be a defining period, during which she met and exchanged ideas with other students and artists from a breadth of countries within the Caribbean. Despite moments when she was buffeted by both ignorance and racism, which included the sobering experience of segregation in the United States, when, as Mervyn Morris described: 'she was not permitted to travel in the class her ticket indicated until the train had crossed the Mason-Dixon line,'¹⁴⁸ overall, these experiences proved productive. They further crystallized her creative voice, helping to catalyze the political purpose in her poetry and stories. It is also significant that Bennett's perspective was moulded at some distance from the Caribbean and that, like so many of the Caribbean diaspora, the opportunity to engage with writers and artists from diverse parts of the Caribbean helped to illuminate the commonalities that united the superficially disparate set of islands. Despite the panoply of attractive offers in London, ultimately, a combination of homesickness, ill health and a switch in focus prompted Bennett to return to the Caribbean. It proved another intense and itinerant period which offered a diversity of experience, central to which was studying folklore in Trinidad. For Bennett what was an increasingly academic pursuit also confirmed the potential applicability of folklore to identity with Bennett telling the renowned American folklorist, Daryl Cumber Dance, that in 'the folk' she 'always found something for [her] need.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Morris, *Louise Bennett*, Chapter One, Paragraph 34, n.p.

¹⁴⁹ Dance, *New World Adams*, p. 25.

Writing Anancy: The Challenge of Making the Written Word Heard

For Louise Bennett, whose myriad skills closely aligned her with the trickster figure, Anancy's appeal as a storytelling device is easy to surmise. However, the task of rescuing and reinventing both the central trickster figure and the tales still presented innumerable challenges. Rex Nettleford described Bennett as: 'a poet of utterance,' explaining his meaning with the clarification that she: 'us[ed] the normally spoken language, not the normally *written* tongue.'¹⁵⁰ However, despite Bennett's preference for orality with its inherent spontaneity and celebration of sound, she was also aware that, to reach a wider audience and preserve something of the essence of the tales, they should be written down. In this, Bennett was undoubtedly assisted by the availability of certain sources for the stories, the most prominent of which were those collected by both Martha Warren Beckwith and Walter Jekyll. Bennett's perception of the degree of success with which Jekyll had painstakingly conveyed the breadth and multisensory nature of the tales to the page led her to enthuse later that she was: 'overjoyed[...]to find accurate retellings of many of the stories which [she] had forgotten.'¹⁵¹ Part of her effusiveness may have derived from Jekyll's evident admiration for the Jamaican dialect, the notes to his versions of the stories containing considerable detail about intonation and pronunciation alongside remarks about the 'neat, short turn' of the language which he praised for its 'conciseness'.¹⁵² However, Jekyll was further distinguished by his role as 'mentor' to the writer Claude McKay who Leota S. Lawrence, credits with "rescuing" the West Indian peasant from his traditionally "low" position in literature and "elevating" him into a real and

¹⁵⁰ Louise Bennett, *Jamaica Labrish*, p. 13.

¹⁵¹ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. x.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

authentic human being.¹⁵³ Despite Jekyll's creditable efforts to faithfully transcribe the tales, the Anancy stories suggested something more personal for Louise Bennett. Against the political uncertainty leading up to Independence, they could say something about Caribbean culture and heritage without reference to European 'values'. Their resonance was also intertwined with significant, traditional events and memories, points of reference which included 'swap[ping] Anancy stories during recess and lunch time,¹⁵⁴ as well as those at 'Dinky-Mini' or death wakes. Bennett described such commemorations as a 'function to cheer up the family of a dead person[...].we can sing happy, and dance, and things to keep the family cheerful.'¹⁵⁵ For Bennett, the tales offered a sense of unity, and the potential for escape from the sorrows that were common features of life. Most importantly, perhaps, the folklore also suggested a form of rootedness, its auralty and tradition capable of traversing boundaries of class, gender, or race.

At a time when the Caribbean was questioning its identity, for Bennett, folklore offered a crucial solution to its sense of deracination, an insight that allowed her to recognise the advantages not only of reasserting the familiar folkloric character but to attempt to faithfully preserve the 'theatrical' essence of the stories on the page. Such additional, multisensory, elements encompassed a host of features and included humour, visual movement, and one of its most important facets, sound. In *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature*, Nicole Brittingham Furlonge proposes that 'reading' or interpreting African American literature requires

¹⁵³ Leota S. Lawrence, 'The African Presence In Caribbean Folklore', *New Directions*, 8:3 (1981), n.p.

¹⁵⁴ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. ix.

¹⁵⁵ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. x.

a: 'shift in emphasis away from the visual toward the aural.'¹⁵⁶ In a sense, Bennett's challenge was to execute the process in reverse, by encapsulating the performance within stories which, by their written nature, had to remain 'fixed'.

Although Bennett's preferred arena was undoubtedly the stage, with poet and biographer, Mervyn Morris, positing that: 'ideally we should sit around Miss Lou at twilight savouring the magic of her telling, the practised skill in voice and gesture, the rhythm of the songs,'¹⁵⁷ Bennett had produced written versions of the stories as early as the 1940s. *Anancy Stories and Poems in Dialect* was published in 1944; the anthology, *Anancy Stories and Dialect Verse*, which Bennett had contributed to, was published in 1950 and, in 1957, another itinerant period for Bennett, during which she worked as drama officer for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission, *Anancy Stories and Dialect Verse (New Series)* was published, a collection which included fourteen Anancy stories in Creole and a number of additional stories which were written in Standard English. Bennett's role at the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission had required her to travel to a variety of towns and rural communities across Jamaica. Philip Sherlock describes one of the objectives of the role as to 'find a unifying force and that meant engendering a national spirit.'¹⁵⁸ It was a task which undoubtedly enriched both her storytelling and her sense of its potential impact.

Perhaps Bennett's most well-known collection, *Anancy and Miss Lou* was not published until much later, in 1979. Mervyn Morris clarifies that one of its objectives

¹⁵⁶ Nicole Brittingham Furlonge, *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Mervyn Morris, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, Introduction, p. x.

¹⁵⁸ Morris, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, Chapter 2, paragraph 4, n.p.

was to make the stories available again because the earlier collections were, at that time, 'out of print'.¹⁵⁹ While *Anancy and Miss Lou* may be perceived as something of a 'definitive' collection, its thirty-one stories representing the breadth of her written Anancy output, its date is misleading as most of its stories appeared in previous anthologies or collections. Others can be found in earlier video footage, performances that were informed by their flamboyant, florid style and spontaneity. The tales in *Anancy and Miss Lou* predominantly replicate versions from earlier anthologies which were written in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, with the majority of discernible differences being small details in spelling or formatting, issues which may have represented editorial style differences or choices. Despite this, these alterations are not entirely insignificant. For example, in the 1950 anthology, one of the stories is titled "Anancy an' Tiger", whereas in the 1979 version it is called "Bra Nancy an Tiger". Although the change is minimal, the later title emphasizes Anancy's connection to the (Caribbean) reader while distancing Tiger from her cast of other characters. A more significant feature of *Anancy and Miss Lou*, which differs from the earlier collections, is that Bennett was allowed to include the music. In his biography, Morris suggests that this had always been her intention in recognition of the fact that the music was integral to the stories, a feature which had been acknowledged even by the less culturally immersed, Jekyll and Beckwith. Despite being primarily reproduced from her earlier versions, as a collection, therefore, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, is still most effective in demonstrating Bennett's skill and significance in honing and reasserting the stories to suggest something important about culture and heritage. Critical to this objective was a shift in focus towards Anancy, whose reputation was intertwined with language, and his origins in West Africa and Bennett

¹⁵⁹ Louise Bennett, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, p. vii.

relies upon something of a 'formula' for her tales in her attempt to reassert this sense of rootedness. Central to all the versions, is the brazen, flamboyant, Anancy, a distinctly Caribbean figure with a distinctly Caribbean voice.

Bennett's Anancy 'Formula'

In her Anancy stories, Bennett substantially builds upon the tales that Beckwith and Jekyll recorded, but she also shapes the stories, structuring them into a specific format. With echoes of her poem, 'Independance', when she asserted that Jamaica 'needed an Independance Formula',¹⁶⁰ Bennett creates a 'formula' for her Anancy tales. Integral to ideas of 'voice' and 'aesthetic' its features most overtly correspond to themes of rootedness and heritage. One of the most prominent aspects is contained in the introductory passage of each of the stories when she replicates, somewhat paradoxically, the European fairy tale beginning: 'Once upon a time.' However, in Bennett's conclusion to each of the tales, she references the more obviously traditional Ashanti format, with her use of the disclaimer: 'Jack Mantora, me noh choose none.' Folklorist Laura Tanna contends that, while openings and endings were frequently used within the oral tales to 'organise' the performance, by the 1970s, the more familiar style of ending was conveyed by the colloquial: 'Dat is de h'end of de story,' Tanna further asserting that only occasionally was the ending 'Jack Mandora me no choose none,' used.¹⁶¹ As Tanna explains, many folklorists attribute its use to moralistic reasons in an attempt to negate the effect of the story, although there are other intriguing explanations for the phrase with, linguist, Frederic Cassidy, claiming that the origin is English, and that it represents a contraction of

¹⁶⁰ Louise Bennett, 'Independance', in *Jamaica Labrish*.

¹⁶¹ Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales and Oral Histories*, p. 31.

words which include 'Jackanory and'.¹⁶² While Jackanory and its associations with storytelling are familiar to those in Britain, regardless of its origins, it seems likely that Louise Bennett was attempting to reinforce a particular tradition through a formula which referenced its discernible roots in the Caribbean plantation stories and, more specifically, in West Africa. For example, in the majority of Bennett's tales she includes the penultimate line: 'Is Anancy meck it'. Part of her 'formula' also dictates that the stories revolve around Anancy, who provides a central constant. It is a decision which deviates somewhat from the breadth of versions contained within Jekyll's and Beckwith's collections which included stories with a disparate range of sources. In her introduction to Jekyll's versions, folklorist, Alice Werner, asserted that, while many of the tales had a recognisable Ashanti connection, 'the African element [was] far less evident than in "Uncle Remus" and is in many cases overlaid and inextricably mixed up with matters of European origin.'¹⁶³ One such 'European' story was the "Three Little Pigs". Bennett's compendious knowledge of folklore would have extended to an awareness of the historically tangled roots of the tales, a fact she celebrates in her poem, 'Yes m'dear': 'When the Asian culture and the European culture/buck up on African culture in the Caribbean people/We stir them up and blend them to we flavour/We shake them up and move them to we beat/we wheel them and we tu'n them and we rock them/and we sound them and we temper them/and lawks the rhythm, sweet!' Her decision to focus on predominantly African elements suggests an intention to reassert the richness of Caribbean heritage without reference to Europe. Part of this focus was to place at the centre of the tales the trickster character who originated in West Africa, positioning Africa as the

¹⁶² Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales and Oral Histories*.

¹⁶³ Walter Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. xxvi.

symbolic origin through Anancy, of whom she asserted: 'Everything that happened in the world was started by Anancy.'¹⁶⁴

In addition to the familiar bookends, Bennett uses other, repeating, patterns to create her formula. While less significant than some of the features already mentioned, there is a marked consistency in length and title, aspects which are designed to create a sense of familiarity through predictability. Perhaps the greater challenge for Bennett, however, was the need to recreate both sound and performance within the written version of the tales. One of Bennett's most prominent devices is her use of dialect which has an immediacy and conveyed in the present tense, effectively forces the reader to 'hear' the words, as part of a rhythm. In fact, Bennett used similar devices in her poetry. Intended to be spoken, the words on the page were required to 'suggest recognisable noises and nuances of meaning.'¹⁶⁵ Like her reinventions of the Anancy stories, Bennett's poetry represented a similar deviation from the traditional stylistics of much classical European poetry, a distinctive style which contributed to the fact that it had also been critically dismissed, with the result that Bennett was frequently omitted from the literary canon of influential poets.

Mervyn Morris argues that Bennett's ostracism stemmed from a lack of awareness of some of the references within her literary work, asserting that her meaning was fully available 'only when readers [were] in touch with the oral and other cultural contexts the words imply.'¹⁶⁶ In her Anancy Tales, Bennett's technique similarly relies on the creation of references and nuances, and, within both her poetry and folktales, she

¹⁶⁴ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. ix.

¹⁶⁵ Mervyn Morris, *Louise Bennett in Print*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, Volume 28, (1982), (p. 49).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

displays a command not only of the dialect but the canon of stories and characters which she revitalised.

Any attempt to understand the multifaceted purpose of Bennett's Anancy stories also requires an ability to 'listen' particularly as there are points where the meaning is directly affected by the pronunciation. For example, in the opening paragraph of "Anancy an De King Daughta", she writes: 'Once upon a time, dere was a very bad bull livin eena de hoodlan, an everybody did fraid a him. But dem she dat de bull had a golden tongue an plenty man goh out fi gill did bull an get rich but not one a dem come back – de bull kill dem.' While the punctuation helps to provide the breaks in the tale, echoing as far as possible the spoken pauses, it also creates a sense of the overall arc. The signals to 'hear' and not merely 'read' the words further serve to clarify some of the meaning. In this way, it is clear from the structure that the word 'dere' should not be perceived or pronounced as 'dear' but should rhyme with, and reference, the word 'there'.

Bennett also frequently constructs her lines with words of one syllable. This technique not only adds to the sense of rhythm but draws on the traditional West African versions of the tales and is reminiscent of a structure of language that can be glimpsed in the rhythmic, short-syllabled, alliterative Twi versions which Rattray transcribed and produced alongside the English versions of the stories. Countless examples of this emerge within Bennett's tales. In "Anancy an Mosquito" Bennett writes: 'Monkey tell her she is Bredda Rabbit frighten him, as she demands dat de two a dem fi go an see Bredda Rabbit an fine out de truth a de matter.' While the approach I have adopted undoubtedly lacks scientific rigour it is still interesting to

consider elements of her syllabic composition. For example, in a sentence of thirty-one words, only eight contain more than one syllable of which five are the names of, or directly reference, characters: Bredda (twice), Rabbit (twice) and Monkey. In the same excerpt from “Anancy an Mosquito” above, Bennett’s structure also warrants further examination. For example, Bennett’s specific use of the words, ‘frighten’; ‘fi’ and ‘fine’ create a particular rhythm, partly through assonance, that is, they contain the same vowel sounds although they do not strictly rhyme. It is a pattern which is enhanced by the prevalence of words which commence with ‘de’: demands, dat, de, dem, which is also reinforced by the two uses of ‘Bredda’. In Bennett’s tales her use of language is rhythmic, punchy, and evocative in its representation of sound. Bennett adds a further accent to this by, as she frequently explains in her stories, emphasising the fact that Anancy was ‘tongue tied’.

Louise Bennett’s ‘Anancy formula’ does not merely attempt to convey a sense of the sound; it also conjures visual images, especially colour, to enhance the drama. In “Pig an Long-Mout”, she references ‘big fires’ which evoke both sound and the physical sensation of heat. There are also allusions to movement. Anancy is swift, a speed conveyed by him ‘grabbing’ the bag before he ‘run’. Bull ‘chokes’ on the rope in which he is ensnared, and Bennett juxtaposes ‘exclaims’ with the ‘whisper’ of Anancy’s plan to Tookooma. Bennett manipulates the visual and aural, conveying an imagined theatre which is liberally peppered with colour, laughter, and movement. Within that visual and aural theatre, the most prominent aspect is language, in its multifaceted potential: its sounds, origins and patterns.

Reshaping and Reasserting Anancy, the Tricky Spider/Man

In addition to the difficulties of conveying the visual and auditory elements which accompanied the stories in writing, Bennett also had to negotiate a principal character who was problematic. Most challenging was the prevailing antipathy towards Anancy, the trickster figure who stood brazenly at the centre of all her versions of the stories. Despite the charisma, energy and playfulness which had historically proved aspirational, Anancy's wit, cunning and selfishness, which had suggested tactics for survival on the plantations, were now at odds with accepted standards of morality. The furore which surrounded, and continues to surround, discussion about, the appropriateness of celebrating Anancy extended to calls in 2001 to 'ban' him as a folk hero,¹⁶⁷ a move which Mervyn Morris describes as prompting a 'media controversy'. Ralph Thompson, amongst others, argued that the 'sentimental attachment to this character [was] now spent,'¹⁶⁸ contending that Anancy was no longer deemed to be a 'suitable role model' for school children, and not 'appropriate' for 'a black nation facing the new challenges of its destiny.' Such misgivings were not novel, of course, and have been discussed earlier in this thesis, but the reappropriation of Anancy within a more contemporary setting re-energized debate. Interviews with Bennett in which the character and message of the stories are broached typically amount to a defense, delivered unapologetically, about the absurdity of taking the character too literally. As Bennett's close friend and collaborator, Ranny Williams, told folklorist Laura Tanna: 'You just might as well say you get the devil out of the Bible. Hear what I mean. They know the devil for the

¹⁶⁷ 'Ban Anancy', *The Gleaner* (18th March 2001).

¹⁶⁸ Ralph Thompson, 'Goodbye to Anancy', *The Gleaner*, (4th April 2001), cited in Mervyn Morris, *Miss Lou*, Kindle Book, Chapter 4, n.p.

devil, and they don't try to emulate the devil.¹⁶⁹ Despite her repeated efforts to explain Anancy's multifaceted purpose, the task of reasserting Anancy required careful crafting and Bennett's determination that he had something significant to say about heritage ultimately proved a masterful act of consolidation and reinvention. On the Caribbean plantations, Anancy had descended from the quasi-Godlike status of the Ashanti tales. In his more human guise, Anancy suggested an accessible hero, and a representative of the people. His ability to linguistically 'spin' situations demonstrated a potential for power. In Louise Bennett's retellings of the stories, despite her description of Anancy as a 'magic spider man',¹⁷⁰ he is fundamentally human and earthbound. He rarely shapeshifts or moves between physical worlds, and instead assumes disguises, typically by literally dressing up in what frequently proves a laborious task, which adds to the sense of performance or theatre. As a device it serves an additional function within Bennett's stories, with Anancy's various disguises emphasising both his fluidity and mobility. Yet, it is in Anancy's fundamental 'humanness' that his plethora of flaws are exposed, including selfishness and greed, which make him both accessible and available for Bennett to exploit his mistakes in order to convey messages within the stories.

As already discussed, an important part of Bennett's 'formula' was to reposition Anancy at the centre of every story, in contrast with the versions compiled by both Jekyll and Beckwith in which Anancy features in only some of the tales. In Bennett's versions, the focus is redirected so that Anancy becomes both creator and facilitator and remains critical to the action of the tales. Paradoxically perhaps, and despite his

¹⁶⁹ Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales*, p. 80.

¹⁷⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. ix.

panoply of human flaws, Anancy remains a spider within Bennett's tales. It is an iteration which, as with the versions told on the plantations, affords numerous additional storytelling advantages. The spider physiology has a potential not only to enhance the theatre and humour but to provide a metaphor for adaptability.

In Bennett's stories many of the characters are not fantastical beasts but 'ordinary' animals and, at times, 'pests,' in a list which includes the dog, cat, lizard, snake, rat, cow, mosquito, wasp. Their significant 'animal' traits are also reflected in their characterisation, much in the way that the familiar 'tortoise and the hare' story reflects not only physiological features but behavioural characteristics of the animal. More relevant, however, is that each of these animals has distinctive, familiar qualities, many of which can be heightened by their specific sounds, including the mosquito and wasp.

Perhaps most significant is Bennett's emphasis on the spider's advantageous array of skills. This contrasts with the Anancy of both Jekyll and Beckwith's versions when Anancy's linguistic skill, cleverness and musical ability were more relevant to his success. For example, in Bennett's "Anancy an Lizard", Anancy goes to the palace of the King whose 'pretty daugtha' had a 'secret name' in the hope of discovering it and thereby 'winning' the daughter in marriage. Although this is a familiar plotline from the Jekyll and Beckwith versions of the tales, in Bennett's story the 'friends', Anancy and Lizard, go to the palace together, but the quick and agile Lizard cannot match Anancy's liveness and physiological quirks. Whereas when Lizard tries to crawl under the gate he is promptly chased away by a notional Guard, Anancy can 'sail over de wall like nutten happen.' Such impressive, magical, and acrobatic feats upon his trapeze-like web continue through the palace, until, hiding on the princess's

bedroom ceiling, Anancy is able to eavesdrop on the conversation, thereby discovering her name. There are numerous facets to the tale with Anancy's ability to conceal himself, which is reminiscent of the popular theme of disguise, proving advantageous alongside his awareness of the benefits of listening. As with many of the earlier tales, in Bennett's version, Anancy also obtains information through cleverness although, ultimately, it is his physical ability as a spider, and mastery of both the ground and air, that prove the most dominant aspect of this tale.

Bennett's exploitation of the spider symbol and physiology also draws on metaphysical signifiers, including the possibility that the spider can suggest dualities. As has already been discussed in this thesis, one of the theories about Anancy's peculiarities derived from an idea that he was in a state of transition. Charles Daniel Dance, European visitor to Guyana who, in his account of 1881, referenced the specific theory that Anancy was 'a spider from which man is thought to have been developed', further explaining that: 'the "Anansie" of the stories is the half-developed man from the spider, who in his transitional state combines the agility and craftiness of the insect with the intelligence of the man.'¹⁷¹ For Bennett, this 'half-developed' state acquired further significance within the political circumstances of the Caribbean, positioning Anancy as the notional adolescent, who was symbolically transitioning, a theme which was also prominent in her poem, 'Independance' when she wryly asserted that: 'Jamaica grow a beard.' Analogous to ideas of Jamaica and the wider Caribbean, however, Bennett's Anancy, metamorphic and adaptable, also

¹⁷¹ Charles Daniel Dance, *Chapters from a Guianese Log-Book*, extract reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, p. 133.

suggested ways to prosper, through the dual qualities of linguistic versatility and his audacious determination to be accepted on his own terms.

Anancy's Linguistic Verve

In the early tales, linguistic prowess was a principal feature of Anancy's raft of skills, and crucial to his effectiveness. His verbal dexterity and cleverness frequently allowed him to seize a degree of power despite the constraints of his circumstances. Bennett was, of course, aware that these skills were rooted in a Caribbean oral tradition, practices which, as was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, were noted by early European visitors to the plantations including James Anthony Froude, who, in his account of 1880 described 'two middle-aged dames[...]in a state of violent excitement.' Froude further wrote that the women were: 'natural orators, throwing their heads back, waving their arms, limbs and chest quivering with emotion.'¹⁷² Such invective when applied to oral practices was not confined to the dismissive accounts of early visitors to the plantations but was also a feature of the education system in the years leading up to independence in much of the Caribbean. Despite this, Bennett recognised and celebrated the value of these skills and her poem, 'Cuss Cuss'¹⁷³ depicts a 'tracing match' in which two Jamaican women are pitched against each other. With typical humour, Bennett acknowledges the creativity of their insults and, through her use of words, including 'booggooyagga' (which referred to being 'low-grade') she mocks this derision, instead celebrating these oral traditions through the musicality of lines which include: 'Fe me han noh jine chu ch an me naw/ Pay licenc fe me mout'. However, 'Cuss Cuss' not only represents a

¹⁷² James Anthony Froude in *The English in the West Indies*, reproduced in *After Africa*, ed. by Abrahams and Szwed, pp. 93-94.

¹⁷³ Louise Bennett, 'Cuss Cuss', *Jamaica Labrish*.

challenge to the narrow, uninformed perspectives that fail to recognise the linguistic skill of these artistic forms, but also provides a signal to some of the oral practices that emerge within the stories. Like Anancy, Bennett relied on spontaneity, enabling her to 'play' with words, adapting and adjusting them to incorporate additional meanings. The 'tracing' or 'competitive cursing' which was illustrated in 'Cuss Cuss' with its similarities to the African American 'playing the dozens' is also perceptible in the exchanges with the equally cerebral Monkey. In those tales, repetitive phrases enhance the rhythm, for example: 'plenty plenty' and 'nuff nuff' and, while these features are also evident in the tales which Jekyll recorded, Bennett goes further in her celebration of these traditions. In one of her longer tales, "Anancy an Monkey", she conspicuously draws on these verbal exchanges. Anancy and Monkey are evenly matched, a form of rivalry which is suggested by the liveliness of their interaction when Anancy struggles to outwit Monkey despite having successfully duped Goat, Sheep and Hog:

'Anancy hall out: "Bredda Monkey, yuh so foo-fool!"

Same time Monkey buss out a laugh, "ki ki ki ki!"

Bredda Nancy, yuh tink yuh can do me like weh yuh do Bredda Sheep an Bredda Goat an Bredda Hog?"

Ultimately and, perhaps more than many of the other tales, there is a sense of enjoyment within this dialogue, which is evident both in the admiration for, and concomitant laughter at, Anancy.

Reasserting the influence of Aso

A final, critical, and innovative, aspect of Louise Bennett's reinvention of Anancy relates to gender. Lloyd Brown, the Jamaican poet and academic proclaimed that 'no other West Indian writer has dealt at greater length with the West Indian woman. And in no other writer has the world of the Jamaican (and the West Indies as a whole) been presented almost exclusively through the eyes of women, especially the rural women and the poorer women of the city.'¹⁷⁴ In her poetry Bennett referenced both women's strength and courage. In 'Jamaican Oman', she argued that 'Jamaica Oman know she strong,'¹⁷⁵ and in other poems she celebrated the impact and courage of Nanny Maroon. Louise Bennett's later alias, Aunt Roachy, was both incisive and opinionated on matters which ranged from 'Jamaican philosophy' to the treatment of women and rent control, Aunt Roachy's innocuous, humorous, style both emphatic and appealing as she metes out her wisdom. In doing so, Bennett reasserts a matriarchal figure familiarised through characters who include Tanty in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, while conveying trenchant truths behind a veil of humour. On a superficial reading, it is therefore perplexing that Bennett's Anancy tales do not explicitly reference Anancy's wife's importance and intelligence, features conveyed in the Ashanti tales. When, in the pivotal tale in which Anansi seeks the stories of the world, he consults Aso, seeking her option and heeding her advice, it is in fact Aso who displays sense and intuition, formulating the ideas to ensure that they achieve the challenge, even though Anansi has the boldness and linguistic skills to execute it. In Jekyll and Beckwith's versions, while Anancy represents a possible amalgam of the qualities and strengths of both Anansi and

¹⁷⁴ Lloyd W. Brown, *West Indian Poetry* (Port of Spain: Heineman, 1984), p. 116.

¹⁷⁵ Louise Bennett, 'Jamaican Oman', *Jamaica Labrish*.

Aso, when she is explicitly referenced, she remains largely ineffectual. Anancy's 'wife' does feature in Bennett's tales, including when she tends to her 'sick' husband who attempts to trick her into feeding him the pig that she wishes to sell to buy more land. However, despite some tentative hints that she is both acquisitive and forward thinking, she remains somewhat anodyne within those stories. This suggests a paradox in Louise Bennett's work. Her own connection to Caribbean folklore was first established through the influence of female relatives, Bennett later recalling: 'my grandmother used to tell me stories every night. All the stories had songs and she would sing a song over and over again, until I knew it and fell asleep singing it to myself.'¹⁷⁶ Similarly, in "Anancy an Him Story" it is the women who pass on the folklore, laying an essential cultural and historical foundation. In "Anancy an Crab", Mada Cantinny is a 'wicked ole oman' but has autonomy and money, and in both "Nancy an Dora" and "Mussirolinkina" it is the women who hold any meaningful power within their families. It therefore seems incongruous that, in many of Louise Bennett's tales Anancy's wife is apparently absent, particularly against Bennett's robust assertion of the important role of Jamaican women.

Despite Aso's apparent evaporation within Bennett's stories, her poetry provides possible 'clues' not only to an important facet of her version of Anancy but to the surviving force of Aso. Many of Bennett's female characters exhibit distinctly Anancy-like tendencies and, through such traits, achieve power in a multitude of ways: the strong woman who rushes to protect her 'space' on the bus by 'spreading out', the incident which is acknowledged to have inspired her first creole poem, or the Anancy

¹⁷⁶ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. ix.

like tactics in 'Mi Bredda,'¹⁷⁷ when the domestic servant reverses the power dynamic against her dishonest employer. Perhaps the most persuasive clue to Bennett's particular perception of Anancy as something of an evolved product of the West African tales is that his 'wife' can be found in a raft of characteristics which seem to reference the features of both the Akan Anansi and Aso. Contrary to Anancy's reputation as a sexually voracious character, it is also relevant that, despite Anancy's apparent 'sexual bravado,' his preening and pursuit of potential conquests, these appear to be the culmination of a conceited, acquisitive nature, rather than any genuine interest. Instead, Anancy's more meaningful successes are frequently verbal, either through his ability to solve a riddle, discover a secret name, or manipulate someone through his understanding of character. Rather than exhibiting an overt masculine sexuality, therefore, in many of Bennett's stories Anancy displays a gender fluidity which is symbolically referenced, when he feigns the role of a female in order to trick Crab. Instead of any sexual prowess, it is in language that Anancy finds his power, both through his trademark intuitiveness and his ability to negotiate place, features aligned with 'de cunny Jamma Oman,' of Bennett's poetry. It is also interesting, although something of an 'aside' that in the first of his collections of Anancy stories, *Anancy's Score*, co-founder of the Caribbean Artists Movement, Andrew Salkey, created a story in which Anancy and his wife unite, combining to emerge as the gender fluid Anancy. Bennett later told Daryl Cumber Dance that Salkey 'credited' her with being the origin of certain of his stories. It is tempting to imagine that Salkey derived this particular aspect of his Anancy from Louise Bennett. In doing so, complex and ambivalent, Bennett has reclaimed a

¹⁷⁷ Bennett, 'Mi Bredda', *Jamaica Labrish*.

trickster who is more conspicuously able to advocate for both Caribbean men and women.

Reshaping the Themes and Features of the Tales

Did Anancy Meek it? Bennett's Use of Naming

While the tales of the Caribbean plantations were rarely overtly didactic, they still served an important function in recreating a sense of place within an alien world, the tales encompassing a variety of themes including why Tiger 'lived in the wood' or rat 'lives in a hole'.¹⁷⁸ In addition to this ability to 'order' the alien world was a preoccupation with names which emerges in many of those early stories, and is a specific feature of what I have highlighted as an aesthetic. Although Bennett reshaped and re-emphasised particular aspects of the stories into something of, what I have termed, a 'formula', in her versions of the stories there is still a marked focus on names with some stories hinged on an ability to ascertain the name of a character. Many of Bennett's stories are familiar from those contained in the early collections, particularly those recorded by both Beckwith and Jekyll, including the 'Riding Horse' tale in which Anancy humiliates the loud and rough Tiger, the familiar but now less conspicuous adversary within a contemporary setting. The 'Tar Baby' story also appears, reimagined as a farmer's punishment for theft, in a possible reference to Frederick Douglass's description of this practice in his autobiography.¹⁷⁹ However, two of the tales which are featured in *Anancy and Miss Lou* are more conceptual, including Bennett's opening story when Anancy desires that a story should be named after him. The final story of the collection, "Anancy an Common-Sense",

¹⁷⁸ Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story*, 'Annancy and Tiger' and 'Annancy Puss and Ratta'.

¹⁷⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p. 10.

bears notable similarities with “Anansi and his Pot of Wisdom”, which, featuring in Rattray’s collection, further roots Bennett’s tales within an African tradition. Bennett’s other tales draw on separate functions of the early tales of the plantations. For example, several provide simple explanations of the world. In her versions of the tales, although Bennett consciously extrapolates a range of themes and ideas from the stories of the Caribbean plantations, she goes further in shaping and redefining a world. Her tales explain how ‘wasp has no teeth’ or ‘why Spider is confined to the rafters’, superficially simple tales which contrast Anancy’s cleverness with his misdeeds. It is an ‘explanation’ of the world, which is notably nuanced. Ostensibly tales for children, in the vein of *Just So* stories, or *Aesop’s fables*, they were informed by the context in which Bennett was writing. No longer the ‘representative’ of the people within the urgent context of slavery, Bennett moulded Anancy to serve an aspirational role. In Bennett’s tales, he often emerges as an appealing rascal, his physical manifestation as a spider suggesting power and weakness, thereby positioning him as a relevant motif for the marginalised. Accordingly, in the tale “Anancy an Wasp”, Anancy is the facilitator, manipulating the events. Wasp’s ‘pride’ in his teeth, sets the challenge for Anancy, who taunts Wasp that his teeth are weak. Predicting Wasp’s reaction, Anancy influences him further, inviting him to take ‘a bite offa any part of [him] excep [his] head because of course dat too tough.’ Accepting the challenge, Wasp takes a bite out of Anancy’s ‘head’ which has been covered by an iron pot. Predictably, on biting the metal pot, Wasp’s teeth ‘splinter’ so that the wasp no longer has teeth. This story is typical of Louise Bennett’s stories in which Anancy ‘meck[s] it,’ that is, where Anancy himself is responsible for the significant event which results in a ‘characterisation’ or a quasi, ‘counter-evolution’ of the animal. Anancy’s clever trick is responsible for Wasp’s lack of teeth, but the

'wickedness' of his plan is mitigated by the fact that he has exposed a flaw. In this case, it is Wasp's vanity, with the story serving as a lesson against excessive pride or arrogance or, considered broadly, a lesson against the arrogance of Colonial power, with its demonstration of the potential to curtail its reach. However, Bennett's versions of the tales allow her to suggest further layers of meaning for the stories. For example, in Jekyll's story, the principal adversary was a snake whereas Bennett's choice of Wasp establishes a more evenly matched battle. Each is an accessible, ubiquitous animal, which, while relatively harmless, has potential to be perceived as a 'nuisance'.

Similarly nuanced, in "Anancy an Crab", the crab acquires his shell as part of the denouement to a story in which, again, Anancy is the puppeteer. In the tale, Anancy disguises himself as a 'girl', in which guise he flatters the crab who, delighting in the attention, reveals the name of the 'rich ole oman' who, with no children, Anancy covets as a potential benefactor. With echoes of many of the earlier tales, naming represents a central theme and Anancy's success in tricking the unsuspecting crab to disclose the name of the potential benefactor results in Crab's punishment when his patron throws a calabash on the back of his head, Crab thereafter carrying a shell on his back.

It is also notable that, in Bennett's tales, Anancy has become a more palatable, more defensible, hero. Many of the earlier stories' apparent harshness, including Anancy's occasionally ruthless conduct, have been muted. Anancy is no longer indiscriminating and, unlike the earlier tales of the plantations, when his desire for food could go some way towards justifying his 'greed', Anancy's 'victims' are rarely

family members. Anancy now also has 'friends' and, even though he sometimes deceives them, he primarily preys upon the flawed, for which any punishments are conceivably 'deserved'.

In her re-appropriation of what is a specifically Caribbean world, Bennett's choice of animals is also notable. In Jekyll and Beckwith's versions of the tales, many of the animals were recognisable from the Ashanti stories, or 'translated' into more accessible, well-known animals. However, while the traditional and familiar Monkey, and the rough and dim-witted dolt, Tiger, appear in Bennett's versions, the majority of her characters have been substituted by 'ordinary' animals: wasps, cows, goats, and rats and, while some of them featured in certain of the early tales, this menagerie of more commonplace creatures reinforces the familiarity of the Caribbean context. It is also significant that Louise Bennett's stories are further marked by a distinctly Caribbean setting so that, whereas in the earlier tales of the plantations, any references to 'hard times' frequently referred to hunger or a lack of food, common sources of preoccupation for slaves, in Bennett's versions the 'very hard time' typically follows a hurricane.

Perhaps most symbolic in this reclamation process is the opening tale of Bennett's collection "Anancy an Him Story" when Anancy bemoans the fact that: 'him nevah see himself' in the stories, a source of outrage which prompts him to 'put himself in a story book.' He succeeds, the tale concluding with the words: 'And every night wen de ole oman dem a put dem granpickney to bed, Anancy come an show up himself pon de wall or do ceiling so dat de ole oman dem can memba fi talk bout him...So dem tell dem pickney Anancy story, de pickney dem tell smaddy else, dat smaddy

else tell an tell.’ In this story, there is a sense of Anancy achieving something of an omnipresence, a power of endurance which ‘outlives’ him, permitting him to exert a power while remaining elusive. Her decision to position this story so prominently within the collection suggests that Bennett also wants it to say something about heritage. Against a background of a European education in which the taught literary and historical texts did not always reflect the Caribbean experience, Anancy’s complaints about his lack of representation both illuminate and seek to redress a lack of place within culture and literature. It focuses on belonging, representing an integral thread within Bennett’s stories. Anancy is no longer the ‘representative’ for the people, but has become a significant storytelling motif, or a device, through which to convey Caribbean culture and experience.

Music, Theatre, and the Magic of the Telling

Despite Bennett’s skills at conveying the stories in writing, perhaps the most faithful, authentic, versions of Louise Bennett’s storytelling exist in the many videos or recordings of her television shows which survive. While it is impossible to wholly replicate the experience of being part of Bennett’s audience, these visual records at least convey something of the effect of Bennett’s storytelling and its creation of a sense of unity. Staring, eyes wide and round, into the camera, her body and face close to the lens, Louise Bennett uses a conversational, accessible style. Bennett, like Anancy, who scurries around, facilitates balls, shapeshifts to pose as the doctor in caricature sequences, tells the story in a markedly physical way, moving her body and hands as she heaves her shoulders at particular moments in order to enhance a specific point. An essential part of the historic storytelling traditions of the Caribbean, Guyanese writer and educator Beryl Gilroy recalled the importance of such

movement to storytelling which she described as: 'a syncretism of voice, tone and gesture which gave birth to Creole language and made gesture a language in its own right...' As Gilroy further emphasised: 'West Indians are adept at giving voice to the face, the eyes [and] the mouth to communicate.'¹⁸⁰ Early in Bennett's career, as part of her role to recover and support folklore, she was required to visit remote villages where she immersed herself in its culture and language. Standing on a stage about to perform an Anancy tale or discuss a political point with her trademark mask of humour, there is a tangible, visceral sense of a recreated village scene.

Rex Nettleford asserted that Bennett: 'grasped the fact that she lived in an oral tradition where people talked and listened, cross-talked and reported and possess, almost to a fault, a high propensity for words.'¹⁸¹ It is this legacy of oral and physical storytelling that Bennett sought to recreate, features of a tradition that also emphasised a style of movement. Within the darkness, the storytelling circles offered imaginative, spiritual, spaces in the absence of freedom of physical movement, especially on the plantations. Any escape was achieved through the power of storytelling, which represented an amalgam of the physical, visual, and auditory. Bennett's performance reimagines the spaces in which the stories were told, inviting her audience into the circle, as she speaks with the 'free expression' of the people, a dialect which is 'unhampered by rules.'¹⁸² She *shares* tales that are familiar, in the language of her audience's childhoods as the stories embrace the

¹⁸⁰ Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind, Collected Writings*, ed. by Joan Anim-Addo (London: Mango Publishing, 1998), p. 180.

¹⁸¹ Rex Nettleford, Introduction to Louise Bennett's *Jamaica Labrish*, p. 11

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

practices of oral tradition and the spontaneous, interactive, nature of the tales with intrinsic elements of humour and music and their emphasis on the theatrical.

Perhaps most intertwined with ideas of an aesthetic within Bennett's tales, is music. Performing the tales permitted the incorporation of song or dance, sometimes spontaneously scattered within the story, emulating the storytelling sessions of the plantations in which sound was interspersed into the telling. Music emerges in various ways within her written versions of the stories. It often provides a notional backdrop to the telling, directly drawing upon the earlier tales. Anancy's skill with the fiddle proved critical to his ability to move in disparate social circles, which included facilitating balls. It was also crucial to his ability to conjure speech from a 'mute' child through his mesmerising playing of the violin. In Bennett's "Anancy an Ratta", Anancy is again the fiddler, arranging balls in order to execute his plan. As with many other of Bennett's tales, Anancy's 'trick' is not random or capricious but a device by which he seeks to curtail the excesses or perceived flaws of others. In this tale, Anancy devises a way of humbling the 'very facety an highfalutin fella' Rat, choosing to do so not through his reputed powers of cunning or linguistic virtuosity but specifically through music. Anancy's music compels Ratta to dance, Ratta ultimately falling onto the floor which Anancy has secretly made slippery, hoping to embarrass him. Achieving Anancy's desired effect, by prompting everyone to laugh, Ratta becomes so 'shame' that he runs towards a hole to hide, the conclusion to the story explaining its purpose as: 'till today Ratta live ina hole.'

In another of the tales, "Cockroach an Fowl", Anancy persuades Cockroach to let him act as his manager, relying upon the (amusing) argument that 'not a soul can tief

yuh but meself.’ Colourful and multi-sensory with the imagined music of the violin, the sounds of teeth splintering on a clay pot, the slither or hiss of snakes or fizzle of fire, each of the aural and visual details are keenly observed and retold by Bennett. In her written versions of the tales, she conveys the sense not only of the theatre but that they have been uniquely shaped and enhanced by an amalgam of her multifarious skills, an impressive repertoire encompassing music, dance, and folklore.

Shapeshifting and the ‘Magic’ of Costume

Reminiscent of her mother’s dressmaking parlour in which costume had a potential to transform, in Bennett’s version of the tales, costume, or disguise, offer a functional, visually stimulating device. In Louise Bennett’s work, a more overtly ‘human’ Anancy attains his skill through linguistic verve and intuitiveness. Bennett’s flair for costume and theatre prompted her to mould the stories further, enhancing them with colour to which her broad experience of theatre added a further resonance. At times, within Bennett’s stories, there are discernible echoes of the Shakespearean roles which Bennett played to acclaim and, later, when she reasserted pantomime for a Caribbean audience. These forms of theatre are notable in their use of costume as a prop through which to explore ideas of gender and identity with pantomime’s customs dictating that the ‘Prince’ is frequently played by a woman and the ‘dames’ by men. In Bennett’s stories costume offers her characters the fluidity to switch genders, classes, and roles. In “Anancy an Smoke-pork”, which has a very similar plot to Martha Warren Beckwith’s version of “Dry-Head and Anansi”, Anancy pretends to be ill in the hope of persuading his wife to let him eat the ‘big fattened pig’. In Beckwith’s version of the tales, Anancy’s wife wanted to sell

the pig to use the funds to buy a piece of land but Anancy, via a series of comic sequences, 'shapeshifts' into the guise of doctor in an effort to persuade Anancy's wife that she should give him the meat from the pig as a form of 'cure' for his spurious malaise. In Bennett's version, Anancy's disguise as a doctor is affected through costume and his subsequent 'diagnosis' of Anancy's possible condition is described through a humorous play on words, 'hogcravenlitis.' Similarly, in "Mussirolinkina", Anancy's cunning plan, which has already allowed him to deduce the name of the girl through covert eavesdropping, is only achieved through his resourceful use of disguise. Anancy borrows a selection of clothes and a violin, or fiddle, in which guise he serenades the girl in an attempt to 'win' her as his wife. Within Bennett's *Anancy and Miss Lou* themes of disguise and costume are used to greatest effect, however, in the tale, "Pig an' Long Mout", when the costume changes significantly feed into the humour. In that tale, Anancy dons various costumes, which include disguising himself as 'a poor ragged ole man' and a 'poor tea-up ole lady'. Anancy's unlikely 'disguises' become increasingly ridiculous and ambitious through the series of costume changes which culminate in him posing as a 'half-starvin pickney' in order to acquire food. While it is an absurd display of the ambition of his attempts, in Bennett's humorous and vivid retelling, it inevitably induces sneaking admiration both for the creativity of Anancy's plan and its ultimate success.

Humour

In all the versions of the tales, humour is frequently intertwined with both theatre and the physicality of the spider. Although it is difficult to distil the precise source of Bennett's humour, it is significant that, as an authorial Anancy, it is Bennett who frequently provides the laughter. Watching her perform, she relies upon a

combination of devices to induce her audience to laugh. A video of one of Bennett's performances for a studio audience shows her discussing the Jamaican dialect. After a few minutes the entirety of the audience is laughing. It is difficult to define the precise reason behind this, or to identify the nature and source of the humour. However, while the subject matter seems to offer little by way of immediate comedy, any humour seems to arise from the sense of sharing and the presumption that everyone comprehends the source of the 'joke'.

In Bennett's work humour is frequently inextricably bound with theatre, with Anancy's attempts to disguise himself, as is evident in "Pig an' Long Mout", emerging in caricaturist episodes of the two-dimensional character. Anancy's cunning and forms of disguise add to the comedic value of the sketches and there is an essential 'nonsense' which both reinforces and dilutes such scenes. These are 'scrapes' which are not intended to be taken seriously yet carry an underlying significance, the circles and layers of meaning providing an echo of the earlier tales. In "Pig an' Long Mout" the visual effect of his rapid clothes changes is amusing, particularly as the profits of his deception, in the form of his store of food, are seized by the Fire Dragon which almost immediately, bring about his comeuppance. The absurdity which is frequently inherent in Anancy's character and in the repetition of his mistakes, appears within a cycle of misdeeds and Anancy's typical success in achieving the objective of his increasingly far-fetched plans, represents an essential facet of the humour. It also illuminates something of his appeal, in its evidence of Anancy's audaciousness. Although Anancy is dishonest, there is something amusing in the changes, affected apparently easily and with no sense of the moral outrage which his disguises as both 'a blind man' and a 'sore-foot bwoy' would habitually attract.

Despite the epithet that Louise Bennett self-consciously applies, her Anancy is rarely 'magic'. However, it can explain away features of his behaviour, distancing it from what is expected to be 'morally acceptable' and affording Bennett greater freedom in her storytelling. It also permits Bennett to veil the often-satirical messages or trenchant truths about people or political abuses, with laughter, a skill and design that goes to the centre of the stories. Louise Bennett told Dennis Scott that she had: 'found a medium in which she could pretend to be laughing.'¹⁸³ Observing interviews with Louise Bennett, what is notable is the frequency with which she laughs. At those moments, Louise Bennett opens her mouth and eyes wide, her laugh loud and resonant. However, beneath such physical displays, at times, it is possible to discern what might be a hint of something else within Bennett's eyes, and a reminder that the laughter is so often the obverse of sadness.

Creating a Legacy

It is interesting, but perhaps surprising, that in some of the biographical detail about Louise Bennett she is described as 'shy', with the outrageous Anancy, bold and at times intrusive, suggesting an alter ego for Louise Bennett in which she could act as ventriloquist and puppeteer. Through Anancy, Bennett found a successor for the political purpose that she explored in her poems and monologues in which she derided features of colonialism, inequality, and racism. However, it was through her ability to cultivate and re-popularise Anancy and the stories, and, further, to do so in writing, that she both consolidated the tales and created a meaningful legacy. While Jekyll and Beckwith had previously attempted to convey the performance and sound

¹⁸³ Mervyn Morris, *Miss Lou*, Introduction, Paragraph 5, n.p.

to the page, through their endeavours to accurately encapsulate the multifaceted, multisensory nature of the earlier stories, Bennett created something of a formula. In part, she did so through her use of sound, movement, and humour. However, she also positioned the fluid, rogue Anancy, who symbolically represented a fusion of Anansi and Aso, at the centre of every story, suggesting a thread which connected the Caribbean to West Africa.

When discussing Bennett, the poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, asserted that: 'apart from Marcus Garvey, [he could] not think of any other Jamaican who has had a greater impact on the shaping of the nation's identity.'¹⁸⁴ Perhaps the greatest testament to Bennett's influence, however, can be found in the sense of heritage that she instilled. Academic, Ifeoma Nwankwo said: 'I always consciously or unconsciously packed my suitcase with cultural anchors, memories, and data in order to prevent cultural vertigo. Miss Lou and the songs, poems, which led me and so many others to memorise, functioned for me as gravity – as a grounding force.'¹⁸⁵ Through Bennett's role in reasserting and repopularising the Anancy stories, Bennett redefined a particular language, bolstering a uniquely Caribbean aesthetic. It reinforced a foundation for a style of literature and language with its roots in the tales. In this, Anancy's 'ropes' not only suggested a form of continuity but a web of stories, intricate and interwoven and a loose, but surviving, tethering to place.

¹⁸⁴ L. K. Johnson, *Louise Bennett, Voice of a People, Wasafiri*, Vol. 22(1) (2007), 70-71.

¹⁸⁵ Ifeoma Nwankwo, 'Introduction: (Ap)Praising Louise Bennett: Jamaica, Panama and Beyond', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, (2009), 17.

Chapter 3: Defining Voice and the Significance of Anancy in the Development of a Caribbean Aesthetic

*'For I am a direct descendant of slaves (the Calibans) too near to the actual enterprise to believe its echoes are over with the reign of emancipation. Moreover, I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshiping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy in language.'*¹⁸⁶

(George Lamming)

Meeting in London in the 1960s, the Caribbean Artists Movement sought to define and consolidate a Caribbean 'voice'. This chapter considers how Anancy and the Tales, a rich resource of folklore capable of unifying the diverse and disparate regions of the Caribbean, emerged as critical to that aesthetic. The Caribbean Artists Movement consciously built upon a literary foundation which included the reinvented tales of Louise Bennett and Samuel Selvon's esoteric narrative voice. However, as a device, the malleable, fluid Anancy could be further cultivated to reflect the specific circumstances in which CAM originated. In the work of many prominent writers, including Andrew Salkey, Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris, Anancy was reasserted as a transitional, potentially revolutionary, figure. His protean capacity to repeatedly reinvent himself into something both creative and life-sustaining, offered a degree of solidarity and inspiration for those of the diaspora who similarly sought a sense of place. Perhaps most significant, Anancy was also asserted to suggest new ways to represent self by embracing the plurality that had informed and enhanced Caribbean experience.

¹⁸⁶ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 15.

Crossing over to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s were a panoply of artists and writers who, like Bennett, were driven by the educational and literary opportunities which Britain seemed to offer. The success of a plethora of 'Windrush Generation' writers, who included Sam Selvon, George Lamming and V. S. Naipaul, undoubtedly spurred such aspirations. However, what greeted many was in stark contrast with their expectations. After an education in which they were inculcated with false notions of the superiority of Britain's education, literature, and language, many were disappointed by the lack of meaningful welcome from an imagined 'mother country'. In addition to the frequent hostilities, which were often compounded by widespread ignorance about their homelands, was the realisation that, after a period of some success for Caribbean writers, the prospects for a sustainable literary career appeared to be declining.

The founding members of the Caribbean Artists Movement: Barbadian, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Trinidadian, John La Rose, and Andrew Salkey, who spent much of his childhood in Jamaica, were motivated by ideas of creative collaboration and exchange with other writers of the Caribbean. It was this potential, which had earlier buoyed Louise Bennett, ultimately helping to sharpen her creative voice, that Brathwaite in particular identified as essential to any revitalisation of Caribbean literature. For Brathwaite, the apparent decline in interest could be attributed, at least in part, to the 'scattered' nature of many of the writers and, for him, one of the driving factors for the Movement was its opportunity to promote a sense of cohesion. However, the declared objectives of what became commonly known as CAM were manifold. Prominent amongst them, was the determination to facilitate debate and

analysis, in an attempt to define a Caribbean 'voice'. The sense of urgency which drove this focus on aesthetics derived partly from the realities of Independence. By the mid-1960s, this included Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados, prompting many to question their identity without Europe and its perceived cultural superiority. It was a process which Louise Bennett had already begun, most prominently through her reinvention and reassertion of Anancy and his tales, a foundation upon which the members of CAM consciously constructed their ideas of an aesthetic.

The unique circumstances of CAM, together with the nature and breadth of diversity of its members, both in terms of cultural perspective and artistic talent, provoked a creative collision of ideas. The energy and commitment that accompanied and sustained such discussions served as a catalyst, with the fundamentals of an 'aesthetic' swiftly distilled from the myriad cultural and artistic practices that were shared by significant swathes of Anglophone Caribbean. Within this unique set of conditions, Anancy emerged as a potent archetype, his footprints detectable within much of the creative output that followed the embryonic stages of CAM. The influence of Louise Bennett, particularly in her use of language, is conspicuous within much of that writing, but Anancy was also utilised to say something trenchant not only about the Caribbean but a specific migrant experience. For the many displaced and often beleaguered writers and artists who were based in the energetic, but at times hostile, London of the 1960s an Anancy capable of straddling worlds offered inspiration as a diasporic figure.

Foundations for an Aesthetic: The Legacy of George Lamming and Samuel Selvon

Despite the breadth of skills of the writers and artists who were instrumental in the founding and development of CAM, its declared objectives meant that much of its focus amounted to a process of consolidation in its attempt to gather and channel the many threads of artistic and cultural production in pursuit of a 'voice'. In a letter to Brathwaite in 1967, discussing the potential focus for the movement, Gordon Rohlehr suggested Louise Bennett as 'key to ideas of aesthetic.'¹⁸⁷ Bennett's insistence upon using what was historically a fundamentally oral language in her art proved a source of both inspiration and example, but CAM sought to build and define a new 'language' and perspective. Inevitably, it was substantially shaped by its London context and the opportunity to exchange ideas not only with writers of the Caribbean but with those from other parts of the Commonwealth. In a letter to Kenneth Ramchand, during what were still the formative stages of CAM in 1966, Brathwaite set out the proposed framework for the movement as: 'not only to talk among ourselves and about ourselves; although this clearly has its place; but also to set up a body which can meet and converse with British, C'wealth and other writers and artists, esp[ecially] African and French and Sp West Indians, and of course Indians where possible.' Brathwaite continues: 'I don't need to stress to you the importance of this kind of exchange. At the moment, it seems to me, that the West Indian is rather being left out of things and since most of our writers, and some painters, have made their homes here; this isn't really as it should be.'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Gordon Roehler to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, dated 12th January 1967, George Padmore Institute, The Caribbean Artists Movement Collection.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Edward Kamau Brathwaite to Kenneth Ramchand, dated 28th December 1966, held at the George Padmore Institute Archives: The Caribbean Artists Movement Collection.

The fact of being in London created a specific foundation for future generations, but it also represented part of a chain of influence, which was informed by the raft of writers who preceded them, laying some of its metaphorical groundwork. As with so much of Anancy's 'path', any attempt to 'track' his influence or the process of his reinvention, is not neatly chronological. Instead, and fittingly, it resembles more of a web, of interconnecting, criss-crossing paths of influence. Most significant for CAM, however, appear to be those writers who left the Caribbean for Britain in the 1950s and who, in a variety of ways, both in literature and in education, served as something of pioneers. This was a group which included George Lamming, CAM founding member Andrew Salkey, Beryl Gilroy, whose profound impact, particularly within an educational sphere, I discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters, and Samuel Selvon.

Born in 1927 and, perhaps fortuitously, travelling on the same boat as Selvon, George Lamming, left Barbados for Britain in 1950. Although, Lamming initially had to rely upon earnings from the mundane and, at times demeaning, factory work, he achieved some success in 1951 at the BBC Colonial Service and BBC's Caribbean Voices radio series. Lamming's first book, *In the Castle of My Skin* was published in London in 1953 winning the Somerset Maugham award, his second novel in which Lamming explores the migrant's predicament, *The Emigrants*, was published the following year. The exchanges between Lamming and Selvon during the long journey to Britain were creatively productive. In Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, he discusses something of the beginnings of what proved to be a long friendship with Selvon,¹⁸⁹ but his perspective was further consolidated by his experiences with

¹⁸⁹ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, pp. 211-225.

Caribbean Voices. Lamming credited the opportunity to collaborate and exchange ideas with so many other Caribbean writers, who included Andrew Salkey, as critical to a process of self-discovery, later writing: 'No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as West Indian until he encounters another islander in a foreign territory. It was only when the Barbadian childhood corresponded with the Grenadian or the Guianese childhood in important details of folklore that the wider identification was arrived at. In this sense, most West Indians of [his] generation were born in England.'¹⁹⁰ George Lamming's reputation was such that he exerted a powerful, and, at times, intimidating, influence on other writers from the Caribbean. Discussing the effect of Lamming's work on CAM founding member, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, the academic, Louis James, who was friends with Brathwaite at UWI at Mona, and was himself an important member of CAM, later wrote: '[Brathwaite's] contemporaries included Thom Gunn, Peter Redgrove and Ted Hughes, with whom he remembers spending his last day in Cambridge. But in 1953 he read *In the Castle of My Skin* by his fellow Barbadian George Lamming, whom he also met when Lamming visited Cambridge friends. Brathwaite wrote later that he felt: "everything was transformed. Here breathing to me from every pore of line and page, was the Barbados I had lived. The words, the rhythms, the cadences, the scenes, the people, their predicament. They all came back."¹⁹¹ Lamming's reputation was also sufficiently prepossessing that Linton Kwesi Johnson later recalled his own sense of unease at an early reading of his poetry: 'In the front row was George Lamming whose face was set in a kind of

¹⁹⁰ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 214.

¹⁹¹ Louis James: The Caribbean Artists Movement, citing Edward Brathwaite, 'Timehri', *Savacou*, 2 (1970), in Bill Schwartz, ed., *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 37.

grimace...I [asked] Andrew [Salkey] about it and he said not to worry about it, that he was “just concentrating”.¹⁹²

Compared to the magnitude of Lamming’s success, fellow writer and traveller, Samuel Selvon’s, achievements were less immediate or pronounced, but the book he was writing on the ship, when Lamming and Selvon reputedly ‘fought’ over a typewriter,¹⁹³ *A Brighter Sun*, was published to ‘much acclaim’ in 1952¹⁹⁴ and his ground-breaking *The Lonely Londoners* has been described by Caryl Phillips as: ‘the quintessential novel about migration.’ Selvon’s experimentation with language and place, utilising the sounds and music of his childhood, resulted in the creation of a unique ‘voice’ in the narrative of *The Lonely Londoners*, an ‘approximation’ of a Caribbean dialect, which, as Susheila Nasta describes was ‘partially driven by the influence of Trinidadian calypso.’¹⁹⁵ It was a process of defining individual ‘voice’ that Louise Bennett had also explored, ultimately finding a medium in dialect but which, for Selvon, experimenting with the longer forms of writing, there was little precedent. Selvon initially attempted to write in ‘standard English’, ultimately determining that the language: ‘was not sufficiently pliable and could not convey his feelings, the moods and the - as yet - ‘inarticulated’ desires of his characters.’¹⁹⁶ Selvon describes his restyled language as: ‘the kind of dialect as it is spoken in Trinidad which is really a jumbling up of – it’s a grammatical jumbling up, rather than very much of the words that come from other languages like African tribal languages.’¹⁹⁷ In Selvon’s work, hybridity and plurality are critical, not only to language but to a style

¹⁹² British Library Online Event: ‘Keep On Keeping On, A Celebration of Andrew Salkey’, 8th December 2021.

¹⁹³ Susheila Nasta, Introduction, in Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. x.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹⁹⁵ Nasta, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. vi.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams* p. 255.

of narrative, the uniqueness of which derives not only from its 'jumbled up' nature but from an emphasis on dialogue. It was a perspective that was shaped by his Trinidadian background which he described as: 'much more mixed than[...]in any of the other islands.'¹⁹⁸ Ultimately Selvon's celebration of both oral tradition and dialect, demonstrated a linguistic command that prompted Lamming to describe Selvon as: 'the greatest and therefore most important folk poet the British Caribbean has yet produced.'¹⁹⁹

At times sombre and unsettling, in *The Lonely Londoners* Selvon recounts the experiences and challenges not only to survive, but to thrive, as a colonial migrant in London in the 1950s. Although disappointment and disillusionment represent recurring themes, the text is also peppered with moments which reflect a celebration of life, epitomised by the summer months in the London parks that wielded an intoxicating power over many of the characters. Alongside such moments of vitality, some relief from the misery is also provided through humour, which Selvon threads through the narrative.

For Selvon, who fled Trinidad because of its 'parochialism', Britain presented an opportunity for a larger stage for his work. However, while Selvon, along with many others from the Caribbean, was familiar with Britain's culture and literary traditions, his own background and individual experience were less well-known to the Britons he met. So often grouped by the media at the time as 'Jamaicans', a form of ignorance informed many of the exchanges. Selvon reflects this insularity in the

¹⁹⁸ Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams*, p. 259.

¹⁹⁹ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 224.

experiences of his principal character, Moses, who rails at the evident lack of knowledge of the Caribbean within Britain of the many who: 'don't know a damn thing about Jamaica – Moses come from Trinidad which is a thousand miles from Jamaica.'²⁰⁰

Selvon's writing does not merely reflect features of an oral tradition. *The Lonely Londoners* frequently reveals a more specific influence of folklore, and particularly Anancy, despite his apparent absence from its narrative. As a 'folk' poet who was profoundly interested in ideas of Caribbean unity as well as the potential creative force that the region's hybridity offered, it is perhaps unsurprising that features of an Anancy aesthetic emerge within his work. Although some of Selvon's themes undoubtedly stem from a broader oral tradition, most obviously Selvon's use of a rhythmic, lyrical spoken language, others point to a more specific, focused, interest in the Anancy tales. One facet of this is naming, which was capable of engendering a sense of rootedness. A prominent theme of the early tales, which was also asserted within Louise Bennett's work, one of its potential purposes was as a means to appropriate and name the world. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon's principal characters have distinct, symbolic names, including Moses, and the nicknamed, Sir Galahad. The respective Old Testament and knight of the King Arthur legends are set in opposition, creating conflicting traditions of myth and religion which are reinforced by their contrasting approaches to the challenges of life in London. If Moses is astute and wise, Galahad forges ahead, at times recklessly and naively but with a determination reminiscent of Anancy.

²⁰⁰ Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 7.

Certain other members of Selvon's cast are also defined by their characteristics, including 'Big City', who was nicknamed in the army when he was 'always talking about the big cities of the world,' while insisting that he needed to go to 'New York and London and Paris, that is big life.'²⁰¹ James Procter contends that, in *The Lonely Londoners*, names 'offer a communal semantics for Selvon's West Indians, a collective code that allows new forms of spatial reference to develop'.²⁰² It is a practice which not only encompasses people but places, including Notting Hill and Bayswater, respectively renamed as 'the Gate', and 'The Water', which, as Procter describes, offer a means to 'domesticate' the cityscape and 'render it familiar'.²⁰³ It also constitutes part of a symbolic process which centralised the role of names within the Anancy Tales, including the need to appropriate and rename often hostile, spaces, in an attempt to create a sense of agency. Whether Selvon consciously drew on the Anancy Tales is difficult to be certain, but Selvon's enthusiasm for the tales is suggested, albeit much later, by the fact that he wrote a BBC play about Anansi in 1973.

In addition to his use of themes a significant part of any 'Anancy aesthetic' relates to the specific characteristics of Anancy himself. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Galahad is perhaps the most conspicuously reminiscent of the malleable, brazen trickster in his enthusiasm and determination to prosper in a new environment despite, at times, failing, in part through his naivety. However, it is perhaps Tanty who proves most successful in exploiting some of Anancy's potential when she forcefully tries to re-

²⁰¹ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 83.

²⁰² James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 54.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

establish Caribbean traditions within London, her self-confidence enabling her to define and consolidate a sense of space. Tanty draws on a familiar archetype as the audacious, matriarchal figure, who was evoked so popularly in the loquacious and opinionated Aunt Roachy of Louise Bennett's monologues. However, Selvon's characterisation of Tanty seems specifically connected with Anancy. Tanty succeeds in finding a sense of place within London through her determination to do things on her own terms. She persuades a shopkeeper to give her credit, despite a strict policy against this practice, declaring that 'where I come from you take what you want, and you pay every Friday.' Despite his initial protestations that he 'doesn't do business like that,' Tanty eventually persuades the shopkeeper to agree, also acceding to her insistence that they 'better put [some bread] in a paper bag,' because that is what she is used to.²⁰⁴ Typically conveyed with humour, Tanty is also reminiscent of Bennett's encounter on the tram when the countrywomen 'spread themselves out' to appropriate space and, by extension, some form of place, with Tanty's physical presence providing a counterbalance for her limited power. Part of the humour inherent in the characterisation of Tanty stems from this physicality. She insists that she dances with an embarrassed Harris, 'swing[ing] him on the floor, pushing up she fat self against him.'²⁰⁵ Such humour at times masks the impressiveness and strength of her character and, in particular, the repeated assertion of her rights, a feature which at times seems specifically rooted in the influence of Anancy and the tales. It is a theme which is pervasive within the novel which, devastating in places, is also interspersed with humour, so that laughter and ridicule are frequently

²⁰⁴ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 66.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

presented as a response to chaos and difficulty: ‘When all this confusion happening Moses was killing himself with laugh.’²⁰⁶

The numerous letters from Samuel Selvon which are contained within the Andrew Salkey archive underline a personal tendency to utilise humour as a means to navigate problems. They also reveal the extent to which Selvon’s own voice emerges within his novel. The light, comedic tone, and affection of his many letters to Salkey echo the language of many of his characters. In one letter, Selvon writes: ‘Boy I missing London.’²⁰⁷ Despite its challenges, leaving London also created a chasm, through an absence of its community of writers and artists. From his letters it is clear that Selvon perceived his communication with his friends and colleagues as a lifeline, especially after he emigrated to Canada, such that he comments in 1981 that a postal strike left him in ‘isolation for 33 days’.²⁰⁸

Selvon’s prowess with ‘voice’ made him an obvious source of inspiration for CAM. On the fringes of the movement, his influence was both acknowledged and coveted. In the CAM archives at the George Padmore Institute is a letter, dated 6 March 1967, in which Brathwaite writes to Gordon Rohlehr to convey his hopes that their forthcoming meeting should be ‘followed by something by Selvon himself.’²⁰⁹ His use of dialogue and the themes within his novels owed much to the folk stories; the fact that he succeeded in creating a new form of language which represented a

²⁰⁶ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 12.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Selvon to Andrew Salkey dated 31st January 1979, retained in Andrew Salkey’s Archive at The British Library. (With thanks to the Estate of Sam Selvon).

²⁰⁸ Letter from Selvon to Salkey dated 16th August 1981, at the British Library.

²⁰⁹ Letter from Edward Kamau Brathwaite to Gordon Rohlehr, dated 6th March 1967, in George Padmore Institute Archives, The Caribbean Artists Movement Collection.

consolidation of a spoken, oral style, was another example of the possibilities for writing and the uniqueness of the Caribbean voice.

Founding a movement: Defining the language of the Caribbean

The artists and writers who contributed to the Caribbean Artists Movement were an overtly disparate group. Orlando Patterson was primarily a sociologist, Aubrey Williams a painter and, even amongst the founding members, Kamau Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey, little pointed to an obvious common experience. La Rose's childhood in Trinidad had afforded him a comprehensive education in both society and culture. He had a background in politics and a breadth of knowledge, which seems to have made an impression on many, including friend and mentee, Linton Kwesi Johnson, who described him as: 'a man of great erudition whose generosity of spirit and clarity of vision and sincerity inspired people like [him].'²¹⁰ Such 'erudition' encompassed Spanish and French literature, Amerindian folklore and tradition, and a compendious knowledge of music. 'The most remarkable human being [Linton Kwesi Johnson] had ever known,'²¹¹ La Rose was also intensely politically motivated, having joined a Marxist study group, and was later active in the trade union movement.²¹² Prior to the formation of CAM, John La Rose had already founded New Beacon Books with his partner, Sarah White, with the specific intention of publishing undervalued and overlooked work particularly from the Caribbean, an achievement which is still evidenced, despite some recent commercial setbacks in the wake of the Covid Pandemic, in the elegant, multi-purpose space of the

²¹⁰ The Guardian, 4th March 2006.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 37.

bookshop in Stroud Green in North London. Edward Kamau Brathwaite had grown up in Barbados, travelling to Britain where he studied at the University of Cambridge, achieving a history degree followed by a teaching qualification in the 1950s.

Brathwaite subsequently spent several years teaching in West Africa, and was appointed to the educational service of Ghana, 'the place where [he] should have gone all along.'²¹³

It was John La Rose who is credited with first suggesting an intellectual or artistic movement, an idea which he initially posited to Wilson Harris. However, it was his meeting with the poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, with whom he discovered a shared vision, that ultimately led to the formation of The Caribbean Artists Movement. For Brathwaite, it signified the culmination of an idea which had been fermenting for several years. Louis James recalls Brathwaite researching Jamaican popular culture in the early to mid-1960s at UWI at Mona, which James described as: 'the seed ideas of what was to become CAM[...]germinating in Brathwaite's activities[...]in the previous decade.'²¹⁴

The third founding member was Andrew Salkey. Born in Panama, he grew up in Jamaica but had established a significant reputation in Britain by the mid-1960s. Salkey was recruited as a potential asset primarily because he was perceived as: 'the key person for West Indian intellectuals in London, as a published novelist, poet and anthologist, through his work at the BBC and because of his personality.'²¹⁵

Living and working in Britain since the early 1950s, and a prominent figure on BBC's

²¹³ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 39.

²¹⁴ Louis James, 'The Caribbean Artists Movement', citing Edward Brathwaite, 'Timehri', *Savacou*, 2 (1970), in Bill Schwartz, ed., *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 37.

²¹⁵ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 42.

Caribbean Voices, Salkey had made an impression on the British literary scene with an established network of contacts, experience and characteristics. He not only regularly contributed to *Caribbean Voices*, but also worked for the *Pacific Service*, the *African Service* and for what became the *World Service* and was deemed to be 'highly productive as a writer and editor' with a prolific and broad-based body of produced work.²¹⁶ Salkey's influence was such that he was responsible for introducing V. S. Naipaul to his publisher Andre Deutsch,²¹⁷ but the profound effect he had upon the many writers, activists and artists with whom he was acquainted was not limited to literary aspirations. At a British Library event to celebrate Andrew Salkey's work in 2021, the publisher Eric Huntley, described how Salkey was 'very liberal [and] open', his warmth and the efforts he was willing to make for people extending to Huntley's recollection that: '[Salkey] would have gone to the station where migrants were coming in and helped people.'²¹⁸ Huntley further revealed that Salkey had found a job for him at the BBC, which he cited as an example of the immense generosity of the man that he described as 'really exceptional'. Such testimonies are similarly bolstered by the numerous letters held in his catalogued, but undigitized, archive at the British Library in which his many friends seek his assistance, 'favours' which are often substantial, but which he almost invariably provides. In one letter Samuel Selvon gratefully describes an occasion when he appeared at Salkey's door to seek a favour. Salkey who was then in bed, ill, nevertheless struggled to find him the three names and addresses he sought, his

²¹⁶ Biographical details found in Anne Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement* p. 43.

²¹⁷ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement* p. 43.

²¹⁸ British Library Online Event: 'Keep On Keeping On, A Celebration of Andrew Salkey', 8th December 2021.

insistence on hospitality extending to the fact that he also ensured that Selvon was given a cup of tea while he sat on the end of his bed.²¹⁹

Despite a divergence in experience and background, Brathwaite, La Rose, and Salkey shared certain similarities which may have helped to create the evident symbiosis between the three: all were born between 1927 and 1930; all three had an interest in politics, music and folklore and they all shared a profound respect for each others' work. Anne Walmsley recounts how Brathwaite wished to meet La Rose because he admired his poetry and that Salkey 'regarded John La Rose as his political friend [having] heard about La Rose first as a young activist in Trinidad.' As such, they complemented each other in numerous creatively productive ways, their skills and political purpose intersecting and stimulating what became a shared vision.

The writers and artists who first attended meetings in Kamau Brathwaite's King's Cross flat included Brathwaite's wife, Doris. Anne Walmsley credits her with being: 'central and supreme', within the movement, further asserting that: 'no other woman had a significance in CAM which was similar in any way.' Walmsley proceeds to quantify that influence as extending to: 'how she carried out CAM work, and what she herself was. She had her own strong ideas about the creative function of CAM, her own firm belief in what CAM could achieve – evident in her radiant face at the First Conference, her frequent interventions in discussions in the Second.'²²⁰ Sarah White, Nerys Patterson and Pat Salkey are also credited with being crucial contributors. A lack of artistic recognition may have precluded many other women

²¹⁹ Letter from Samuel Selvon to Andrew Salkey on 13th February 1974, Andrew Salkey Archive at The British Library.

²²⁰ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 307-8.

from any meaningful participation in CAM. Una Marson, Pearl Connor, and Claudia Jones, amongst many others, were innovators in a variety of fields, but many female writers had been stymied by the 'double jeopardy'²²¹ which Sandra Courtman describes as frustrating the literary career of the pioneering Beryl Gilroy, who became one of the first black headteachers of a school in London in 1969, only a few years after the formation of CAM. It is not clear why Beryl Gilroy was not a member of CAM. She was well acquainted with Andrew Salkey who supported her work and, in his review of *Black Teacher*, describes her as: 'both an exemplary person and an exemplary teacher.'²²² Her absence might have been for other, personal, reasons or the demands of family or working life. In any event, at that time Beryl Gilroy had already written a (then unpublished) number of books. She was also extremely insightful with a keen awareness of the significance of folklore both to Caribbean culture and its connection with identity. Her absence from CAM undoubtedly diminished debate and the fact that her literary work was overlooked for some years deprived the canon of Caribbean literature of a valuable insight into the immigrant experience from a woman's perspective.

One of the principal early objectives of the Caribbean Artists Movement was to promote cohesion. Despite the relatively humble early meetings, the minutes are comprehensive, perhaps in anticipation of the significance of the Movement or in a desire to preserve, which was a preoccupation of many of the key early members. CAM's impact was felt early on in any event, prompting John La Rose to write to Brathwaite in September 1967 with a sense of its momentousness as he recalled:

²²¹ Sandra Courtman, 'Discovering Literature: 20th Century: In Praise of Love and Children: Beryl Gilroy's arrival story', [In Praise of Love and Children: Beryl Gilroy's arrival story | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](#), Published 4th October 2018.

²²² *New Society*, 5th August 1976.

'the day when [they] met in [Brathwaite's] drawing room[...]Sarah, Doris, [Brathwaite] and [La Rose], and [Brathwaite] broached the subject about the kind of organisation which has now become CAM...' ²²³ Prominent within the letters at the George Padmore Institute, is the determination with which Brathwaite sought to mobilise what would later be recognised as a significant Movement. At times, it demonstrates the extraordinary effort made to engage individuals of note, including publishers. The ambitions were such that CAM meetings and, later, conferences, were occasions on which many influential and prominent writers, including C.L.R. James, spoke. They served as a catalyst and source of creativity for both the members and other burgeoning writers yet also promoted forms of artistic collaboration which were not confined to those from the Caribbean but from the wider commonwealth. Early on in the Movement's history, Kamau Brathwaite had written to Bryan King to reassert his earlier vision of the potential of CAM: 'The more I stay in England, the more it seems to me that our writers and artists are missing a wonderful opportunity to communicate with themselves and with British and Commonwealth artists around them. What I'd like to start going (and it has no doubt been attempted before) is some sort of West Indian artists/ and writers' group concerned with discussing WI art and literature...I would not, however, like to see this confined to West Indians. There should be a link-up with [Common]wealth and British writers and artists: it is time they really got to know what we are doing and what we are worth...' ²²⁴ One such contributor was the writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who was then known as James Ngugi. Present at early meetings while studying in Britain his ideas may not have been fully formed at that point, but his later stance and public debate with Nobel Laureate

²²³ Letter from John La Rose to E. Kamau Brathwaite, dated 4th September 1967, George Padmore Institute.

²²⁴ Letter from Edward Kamau Brathwaite to Bryan King, dated 30th November 1966, reproduced in Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 47.

Chinua Achebe on the 'appropriate language' for African literature has been well-documented, themes which similarly preoccupied the early members of CAM when questions of language dominated discussion. In fact, despite this effort to engage with the broader commonwealth, such collaboration had been a principal part of less formal meetings as early as the 1940s. Pearl Connor, the pioneering Trinidadian who, amongst other achievements, was instrumental in founding the Negro Theatre Workshop in 1963, also described such opportunities for collaboration and discussion as a form of awakening: 'We were meeting other commonwealth peoples and a lot of Africans, of course. The Kenyatta trial was going on...So we were involved with Africa and the Caribbean – our roots that is to say.'²²⁵

Identifying an Aesthetic

While the objectives, and achievements, of the Caribbean Artists Movement proved multifarious, one purpose, and consequence, of the series of increasingly significant meetings in the late 1960s, a period during which the Caribbean was at something of a political 'crossroads' in the wake of independence, was to identify an aesthetic or a 'voice'. Despite some divergence of opinion, this was generally conceded to be one that should be accessible, reflecting both Caribbean experience and its people. Its fractured history had resulted in the imposition of a plethora of European languages. These had enforced 'artificial' divisions, despite Brathwaite's assertions that the Caribbean represented a 'whole underground continent of thought and feeling and history...' and further projecting the vision that, 'under the water submarine there is a whole unity of Caribbean which we must always remember.'²²⁶ It was a 'unity' that

²²⁵ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 7.

²²⁶ Edward Baugh, 'Caribbean Writers and their Art: History, the Caribbean and the Imagination: Interview with Kamau Brathwaite, 1991', <https://umiami.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media>.

historically had been subsumed within ideas of the supposed supremacy of Europe but which, post Independence, proved central to the declared objectives of the Caribbean Artists Movement, which included the identification of an aesthetic.

A predictable central feature of the Caribbean 'voice' that the members of CAM sought to both extrapolate and celebrate was the spoken and written language of the region. It drew substantially on the work of Louise Bennett who was deemed sufficiently apposite that Donald Munro, writing from the Africa Centre Limited in King Street, London, indicated that he would try to arrange for her to take a meeting on 'Dialect in West Indian Literature' which was due to take place in mid 1967.²²⁷ However, while ideas of dialect within poetry and fiction proved central to discussions about the aesthetic, increasingly pertinent were the broader cultural aspects of language which informed the rich oral tradition. For Gordon Rohlehr, another early contributor to CAM, the patterns of the language reflected styles of music, or the drum, and were vital to the cultural heritage of the Caribbean. Rohlehr had grown up in Guyana but, when CAM was formed, was studying for a PhD at Birmingham University, his thesis focused on the writer Joseph Conrad. While the fact of his being based in Birmingham precluded him from attending many of the London meetings, he attended the second meeting, and was influential in asserting his ideas about the 'aesthetic' that he credits with spurring his further interest in Calypso. Of the meeting, Rohlehr later recalled: 'I had already been in England for two years when I went to the second meeting of CAM[...]at Orlando Patterson's place in London. They were talking about the Caribbean aesthetic; everybody was

²²⁷ Letter from Donald Munro, to E. K. Brathwaite, dated 20th June 1967, CAM Archives held at George Padmore Institute.

pronouncing what they thought this aesthetic was or wasn't. I think George Lamming would have been there, Kamau would have been there, Orlando certainly – I can't remember who else – Aubrey Williams maybe. I kept silent, listening to the talk. It might have been Kamau who said, "You're not saying anything". I didn't know what I was supposed to be saying. These were big guns; when George starts talking you listen. You don't put in your little mouth; you listen. I said, "Well, I think you are going about this thing the wrong way. My basic assumption is that any people would have an aesthetic, a style, a way of doing things and the Caribbean people, like any other people, would have some way of doing things that is characteristically Caribbean. The way to determine what this aesthetic might be is to look at what Caribbean people have done and to create, through a close dialogue with the material, some way of talking about their achievement and of distinguishing what is peculiarly Caribbean about it. If you employ that method, beginning with the work – Walcott's poetry, Sparrow's calypsos, Selvon's novels – you might then be able to recognise recurring features.'²²⁸

Rohlehr was not alone in considering the significance of music. Brathwaite was also very interested in the patterns of the language and the possible symbolism of calypso, but Rohlehr seems to have been instrumental in suggesting something of a formula by which to identify an 'aesthetic'. Crucially, this relied upon features which stemmed from oral tradition as opposed to the more traditional aspects of European literature. It also reflected the music traditions of the Caribbean and its interconnections both with the spoken language and the literature. Perhaps most

²²⁸ Tout Moun, 'From Apocalypse to Awakenings', Vol 2, No 1. (October 2013) citing: 'Gordon Rohlehr, Interview with Funso Aiyejina, in Funso Aiyejina (ed) *Self Portraits, Interview with Ten West Indian Writers and Two Critics*, (St Augustine: The School of Continuing Studies, 2003) 230-270 (p. 247).

importantly it suggested a sense of ownership of a unique version of language. This was not merely the habitually derided 'dialect' before Louise Bennett went some way to elevating its status, but 'Nation Language' as Brathwaite termed it, and a style of storytelling which built upon a specific experience and was shaped from a unique composite of influences.

The Emergence of Anancy as an Archetype

*'Metaphoric activity in post-colonial writing is thus likely to be more culturally functional than poetically decorative, more self consciously concerned with the problem of expressing the new in the language of the old, and more concerned with the importance of the language, art, literature, not just as expressions of new perception or paradox, but as active agents in the reconstitution of the colonial psyche, fragmented, debilitated, or apparently destroyed by the imperial process.'*²²⁹

What is notable from the biographical detail of many of the early contributors to CAM is that they shared an interest in folklore. Andrew Salkey had already collected and edited a series of folk stories. He had also been successful in applying for a Guggenheim fellowship which was formally awarded in 1960. The terms of the fellowship required that Salkey conduct the work in the United States. However, when he initially applied for the funding, he hoped to travel to West Africa and the Caribbean for this purpose. What appears to be a final draft of the application, contained with his archive in the British Library, declares an intention to: '[write] a definitive book of dialect stories in which the African and Caribbean folk character

²²⁹ Helen Tiffin, 'The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature' in *Myth & Metaphor, Critical Essays and Monograph Series no 1*, ed. by Robert Sellick (Adelaide Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1982), p. 16.

Anancy will be set forth in TWENTY (10 traditional 10 modern) fully comprehensive aspects which will be the first attempt to record or interpret this folk story character in a national (AFRO-CARIBBEAN) level.' Many of the stories were written, or drafted, in the 1950s, but it is interesting that the bulk of this work ended up becoming *Anancy's Score*, the twenty stories possibly constituting one of the reasons behind the choice of name. It is also significant that Salkey added: 'At present Anancy is almost dead and forgotten because of neglect and because of the imminent independence and industrialisation of Afro Caribbean territories,'²³⁰ further arguing that 'Anancy's contribution to folk art is quite naturally inestimable. It is the only vital contribution to folk art other than dance. The Afro-Caribbean dialect story-telling tradition will be the ultimate foundations on which Africa and the Caribbean may be able to build a national literary tradition.' At that point Salkey reported that he had composed 'three complete Anancy stories in the modern tradition' and asserted Anancy's relevance and malleability for future, potentially meaningful, stories. It is worth noting that, at that time, although Louise Bennett exerted a significant presence on the stage, and had published many stories, as Mervyn Morris indicated in the introduction to her collection, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, one of its declared purposes in the 1970s was to return to print many of the stories that had gone 'out of print' since they were first published in the 1940s and 1950s.²³¹ Gordon Rohlehr had also argued the importance of folklore to ideas of an aesthetic in his many letters with Brathwaite, with Orlando Patterson similarly emphasising the importance of folklore through his contention that it: 'strikingly illustrates the way in which the functions and mode of construction of African storytelling were adapted to the

²³⁰ The Andrew Salkey Archive at The British Library.

²³¹ Louise Bennett, *Anancy and Miss Lou*, Introduction, p. vii.

island.'²³² However, it is Brathwaite who stands out in his advocacy of a return to the Caribbean oral histories in which, 'language was [and is] a creative act in itself: the word was held to contain a secret power...'²³³

Within those oral histories, and specifically folklore, it is perhaps predictable that Anancy would emerge as a relevant and potentially potent figure, or device, such that Gordon Rohlehr later identified Anancy as an important 'archetype' of New World experience.²³⁴ Indeterminate in character, physiology, or any other form of categorisation, Anancy was not only versatile but encapsulated a celebration of the hybridity which informed both Caribbean culture and experience. For those of the diaspora struggling to establish place, Anancy, who was essentially itinerant, could suggest a source of inspiration for the exiled, through his embodiment of methods for survival and ways to prosper. Brathwaite remained convinced of the relevance of the tales, asserting that: 'for West Indians now seeking their own identity, a study of the slave period, and especially a study of the folk culture of the slaves, is so important. It is during this period that we can see how the African, importuned from the area of his 'great tradition' went about establishing himself in a new environment, using the available tools and memories of his traditional heritage to set going something new, something Caribbean but something nevertheless recognisably African.'²³⁵ Perhaps more significant to a group of writers, however, was that Anancy seemed to embody the power of language.

²³² Tiffin, 'The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature', p. 21.

²³³ Edward K. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves of Jamaica*, (London: New Beacon Books, 1971), p. 31.

²³⁴ Gordon Rohlehr, *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in the Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite* (Trinidad: College Press, 1981) p. 184.

²³⁵ Edward K. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves of Jamaica*, p. 6.

Despite their conviction, the challenge of elevating the spider trickster's status was not straightforward. The associations of 'low culture' which had to some extent beleaguered Louise Bennett's career, still informed debate. Louis James recently recalled how, when 'asked to edit the first published book of essays on West Indian writing,' he 'recommended that Brathwaite should be a contributor.' James goes on to describe how 'a Jamaican colleague protested against the idea so vehemently that [James] dropped the proposal, a decision [he] bitterly regretted.' The basis for the objection to Brathwaite's inclusion was apparently 'his enthusiasm for Caribbean folk culture,' which had 'made him an anathema in the English Department.'²³⁶

Despite such broad dismissal of folklore, and something of a successor to Bennett's arguments about the value of Anancy and the stories, the Anancy that the Caribbean Artists Movement reimagined was for a New World. For Brathwaite and Salkey, as with Bennett, one of the strengths of the folklore was its power in promoting a sense of cohesion, a potential which seemed of some urgency at a critical political juncture in the Caribbean's history.

The Linguistic Power of Brathwaite's Ananse, Spinner of Webs

Brathwaite's three collections of poetry, published during the formative years of the Caribbean Artists Movement: *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969), were later collated as: *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973). Intended to be spoken, they consider numerous themes of heritage and migration, including 'Ananse', which Helen Tiffin describes as 'central to the theme and structure of his trilogy.'²³⁷ In line with the orality and fluidity of his origins,

²³⁶ Louis James, 'The Caribbean Artists Movement' in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. by Bill Schwartz, (Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 211.

²³⁷ Helen Tiffin, 'The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature', p. 31.

the idiosyncratically spelled 'Ananse' bears little resemblance to the playful figure of the humorous stories. Instead, he 'squat(s) on the tips of our language/black burr of conundrums/eye corner of ghosts, ancient his/tories,'²³⁸ evoking ideas of a chain or thread going back towards a shared heritage. Exhibiting none of the humour or humanity of Bennett's familiar trickster, Brathwaite's Anancy remains largely symbolic. Intertwined with the power of language, a theme to which Brathwaite frequently returns, 'Nation Language' offered a medium through which to represent the people. It was the commonly spoken language and, through the repetitive, alliterative rhythms and patterns of the folktales, as Brathwaite argued, 'attained its freest expression in the folk tales.'²³⁹ When Brathwaite's Anancy 'spin[s] drumbeats, silver skin webs of sound through the villages,' it is a thread which Brathwaite traces from Africa, to a place where the God Nyame, who is referenced in the poem 'Korabra' engaged in a contest of words and challenges with his sometime adversary Anancy.

At times, Brathwaite's insistence that the Caribbean should come to terms with its past in order to move forward, proves unsettling within his poetry, forcing confrontation which, in 'The New Ships', provokes the poignant yet urgent questions: 'Whose/brother, now, am I?/could these soft huts/have held me?/wattle daubed on wall,/straw-hatted roofs/seen my round or-/dering, when kicked to life/I cried.' However, the necessity of coming to terms with the past, and its sense of loss and disconnection, propels the movement forward, via the violence of the 'drum, skin, whip, lash', towards the Caribbean and into Europe.

²³⁸ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Ananse', in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1967).

²³⁹ Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves of Jamaica*, p. 33.

Of the key members of CAM, it was Kamau Brathwaite, with his experience as an education officer in Ghana in the 1950s where he also studied musicology, who made the most of the connections between Anancy and his ancestral homeland of Africa. The various incarnations within his poetry illuminate Anancy's role as a culture bearer. In a challenge to the presumptions of superiority suggested by an imposed European education system and language, Anancy encapsulates cultural customs which were emphatically African. Ultimately, however, Brathwaite's Anancy is: 'a searching spirit, searching for the connective link in human life and struggles.'²⁴⁰ Not merely an indicator of heritage, he is also suggestive of restorative power, with a potential to cast off the restrictive rules of society. There is an understandable confidence in this assertion, acquired through his sense of the rich foundation of storytelling in the Caribbean, potently conveyed by the image of Anancy: 'threading threading the moon moonlight stories.' Yet Brathwaite goes further, invoking ideas of rebellion and revolution, as he asserts that: 'Tacky heard him/and L'Ouverture.' However, Brathwaite's invocation of Anancy does not merely reference a history of resistance within the Caribbean but reinforces the possibility of revolution through reinvention. Anancy's protean, metamorphic nature, suggests possibility and change, features that Brathwaite reinforces through his spelling of 'Ananse'. As an example of fluidity, Brathwaite's manipulation of Anancy's name is not arbitrary, but echoes one of the prominent themes of the early tales. When Brathwaite further emphasises Anancy's Akan day name of Kwaku, he not only connects Anancy to his West African ancestor but the importance of names to a sense of heritage. It was a sensitivity which prompted Brathwaite himself to change

²⁴⁰ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 121.

his name, in a ceremony which was attended by the prominent Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Ngugi had similarly discarded his 'given' name of James, and later wrote about the symbolism of Brathwaite's naming ceremony recalling: 'the women led by my mother came from all the villages around...it was during the ceremony with the women singing the Gitiro a kind of dialogue in song and dance that Edward was given the name Kamau.'²⁴¹

In many of his poems Brathwaite invokes Anancy both as a potential agent for social reform or change and in providing a connection with an African heritage. In 'Sumsum', Brathwaite's Anancy: 'gleams/in the darkness/ and captures our underground fears.' In 'Jah' the allusion to Anancy is more oblique when: 'Creation has burned to a spider/It peeps over the hills with the sunrise/but prefers to spin webs in the trees.'²⁴² In Brathwaite's collection, rebirth and the potential for reinvention remain prominent themes with Anancy's fluidity, and shapeshifting, suggesting a malleable, pertinent, device for artists and writers of the Caribbean and its diaspora. Brathwaite utilises Anancy's ability to continually reinvent himself as a powerful motif through which to question identity not only in the Caribbean but, for the displaced and uprooted of its diaspora. As a 'world-maker, word-breaker/creator' therefore, Anancy suggests the possibilities of new iterations within the New World with Brathwaite's Anancy offering a powerful archetype with which to assert legitimate place.

²⁴¹ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 'Kamau Brathwaite: The Voice of African Presence World Literature' in *Today*; (Fall 1994) 68, 4; Periodicals Archive Online (p. 677).

²⁴² Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*.

In Brathwaite's work, there is always a sense of 'writing back' against the presupposed superiority of European culture. A commonplace ignorance about the Caribbean was in stark contrast with the intimate and extensive knowledge of Britain, its culture, and its literature, of many of those who arrived in Britain from the Caribbean. In 'The Emigrants', Brathwaite acerbically asserts: 'Once when we went to Europe, a rich old lady asked:/Have you no language of your own/no way of doing things/did you spend all those holidays/at England's apron strings?'²⁴³ Brathwaite is also 'writing back' when he invokes Shakespeare's Caliban to represent the colonised, drawing on a reference which Lamming cultivated and which Aimé Césaire explored further in his 1969 play *'Une Tempête'*. However, in his poem of that name, Brathwaite not only goes back to the history of slavery, recalling the urgency of the rhythms of 'stick is the whip/and the dark deck is slavery' but surges forward, demonstrating the potential for survival and salvation: 'Out of the dark/and the dumb gods are raising me/up/up/up/ and the music is saving me.' In his desire to utilise the folk as part of a 'voice' or aesthetic of the Caribbean, Brathwaite retrieves the power of the oral, with its emphasis on sound.

Ultimately, Brathwaite's relationship and use of the Caribbean trickster seems at some distance from Bennett's, whose Anancy provided an alter ego for her performance and writing. As puppeteer she cleverly manipulated and moulded him, not only to say something political behind the veneer of humour but through an authorial voice and skills which echoed those of the trickster. Conversely, Brathwaite's carefully crafted poetry is filled with violence and devastation alongside its beauty. Within the compendious collection of letters which are held by the George

²⁴³ Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*.

Padmore Institute, it is impossible not to be struck by the energy which Brathwaite injected into the Movement, in the inexorable pursuit of his vision. Within innumerable letters his efforts extend not only to inspiring interest and offering support to his fellow artists but to diligently thanking speakers and contributors. Andrew Salkey told Brathwaite that the consensus amongst the CAM members was that 'CAM would never have been, had it not been for [Brathwaite] and [his] incredible organizing ability and drive in getting a good team together.'²⁴⁴ It is perhaps apt that the occasion of Salkey's letter was to thank Brathwaite for his 'unceasing' support of his work. Through Brathwaite's love of words, his determination and energy, and his indefatigability, something of a mirror of Anancy can be glimpsed in the cobwebbed corner, ever active as he creates connections between the past and present. While never the familiar, humorous 'rascal' of the stories, Brathwaite's Anancy still draws on an aesthetic which can be found in the tales. It is evident in his emphasis on language, fluidity, and heritage, while he shapes and reasserts the figure to suggest continuity and, potential creativity. In doing so he lays a foundation. Portable and powerful, Brathwaite's Anancy proffers both sustenance and guidance in a land which was frequently hostile.

Rebirth and Regeneration in Wilson Harris's Palace of the Peacock

Born in 1921, Wilson Harris came to Britain from Guyana in 1959, where he rapidly achieved success with the publication in 1960 of his *Palace of the Peacock*. In Guyana, Harris had been part of a circle of writers and intellectuals who included his (former brother-in-law) Jan Carew and Ivan Van Sertima. Although not a 'founding

²⁴⁴ Letter from Andrew Salkey to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, dated 18th February 1968, George Padmore Institute Archives.

member' Wilson Harris was deemed sufficiently important to be invited to be one of the five writers and critics who formed the panel when CAM first went 'public' in March 1967.²⁴⁵ He was also the first person to whom John La Rose put forward the idea for the Movement, La Rose recalling how, in the early 1960s he perceived Britain as: 'a kind of Mecca for the Caribbean writer.' La Rose further explained some of the rationale behind the movement or, as it was first envisaged, a literary and cultural network: 'So, I thought that there was no organisation, there was no means of interaction which was taking place among those writers[...]And the only one person I spoke to about this was Wilson Harris, at an earlier stage.'²⁴⁶ It is also perhaps illustrative of the power of the connections between many of the founding members of CAM that Andrew Salkey played a crucial role in Harris's writing success. Anne Walmsley recounts the story that Salkey was asked to read *Palace of the Peacock* for Faber, after a line of six readers had rejected it for its 'impenetrability'. In recommending its publication, Salkey argued that: 'if [Charles Monteith] and [Faber] can take a chance on William Golding, certainly you can take a chance on Wilson Harris.'²⁴⁷

A mapmaker who explored the interior of Guyana in his early career, in *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris reimagines literal paths through a metaphorical, ultimately allegorical, journey. Harris's travellers, who are bound, as Tiffin describes it, upon their 'various self-seeking quests',²⁴⁸ represent the principal groups of people who came to the Caribbean at different points of history. They include the violent

²⁴⁵ Cited in Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 45.

²⁴⁶ In 'John La Rose: Twenty Years of New Beacon Books', reproduced in Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 38.

²⁴⁷ Cited in Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 45.

²⁴⁸ Helen Tiffin, 'The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature', p. 40.

European ‘adventurer’ Donne, the Amerindian, Vigilance, and his ‘cousin’ the ‘African’ Carroll. Harris propels his cast of characters on a parallel, imagined, journey, with its destination spiritual enlightenment and self-knowledge.

Palace of the Peacock is typically categorised within a genre of ‘magical realism.’ It is perhaps predictable, therefore, that its narrative style has little obvious parity with the occasionally coarse and deceptively simple tales of Caribbean folklore. The lyricism within Harris’s eloquent language, which Kenneth Ramchand describes as: ‘literal and sensuous and eye-opening[ly] figurative at the same time,’²⁴⁹ makes the distance between *Palace* and the rhythmic style of the early Anancy tales still more pronounced. However, evident within the characterisation of several of Harris’s cast of characters, are still features of the Anancy trickster, with Helen Tiffin contending that: ‘all the characters who share a diverse ancestry characteristic of the Guyanese community, have something of the Anancy configuration.’²⁵⁰ Significantly, all the crew are described as ‘upright spiders’,²⁵¹ but Tiffin considers that Anancy emerges most prominently in Wishrop, the Amerindian Vigilance and the DaSilva twins. As a symbolic, transformative spider, numerous references connect Wishrop in particular with this image. The spider suggests a metaphor for life and death and Wishrop is described as ‘crawl[ing] like a spider into the river where he had been tangled in the falls.’²⁵² At a later point of the narrative, Wishrop is similarly described with his ‘fingers clinging to the spokes and spider of a wheel,’²⁵³ and, in the final stages of the

²⁴⁹ Kenneth Ramchand, *Pursuing the Palace of the Peacock*, in Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 120.

²⁵⁰ Tiffin, ‘The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature’, p. 40.

²⁵¹ Harris, *Palace*, p. 25.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

journey, Wishrop is divided by 'his true otherness and possession [by] a web of dreams.'²⁵⁴

Despite a plethora of references, any personification of Anancy seems most obvious in Carroll, 'the young negro boy,'²⁵⁵ whose significantly gender ambiguous name positions him as malleable, a name chosen by his mother because it was 'as innocuous and distant a name as any she could choose.'²⁵⁶ At a point in the story Carroll is described as 'laughing and the fresh ringing sound of his voice made everyone forget himself and turn in involuntary surprise. The laugh struck them as the slyest music coming clear out of the stream.'²⁵⁷ A similar, later, allusion to Anancy can be found in the description of Carroll, laughing 'because he could not help himself. He saw that the omens and engines of grace and salvation were so easily turned again into doom.' It is Carroll who, despite his apparent laughter, possesses Anancy's 'inner eye,' and operates as: 'a small mouthpiece and echo standing at the window and reflecting on the world.'²⁵⁸ Carroll is also not only the musician, his voice 'rich and musical' but, like the fiddle-playing Anancy, speaks with the familiar, simple repetition and rhythm: 'Fine, fine,' he cried again,²⁵⁹ and, later, 'How come you answer so quick-quick for another man? You think you know what mek a man tick?'²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Harris, *Palace*, p. 76.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Despite similarities between Carroll and Anancy, in Harris's work, the spider trickster is most pervasive, and potent, as a metaphor. Reminiscent at times of Brathwaite's use of Anancy as a device, his omnipresence is signposted by the numerous symbolic references to spiders and webs, which are frequently intertwined with ideas of rebirth. The myriad allusions include the symbolic 'cocoon' that lies in the empty hammocks on the first night in Mariella,²⁶¹ as well as Harris's reference to the 'spider and wheel of baptism – infinite and expanding – on which he found himself pinned and bent to the revolutions of life.'²⁶² Like Brathwaite whose Anancy was connected not only to rootedness but to rebirth, Harris's spider motif suggests the potential for transformation through revolution. Its emphasis in *Palace* suggests opportunity, through the ability to move forward and precipitate change, both by reinvention and the determination to discard the mores of society.

Harris also references the trickster's liminality, a figure at the borders, who can negotiate a path between classifications and, most starkly, between life and death. The narrator's perspective is delicately poised between these worlds, declaring in the opening passages: 'I dreamt I awoke with one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye.'²⁶³ However, despite the premise of *Palace*, Harris's vividly imagined journey conveys a promise of eventual spiritual freedom, a possibility which exists in truth. The sense of enlightenment at the end of the journey ultimately proves liberating, allowing the crew to stand 'free of the chains of illusion'. It is significant that such 'chains' are elsewhere described as 'webs of illusion,' a use of symbolism

²⁶¹ Harris, *Palace*, p. 42.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

which further emphasises the spider, and Anancy's, connection to both life and death.

Harris's Anancy is a metaphysical, spiritual being. Most commonly invoked through symbolic references to webs, he remains at some distance from the entertaining, at times riotous, stories of the plantation. However, there are still echoes of the purpose which can be perceived in Bennett's: '*Anancy an Him Story.*' In *Palace*, Harris creates a new legacy for the Caribbean, demonstrating both the diversity and interconnections of its inhabitants whose family histories and the focus of their specific, literal, journey ensures that their fates remain intertwined.

It is also significant that Harris uses an alternative narrative style which is consciously distinct from European tradition and convention. Drawing on metaphors that are specific to a Caribbean experience, Harris's allegory is conveyed via an alternative Creation story, its allusions to the biblical tale emphasized through the timeframe of the journey: 'One day had passed since they left Mariella. And today – the second of the allotted seven before them – had started with an omen of good fortune.'²⁶⁴ In *Palace*, Harris also prominently positions the spider as connected to a metaphorical, alternative, wheel of life, drawing upon Akan cosmology where the spider, legs extended, represents a wheel, or the sun, and by extension the essence of life.

Although his spider metaphor primarily remains a visual, physiological one in *Palace*, Harris connects it with the diversity and hybridity of a Caribbean experience. In this

²⁶⁴ Harris, *Palace*, p. 76.

way, the spider is not only connected to Akan cosmology but, through limbo, to a West African origin and, more specifically, to the terrible experience of the Middle Passage when the Africans captured and crammed into the boats were forced to 'contort themselves into human spiders.'²⁶⁵ For Wilson Harris, the metamorphosis of the spider is also, however, linked to the 'inner universality of Caribbean man. Those waves of migration which have hit the shores of the Americas – North, Central and South – century after century have, at various times, possessed the stamp of the spider metamorphosis in the refugee flying from Europe or in the indentured East Indian and Chinese from Asia.'²⁶⁶

The fluidity and potential license offered by Anancy as he emerges within *Palace* reflects the plurality that Harris deems crucial to ideas of the Caribbean and its aesthetic. Of all the Caribbean artists of this period, Harris seems prominent in his celebration of a diversity of origins, in part through his focus, in some of his other works, on Amerindian and Carib folklore, in addition to West African and European. It is central to his advocacy of the advantages of the creative potential of "cross-culturality",²⁶⁷ a perception which gained greater force during the period in which the Caribbean Artists Movement were discussing a sense of identity, and when artists and writers from all parts of the Caribbean debated what defined them as a group. As a central metaphor, for Harris, Anancy, the shapeshifter, underlines the fact that identity can be multifaceted, with the web representing 'a place and space of hybridity that creates, by its very presence in the world (which is often invisible,

²⁶⁵ Wilson Harris, 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, (2008), 54.1–2: 5–37 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2008>.

²⁶⁶ Harris, 'History, Fable and Myth', p. 337.

²⁶⁷ Maya Jaggi, 'Interview with Wilson Harris', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2006.

unseen, a gossamer of the margins) new combinations and juxtapositions.²⁶⁸ Within *Palace of the Peacock*, Anancy can be perceived as a call to eradicate the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, and to erase all classifications and limitations, suggesting that the ultimate freedom can be achieved through truth and self-knowledge.

Andrew Salkey's Anancy, Diasporic Man of the People

Sociable and popular, Andrew Salkey later told Anne Walmsley that: '[he] was the one that most of them got on with.'²⁶⁹ It is a description which plays down both the extent of his influence and the warmth of his character, aspects which Linton Kwesi Johnson, conveyed when he recalled their first meeting at the home of John La Rose and Sarah White: '[Salkey] wanted to know all about me and what I was doing and what kind of literature I was writing[...]he was a very affable, very lovely man and very warm...'²⁷⁰ Despite his gregariousness, or perhaps because of it, Salkey experienced a profound sense of dislocation on his arrival in Britain, an experience of loneliness which was at least partly assuaged by his visits to the local libraries. Salkey later described the impact of this period, writing: 'I really started learning about myself and home and the history...And therefore for the first time I began to realise myself as a colonial and us as a colony, and our history, and the way that we were forever at someone's beck and call. Our economy wasn't ours. Even our language wasn't really ours.'²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Houston J. Baker, "Foreword" to Joyce Jonas, *Anancy in the Great House: Ways of Reading West Indian Fiction* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1990): p. vii.

²⁶⁹ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 44.

²⁷⁰ British Library Online Event: 'Keep On Keeping On, A Celebration of Andrew Salkey', 8th December 2021.

²⁷¹ Reproduced in Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 45.

Of the significant members of the Caribbean Artists Movement, it was perhaps Andrew Salkey who most prominently adopted Anancy as a diasporic motif, aligning him most transparently with the colonial exile. First published in 1973, Salkey's *Anancy's Score* is a collection of reimagined Anancy tales which built upon an interest in folklore which he had already demonstrated in 1960 as editor of one of the first anthologies of Caribbean writing, *West Indian Stories*. However, as is evidenced within his archive at the British Library, the majority of the stories in *Anancy's Score* were written many years before the formation of the Caribbean Artists Movement, in the early 1950s.

Andrew Salkey was already a prolific writer when the Caribbean Artists Movement was formed. His first novel *A Quality of Violence* was published to some acclaim in 1959 and he had also published several children's books. *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* was published in 1960, a ground-breaking novel in which his principal protagonist, Johnnie Sobert, explores his sexuality and identity within what Thomas Glave describes as the 'increasingly racially uneasy twilight-empire city'.²⁷² In *Autumn Pavement*, echoes of Anancy emerge in the ambivalent, ambiguous, Johnnie Sobert as he rootlessly moves between classes, sexuality, and social aspirations in pursuit of a sense of place. However, Sobert not only resembles Anancy as he calls out the flaws of the many people who inhabit his worlds but demonstrates something of Anancy's charm. At the club where he works, he routinely earns generous tips and enjoys a popularity which derives both from his ease at moving within disparate social circles and the ability to inspire affection in

²⁷² Andrew Salkey, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2009), introduction (by Thomas Glave), p. 6.

people. Sobert's use of language also conjures up Anancy, his dialogue encompassing an alliterative, rhythmic, style: 'Must hustle harder. Time's running out. An hour to go. Same faces. Same coy disgraces.' However, whereas Anancy can exercise freedom through his transcendent fluidity, the detached, ambivalent, Sobert is constrained by the series of labels which he insistently uses to define himself, and which reflect the prejudices of the rigid society in which he is forced to try to discover a sense of self: 'The name's Johnnie Sobert, Jamaican, R.C., Middle-class, or so I have been made to think.'²⁷³ This sense of dissociation is the product of both a stifling class and colour conscious Jamaica in the wake of Colonialism and an ambitious, at times over-bearing, mother who has instilled in her son a sense of inadequacy, dual sources of anxiety, which are further entrenched by his experience of racism in Britain. Stultified by prejudice, Sobert perpetually searches for place, a misaligned sense of entitlement eventually leading to his rejection of both the Caribbean and the 'Africa [which doesn't belong to him].'²⁷⁴ Ultimately unable to emulate the fluidity suggested by Anancy, he remains trapped between worlds, incapable of forging an independent path as he grapples with his own prejudices: 'shade's the thing. Could very well be the reason for my coming to England where I can get a girl a million shades lighter than myself. Just to show the Jamaican and Panamanian middle-classery where it gets off.'²⁷⁵

At some distance from his Anancy alter ego, in addition to a self-sabotaging prejudice, Sobert's principal flaw proves to be a lack of insight. In a pivotal moment in the narrative, Larry his 'countryman' rebuffs him for his inability to move forward:

²⁷³ Salkey, *Autumn Pavement* p. 15.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

'you're looking for a sort of mirror which will make you out to be somebody worthwhile. You want an identity like. You want to feel that you have a nation behind you, a nation that you can call your own. You would like to walk proud like how the German or the Frenchman or the Englishman can walk proud knowing that they have tradition and a long history behind them to give them a real identity. You feel lacking in it because you're a colonial boy with only slavery behind you...' ²⁷⁶

Throughout *Autumn Pavement*, there are glimpses of an Anancy that could have suggested a solution to Sobert's dilemmas, a figure who is able to exist outside artificial boundaries as a potential, fortifying banner of heritage.

A popular theme from the tales, Salkey also utilises names to provide a clue to character and identity. His cast includes 'DuBois', 'Dick' and 'Johnnie'. The latter two names are, of course, suggestive of European archetypes, and convey something of Sobert's ambivalence as he seeks to identify a path between cultures. Similarly, and although Salkey uses the name 'Biddy' in some of his earlier writing, it is tempting to imagine that this character was inspired from the faithful friend of the chameleonic, rootless and at times snobbish, Pip, in *Great Expectations*, whose indecision and insecurities resulted in an inability to appreciate her honesty and quiet wisdom.

Thomas Glave describes *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* as: 'mark[ing] the sharpening of a Jamaican consciousness in conflict with the emergence of a Caribbean-British hybrid one.' Glave further asserts: 'This is a way of being that today could be correctly termed black British: an identity comfortable with both

²⁷⁶ Salkey, *Autumn Pavement*, p. 203.

blackness and Britishness.²⁷⁷ The final sequences of *Autumn Pavement* witness Sobert propelled upon a path towards self-knowledge and the truths that he has so frequently deflected when presented by Larry, Dick, and Bidy. His declaration in the final sequences provides a point of hope: 'I knew all along that I was looking for more than just a choice between Fiona and Dick, between greed and contentment; between sexuality and intelligent, ordinary living. I knew a little about myself, not much...'²⁷⁸ Although there are autobiographical elements to the story with Salkey, and his protagonist, Sobert, sharing the dual traditions of Panama and Jamaica and both spending a period working in bars, Sobert's inability to identify and understand the rich cultural heritage that might have offered a powerful sense of self, confines him to an unenlightened, myopic version of Salkey.

While Sobert does not seize upon the rich resource of the Caribbean folklore to help him to navigate his identity, it is notable that, within *Autumn Pavement*, Salkey himself acts as an authorial trickster, posing problems and creating challenges for the reader, rather than delivering finite, discrete solutions. Peter Nazareth references Salkey's ostensibly ingenuous 'note' on his text as an example of the 'challenge' that Salkey poses for his readers when he purports to apologise for his choice of an 'incongruous' name for one of his characters, which 'might cause offence.'²⁷⁹ In fact, Salkey's 'mistake' in conflating Hindu and Muslim names into one character seems unlikely in view of his compendious cultural knowledge. Nazareth further highlights this paradox when he points out: 'Unless one concludes that the author does not know that he could correct the name before going to press, one must suspect that he

²⁷⁷ Salkey, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, Introduction by Thomas Glave, p. 8.

²⁷⁸ Salkey, *Autumn Pavement*, p. 149.

²⁷⁹ Salkey, *Autumn Pavement*, Author's Note.

is doing an Anancy on us.'²⁸⁰ Something of a clue to his design is also suggested by Salkey's comment that he had no wish: 'to utter propaganda on behalf of Hindu-Muslim Unity.' Salkey's challenge seems pointed, particularly when considering his commitment to what he perceived to be the strengths of cross-culturalism, in marked contrast with the insistence on classification which impeded Sobert's path.

While *Autumn Pavement* 'plays' with some of the features of the Anancy's tales as Salkey, and his principal protagonist, Johnnie Sobert, explore ideas of fluidity and identity, *Anancy's Score* predictably positions Anancy at the centre of the narrative. For this collection of tales, Salkey 'pluck[s] [his] Anancy from the great folk tales of West Africa and the Caribbean,' subsequently 'remoulding' Anancy 'for [his] own ends.'²⁸¹ Using the structure and style of the tales, Salkey offers an attempt to make sense of the world and, particularly, the Caribbean's place within it. Salkey, and Anancy, follow a familiar route in *Score*, paralleling that of many of the diaspora. Through Anancy's disparate variety of guises, and his 'knife sharp brains,'²⁸² Salkey interrogates the illogicality of the world's inequalities. More explicitly than Harris or Brathwaite, in *Anancy's Score*, Salkey utilises many of the themes from the Anancy stories. Crafted in the tradition of many of the earlier tales, they are conveyed through a lyrical, conversational, style replete with 'asides'. Salkey, a skilled performer also draws upon a breadth of theatrical elements which enhanced and animated the tales of the plantations. In one sense, therefore, the tales act as a homage to the earlier stories, humorous, and visual in a multisensory celebration of

²⁸⁰ Peter Nazareth, *In the Trickster Tradition: The Novels of Andrew Salkey, Francis Ebejar and Ismael Reed*, (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Press, 1994).

²⁸¹ Andrew Salkey, *Anancy's Score* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, 1973), Author's Note.

²⁸² Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 144.

lyricism, drama, colour, and music. The significance of music is further emphasised by Salkey's use of 'score' in his title, although the choice of name, fittingly perhaps, is imbued with a multitude of possible references, including the fact of there being twenty stories.

Despite being superficially formulaic the stories are not simplistic and one-dimensional, but ambiguous and challenging as they explore a range of potential themes, many of which draw upon the rich oral tradition which, as Salkey argued in his application for a Guggenheim scholarship: '[could] be the ultimate foundations on which Africa and the Caribbean may be able to build a national literary tradition.'²⁸³ Salkey bookends his collection with two stories which emphasise this potential, with Anancy's journey commencing with his origins in an alternative Eden called "The Beginning", and concluding, in the final story, "New Man Anancy," with Anancy contemplating the 'Old World' of the Caribbean with 'him new eyes' when he sees that it has 'plenty green things beautiful growing things.'²⁸⁴ Within the intervening eighteen stories Salkey utilises the portable, linguistically agile Anancy as a device through which to explore a multitude of themes, reshaping Anancy and the tale to apply to a diversity of contemporary dilemmas.

Unlike Bennett's 'formula' when reasserting the tales, any uniformity within Salkey's stories primarily revolves around their structure and length, a reflection perhaps of Salkey's disciplined approach to writing and his familiarity with the very specific publishing and financial considerations that his various roles in BBC radio would

²⁸³ The Andrew Salkey Archive, at the British Library.

²⁸⁴ Andrew Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 175.

have dictated. In other respects, his stories encompass disparate themes which reflect his interest in exploring Anancy's multifaceted potential both as a metaphor and as a way of connecting both Old and New Worlds, a purpose which he perceived as early as the 1950s. The world that Salkey created for *Anancy's Score* is superficially a two-dimensional setting, populated by the familiar animal characters of many of the earlier tales and injected with a light humour reminiscent of Bennett's Anancy stories. Despite this, Salkey's *Anancy's Score* echoes some of the revolutionary possibility that was perceived and asserted by both Brathwaite and Harris. Salkey's opening tale, "How Anancy Became a Spider Individual Person", is set in a reimagined Garden of Eden, an alternative 'Creation Story' that is set against the backdrop of a distinctively Caribbean scene. Salkey's 'Eden' is populated by the characters from the Anancy Tales, including Tiger, who no longer seems 'brutish', and Dog. However, rather than presenting a simplistic, tranquil scene, 'when trees were honestly trees, when things used to happen as if they hadn't any good reason not to happen, when time was just time,'²⁸⁵ Salkey unsettles the familiar, recognisable setting, and, early on in the story, hints at its inequities. Despite its bucolic appeal, it is also a place where women are deemed inferior, with Dog advising Anancy to 'make [his wife] know right away that a man on top and 'oman underneath.'²⁸⁶

In the introduction to *Anancy's Score*, Salkey declared his Anancy is be a 'crisp, cool calculating spider, a persuasive inventive, anarchic spider-man,'²⁸⁷ who 'knows no boundaries; respects no one, not even himself, at times, and...makes a mockery of

²⁸⁵ Andrew Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 13.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸⁷ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, Author's Note.

everybody's assumptions and value judgements.²⁸⁸ However, in his opening story, Anancy is an idealistic 'poet' stultified by anxiety and a series of fateful premonitions which prompt his wife to describe him as a 'worry 'ead'. Rather than Salkey's 'Beginning' representing a utopia its hierarchy inhibits its residents, factors which evoke some sympathy for Anancy's 'nagging' wife. Her profound sense of discontentment prompts her to seek change, precipitating the symbolic 'fall' from Salkey's 'Beginning'. In a sequence with its obvious parallels with the biblical story, Anancy's wife, manipulated by Snake, eats the 'luscious red fruit' which Anancy also 'collides' with, signalling a 'giant earthquake'.²⁸⁹ The scene of chaos which ensues is portrayed through Salkey's alliterative, lyrical language, powerfully evoking a distinctly Caribbean scene in which the destruction is caused by a 'hurricane leader-wind,' and where, 'everything is sizzling is ripping is snorting is slashing swiftness.'²⁹⁰ Most significant to Salkey's design, however, and most momentous in terms of his recreation of the trickster figure, is that, following a literal and emblematic seismic shift, Anancy and his wife become 'one spider person'.

Of all the work produced by the Caribbean Artists Movement, it is perhaps not surprising that Salkey's Anancy exhibits the most marked connections to Bennett's versions of the stories. In addition to the myriad talents and interests they shared, they were both brought up in Jamaica where the stories were particularly prevalent. Part of Salkey's success at the BBC was his ability to perform and music and theatre remain intrinsic to Salkey's versions of the stories, his use of language representing a celebration of dialect and music, exemplified through the alliterative and rhythmic

²⁸⁸ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, Author's Note.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

language of the passage: '[Anancy] and his wife start a shim sham shaking, like shey-shey, all over the place. The shivering coming on so much that they start looking for some outsize leaf to cover up the shivers with.'²⁹¹ Both Salkey and Bennett were also able to adapt their writing to a range of genres, including stories for children. They each retained the focus on Anancy's fluidity, which encompassed gender, and Bennett's reinvention of Anancy, with traits of both Anancy and his wife Aso, may have provided some inspiration for Salkey. Despite this, Salkey's stories are less formulaic than Bennett's, and, although the influence of the Ashanti stories is still pronounced in *Anancy's Score*, Salkey does not emphasise their West African origins as conspicuously as Bennett. Ultimately, Salkey's Anancy seems to belong to a separate, more metaphysical, sphere than Bennett's, remaining not only complex, but ambiguous and elusive. An interrogator who is incarnated within a variety of forms he demonstrates a multifaceted purpose within the tales which enable Salkey to explore a breadth of facets to Anancy's character. These include the less palatable vices of greed, being manipulative and, in some of his tales, merciless. In the dark, nightmarish story, "Anancy, the Atomic Horse," the parents of seven children who have been eaten by Anancy, disguised as an Atomic Horse, manage to rescue them. However, in a disturbing twist, they are stampeded and trampled by the disillusioned, discouraged children who challenge the 'foolishness' of the rescue, because there: 'always goin be a' Atomic Horse.' Salkey's "Political Spider" is a similarly unsettling and macabre story with Anancy, emulating a politician, his 'cunning spider eyes like sea-beacons, bright and full of message like Trafalgar'²⁹² successfully manipulating a whole community to seek new homes elsewhere.

²⁹¹ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 25.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Although the story is ultimately perceived as a ‘Job lesson Anancy teachin’²⁹³ it has an obvious parallel to the unfulfilled promises of Windrush, which make the sufficiently catastrophic consequences of those decisions when, ‘some settle for suicide; some dead from hungry belly and bad dark eye; some cripple flat on the ground,’²⁹⁴ still more disturbing.

In his collection of stories, Salkey explores a breadth of purposes for Anancy. He asserts both a simple, moralistic, lesson on the dangers of gullibility while also attributing Anancy with both aspirational and empathetic characteristics. In many tales, therefore, Anancy is still the playful, fundamentally human, shapeshifting wordsmith, his nomadism forging a discernible parallel with many of Salkey’s audience. Notably, he is also sometimes Salkey himself, a writer in “Spider Hell Hole” when he ‘decid[es] to tackle a big-time writing thing,’ a pursuit which is described both dismissively and comedically as ‘sparking big brains and ‘nough born promise, and producing some real masterful language.’²⁹⁵ A further parallel to Salkey as the aspirational, diasporic wanderer can be found in “Gold, Silver and Brass” which also encapsulates the attraction of foreign lands, which include the thinly veiled Europe and, perhaps more pointedly, the United States.

Through his breadth of stories, Salkey’s Anancy is moulded into disparate theatrical roles, a ‘player’ who assumes guises with no immediate meaning, such that the tales not only proffer occasional messages but provide a necessary sense of solidarity and support. Encapsulated within the stories is also a constant reminder of the rich

²⁹³ Salkey, *Anancy’s Score*, p. 38.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

heritage, and language, which is capable of offering a sense of rootedness. In a quintessential story within the collection, "Don't give up Anancy", Salkey reminds his audience that, at the core of the 'green' Anancy's character which is so often associated with 'hope', is his aspirational indefatigability.

Unlike the spiritual and symbolic Anancy who elliptically emerges in both Harris and Brathwaite's work, Salkey's multifaceted Anancy is a more physical being. He is also a conundrum, an ambiguous and often perplexing device who illuminates the incongruities and inequality in society. In doing so, Salkey draws upon the tradition of the earlier stories, within a physical world that is both more earthbound and, potentially, constraining than the metaphysical world of Harris's imagination. It has attracted some criticism with Helen Tiffin asserting that: 'the overall structure of Salkey's volume indicates his interest in this transformative pattern, even if there is a rather forced quality about the transition, perhaps because Salkey seems ultimately to have less faith than Harris or Brathwaite in Anancy's protean powers as applied to the gargantuan task of release from a bitter history.'²⁹⁶ However, although Salkey's stories seem to be more earthbound than Wilson Harris's magical allegory in *Palace of the Peacock*, his Anancy is not inert. Salkey's opening story is a call to reconstruct a world based on egalitarian principles. He does not do so through any overt, didactic messages but by forcing the reader to engage with the stories, and to interrogate their meaning. The potential ambiguities of this approach have, perhaps inevitably, resulted in multiple interpretations of the stories and their myriad meanings. For example, Emily Zobel Marshall contends that: 'women fare rather badly in Salkey's 1970s collection,' referencing the 'often sexist portrayal of female

²⁹⁶ Helen Tiffin, 'Myth & Metaphor', p. 27.

characters.²⁹⁷ Helen Tiffin similarly comments on Salkey's characterisation of Anancy's wife as 'garrulous and scolding.'²⁹⁸ Such interpretations, while valid and comprehensible, may, however, point to a possible misunderstanding of Salkey's design. Salkey was known to 'champion' women writers and any misogynistic portrayals seem particularly incongruous within a book dedicated to his close friend Jessica Huntley, the groundbreaking publisher and activist, and her daughter, Accabre. Jessica Huntley was a source of inspiration for 'Sister Buxton,' one of the revolutionary figures who demanded justice following the death of Walter Rodney, in his later short story "The One". The many letters which are contained within Andrew Salkey's archive at the British Library demonstrate the closeness and warmth of their friendship as well as what seems to have been a profound mutual respect. While this does not in itself preclude Salkey from portraying distorted, stereotypical, characters, it may suggest an underestimation of the multi-accented and gender-fluid Anancy that he created. Rather than promoting the rigid, illogical categorisations which were a feature of the 'Beginning', he holds a mirror up to their inequities. For example, when Anancy, indecisive and ineffectual, seeks a range of opinions on how to remedy his wife's discontentment, Brother Dog tells Anancy to 'make a change in [his] policy of treatment of the 'oman [he] got.'²⁹⁹ While Brother Dog's comments undoubtedly echo commonly held perspectives of the 1950s and 1960s when the stories were first conceived Salkey challenges this attitude by telling us that the chauvinistic Dog is 'always trying his best to spoil other living things creations,' with 'ideas carry[ing] plenty suspicion bad'. Many of the criticisms seem to hinge on the

²⁹⁷ Emily Zobel Marshall, 'Anancy Changes': An Exploration of Andrew Salkey's Anancy Stories', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by M. Watt, L. Evans, and E. Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2010), p222.

²⁹⁸ Helen Tiffin, 'Myth & Metaphor', p. 27.

²⁹⁹ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 21.

apparent unfairness of Anancy being assigned an 'appealing' set of attributes unlike his wife. This ignores the shortcomings which are evident in both characters.

Although Anancy is the coveted, 'dreamer' and 'poet', he is also inert. Incapable of moving forward, his wife's 'cunning' provides the cleverness which is the essence of Anancy's strengths. Like Anancy, Salkey's caricaturist female characters, are flawed but also progressive, 'spreading the seeds of the shining politic of change and progress far away into the vast outside.'³⁰⁰ In line with Salkey's own, profoundly held, politics which avoided polarities, rather than reasserting stereotypes, he invites the reader to question the status quo.

Salkey's vision of the benefits of an equal partnership between the sexes seems rooted in the traditional West African tales where it was Aso who provided the brains behind the pivotal story in which Anansi negotiated for the stories of the world and it was also Aso who repeatedly sought opportunities for progress, in contrast with Anansi's amoral, myopic outlook. It is a perspective that also seems borne out by the penultimate story, when Salkey calls out the 'ol'-time macho sign-posts them still bright bad'.³⁰¹ In the story, Anancy has a moment of enlightenment when he recognises his fundamental equality with his wife who responds: 'I did know that from when I small,' later asserting that: "Oman been without equal for centuries. She been 'mongst so-so pickney all her life on the lan'. Some of you is five year ol' an' some o' you is fifty. Five or fifty, all o' you is boy.'³⁰² Just as Louise Bennett was forced to 'defend' her ambiguous and frequently amoral Anancy, Salkey's ambivalent protagonist may also be misunderstood, together with the versatility and malleability

³⁰⁰ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 26.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

of the device with which he examines the often-outdated mores of society. In a sense, Salkey's profound interest in the Anancy stories was embedded in the recognition that they were 'enough' and that the structure and format could facilitate a series of alternative interpretations and functions. His tales encapsulated a form of theatre, language and culture which could be both aspirational and inspirational through its potential not only to provide a foundation for generations of those with Caribbean heritage, but to offer ways of being. At the launch of his subsequent collection of tales, *Anancy, Traveller*, Salkey said: 'I thought that Anancy was so beautifully rooted that I could take serious liberties and it would not destroy him.'³⁰³ Part of his malleability related to ideas of gender fluidity, which he explained as: 'I thought maybe Anancy's not only a man but a woman.'

In *Anancy's Score*, Salkey conveys an Anancy who is impelled forwards, his 'travelin' eye from a long way back,'³⁰⁴ focused on movement and driven by the need to survive. It is a journey in which he explores the world, challenging the many different forms of rhetoric through religion, politics, war, monarchy and artificially imposed racial and national binaries. Salkey does so through his resurrection of an opaque, impenetrable, Anancy who does not unequivocally provide the answers, but instead, within the shadowy world that he occupies, asks the questions. In the final story, Anancy ends his journey by contemplating the possibility of a 'brandless new man'³⁰⁵ as he returns to the Caribbean, unchained by the categories and labels that constrained Johnnie Sobert and stymied the inhabitants of 'The Beginning'. Flawed, earthbound, ambiguous, and ambivalent, Anancy, with his many interwoven strands

³⁰³ Video Clip shown as part of the British Library Conference, 'Artist, Mentor, Friend: Andrew Salkey, A Man of Many Hats', 5 - 6th November 2021.

³⁰⁴ Salkey, *Anancy's Score*, p. 32

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

signals the possibility for change. Through his liminality and his ability to perceive the truth, for Salkey, he represents the potential for a classless, egalitarian society.

Anancy, Traveller, Andrew Salkey's 'sequel' to *Anancy's Score*, was published in 1992. It is a date which is, in fact, misleading. The archives held at the British Library include Salkey's correspondence and notebooks, the latter of which demonstrates the dates, meticulously noted, when he started and completed the stories, many of which were written in longhand over a few days in the early 1980s. The various manuscripts and letters between Salkey and his publishers at Bogle L'Ouverture, close friends, Jessica, and Eric Huntley, also reveal that the draft version of the collection was concluded much earlier.

Salkey's central story in the collection, "The One" was inspired by Walter Rodney's murder in 1980. The earlier shackling and gagging of Rodney had provided the impulse to found Bogle L'Ouverture books, in an effort to publish and disseminate his works as an act of protest. Like *Anancy's Score*, the later collection, *Anancy, Traveller* is again dedicated to Jessica Huntley, and her daughter Accabre. From the correspondence, it seems that the publication of *Anancy, Traveller* was delayed by several factors, which were primarily financial, the regrettable consequence of which is that it is difficult to trace the creative and contextual trajectory for all of the stories. However, Salkey's own move to USA to teach at the innovative Hampshire College was a possible catalyst.

In many ways, *Anancy, Traveller* belongs to a different context than *Anancy's Score*. The structure and format is more accessible, and, at times, the dialect is somewhat

diluted from that of his earlier stories. Certain of the sequences within the collection are also notably less abstract than *Anancy's Score*, as the eponymous hero confronts the supercilious and superficial 'Eagle' in 'Washing Town' to discuss the state of the world in "Holocaust Anancy". Emily Zobel Marshall posits that the second version of the tales was aimed at 'raising awareness and appear[s] to be directed largely at a western, rather than Caribbean, audience.' She further hypothesises that one reason for the shift in focus was 'a result of the twenty years Salkey spent living in the UK and the US between his two collections.'³⁰⁶ However, as previously mentioned, any attempt to date the stories is problematic, firstly because the majority of the short stories contained in *Anancy's Score* were written in the 1950s and not the 1970s when the collection was published and, secondly, because many of the stories in *Anancy, Traveller* were also written much earlier than the publication date. Emily Zobel Marshall perceives this second collection to have a: 'narrative pace [which] lumbers rather awkwardly as Salkey self-consciously moulds Anancy to his political, philosophical and ideological outlook'.³⁰⁷ As a collection, its increased cultural and linguistic accessibility might at times be at the expense of features of Salkey's evocative lyricism. However, rather than a detached commentary on the ills and greed of a society focused on war and oppression, which represent prevalent themes in "Holocaust Anancy" and the sybaritic corruption and self-interest of the "Land of the Super I", Salkey uses key political moments in history to not only explore Anancy's multifaceted nature but his continued significance to a sense of rootedness and heritage, a theme introduced by one of the opening quotes: 'the importance/of place is/knowing who you are/when you get there.' Within this

³⁰⁶ Emily Zobel Marshall, 'Anancy Changes': An Exploration of Andrew Salkey's Anancy Stories', p. 225.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

collection, Anancy is a perpetual traveller. His nomadism is no longer motivated by individualism but is instead informed by wisdom and insight. Anancy's 'world' is also both recognisably physical and allegorical, his separation from it offering him the advantage of contemplating it from a distance, which allows him a specific perspective on the Caribbean's place within the world. Analogous with the opening chapters of *Anancy's Score*, the titular trickster, who seems more consciously aligned with Salkey in this collection, is initially drawn to the superficially appealing Land of Super I, the egocentric 'First World' of USA or Europe. The tale charts a familiar diasporic journey for many from the Caribbean, which is conveyed through the allegorical reinvention that explains Anancy's decision to go to the New World. It is a decision that is treated as neither naïve nor foolish, in its pursuit of a 'better' existence. Beset with challenges, it also ultimately reveals valuable insights so that Salkey, in an authorial Storyteller/Anancy voice writes: 'As a traveller, he got his best privilege, you see. It don't come to those who stay handcuff on the land, all the time, at all. Is only those who take chance with land and water, who go way from home and roam world views, who stretch distance with foot, who for ever making home out of homelessness, and drift, no matter what, that can see what Anancy seeing, here, right now.'³⁰⁸ His 'travel' is as much about history as geographical paths with Anancy 'find[ing] a giant rock' in the middle of the water which offers a safe harbour from which to contemplate the history of the Caribbean and, ultimately, to understand its position within the world. His series of visions from the 'giant rock' include the violence of the Middle Passage, as Anancy witnesses the disturbing 'voices' of history, with his great confidante the 'calm sea' of his 'sister' the wise Caribbea. However, Salkey does not passively contemplate this brutal history but

³⁰⁸ Andrew Salkey, *Anancy, Traveller* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, 1992).

asserts the Caribbean's creative response to its horrors, through a powerful visual sequence, initiated by the "Dance of the Souls of the Dead Slaves". The violence, which is signified by the chains, manacles, whips, and ropes, is reimagined into a carnivalesque scene in which there are: 'neck irons with fan out spikes spinning like wheels everywhere. Them going so fast that not shining star light,'³⁰⁹ while drums beat as 'thousand more dancers dancing processions of tribal community'. There is an arresting visual power to the scene, and to Salkey's art. It is made more potent by his ability to utilise his breadth of skills to reinvent such a brutal period, its accompanying 'lamentation' making it still more devastating, into something which is not only spectacular, but creative.

At a British Library Conference to celebrate Andrew Salkey in 2022, Louis James described *Anancy, Traveller* as: 'an extraordinary book. It starts off with a section asking exactly what is the nature of identity and yourself. How do you feel when I'm is I?'³¹⁰ Throughout this collection, Salkey not only considers questions of identity but Anancy's 'legacy' alongside the role of the Caribbean within the world. In one sequence Anancy meets his 'ancestor', the West African Anansi, and, in "Anancy and Caribbea" the trickster is challenged by Caribbea to justify what he has been 'doing'. The question serves as a provocation to the allegations of irrelevance, or anachronism, of an Anancy whose duplicitous nature seems misplaced within a contemporary, altruistic world. However, when challenged: 'What you ever do for anybody Anancy?' Anancy's response is unequivocal: 'Show them how to survive in this set-hand world we live in.'³¹¹ It is not Anancy's only purpose. In *Anancy*,

³⁰⁹ Salkey, *Anancy, Traveller*, p. 13.

³¹⁰ Louis James, speaking at the British Library Conference, 'Artist, Mentor, Friend: Andrew Salkey, A Man of Many Hats', 5 - 6th November 2021.

³¹¹ Salkey, *Anancy, Traveller*, p. 27.

Traveller his multifunctionality encompasses that of Riddler, a theme which pervades many of the stories, a wordsmith, and quiet observer. He is also the familiar, indefatigable traveller who still possesses a potential to be both aspirational and inspirational and is reassured by the 'dry coconut' that he has retained the 'giant ideas' that he has held 'ever since Africaland'.³¹² In this collection, Salkey's exploration of Anancy suggests a continued resonance for the trickster, and for Salkey's imagination, a storytelling device which is still capable of exploring anxieties of belonging and place, particularly that of the Caribbean, within an increasingly complex world. Salkey provides a partial response to this latter dilemma, placing the sea, 'Caribbea', within a symbolic triangle together with Anancy and the ubiquitous friend/brother of the early Anancy Tales, Tacuma.

Anancy does not 'mek' the world in *Anancy, Traveller*. He instead acts as a medium, or conduit, through which he acquires and shares his insights. However, in Salkey's central story, "The One", he revisits a more traditional and politically active Anancy when he and 'Sister Buxton' seek to avenge a murder, in a veiled analogy to Walter Rodney's tragic death. Conveyed through the comical visual sequences, of the early Anancy Tales, an agile, cartoonesque Anancy's attempts at disguise and secrecy extend to the farcical when he: 'bend down and creep and crawl up to the windows,' in an attempt to find out what is going on.³¹³ In a further reference to some of the features of the early stories of the plantations which is particularly reminiscent of the 'Riding Horse' story in which Anancy humiliates Tiger, Anancy and Sister Buxton 'shrink' the corrupt, 'One Man' so that he can fit into his pocket. Despite these playful

³¹² Salkey, *Anancy, Traveller*, p. 129.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

sequences, an understandable anger can be glimpsed under the surface of this story. It is a call to action for which Salkey unselfconsciously mobilises Anancy to his revolutionary purpose. Eclectically combining the powerful elements of the earlier stories through humour, theatre, satire and a potential for resistance, Salkey imaginatively reasserts many elements of the tales, and an aesthetic, for an urgent political purpose.

In *Anancy, Traveller*, Salkey's world has subtly shifted, its themes becoming more pointed and, more critical. At the centre, Anancy is imbued with a greater purpose, wisdom and insight whilst retaining his complexity and ambiguity. Whereas In 'The One' he was the energetic, determined revolutionary, utilising his cleverness and physiological strengths to expose political corruption he is also the occasionally ridiculous, quizzical, and perpetually travelling folk hero. Unlike Harris's restorative, spiritual Anancy, he remains essentially earthbound with his 'powers' typically constrained by his fundamental 'human' limitations. In this, although Salkey creates something of an 'Everyman', there is also something profoundly personal in his representation of Anancy, which is absent from that of Harris or Brathwaite's invocations. Like Bennett whose array of skills and lightly humorous stories masked a more political purpose, Salkey's multifaceted career allowed him to harness Anancy's potency as a storytelling device.

Of the prominent contributors to the Caribbean Artists Movement, Salkey was perhaps one of the most obviously itinerant, having been born in Panama and brought up in Jamaica, travelling to Britain reasonably early in his career and later settling in America for the opportunity to teach. Salkey's influence also extended to a

variety of genres, Karen Sands O'Connor describing him as: 'the first major Black author living in Britain to write for children,'³¹⁴ in reference to the series of books which Salkey wrote in the 1960s, including *Hurricane*, which was set in Jamaica and published in Britain by the respected and prominent publisher, Oxford University Press. Salkey's myriad interests and skills also extended to his collection of folktales, poetry, novels and his work in publishing and broadcasting. There are other more personal recollections which align him with the Caribbean trickster. His close friend the academic, Robert Hill, with whom he first became acquainted at the Havana Cultural Conference, the subject of his *Havana Journal*, described him as a bit of a 'dandy', enjoying clothes and costume.³¹⁵ Of the early contributors to the Caribbean Artists Movement, Salkey's use of Anancy seems most intertwined with his own character and experience, a connection which, as Jason Salkey recalled, explains his enthusiasm for: 'a funky waistcoat with Anancy embroidered on the back which he wore all the time.'³¹⁶ Jason Salkey subsequently sent me a photograph of the waistcoat, expressing some regret that it did not show the extent of its flamboyance.

Salkey's continued desire to keep moving and to take advantage of possibility, also encapsulated something of Anancy's determination to survive, a pursuit that, for Anancy, resulted in moments of selfishness, and a forced detachment from sentimentality. Of the family's move to USA in the mid-1970s to pursue an opportunity at Hampshire College, Jason Salkey said: 'Dad was guarded on everything to do with Jamaica – we never went back there but we did experience our own exile by moving to America. We missed our friends, but he told us to move

³¹⁴ Karen Sands O'Connor, *Children's Publishing and Black Britain*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 17.

³¹⁵ Speaking at 'Keep on Keeping On', British Library Event, December 2022.

³¹⁶ Email from Jason Salkey to Natalie Lucy dated 14th February 2022.

forward and make friends, so a sense of exile came out then when we moved to America.' When, in the final sequences in *Anancy, Traveller*, Salkey writes: 'When a spider who is man, vow to travel, he just have to keep travelling, no matter where, no matter how, no matter for how long. Is that him and the world make for,' it is, therefore, impossible not to hear those words as spoken by Salkey himself.

For Salkey, the desire to travel and his capacity to assimilate may have come from his own, Anancy-like, fluidity. During an interview in 2021, the publisher, Eric Huntley, said that Salkey 'seemed Jamaican' to him, whereas Jason Salkey, at the same event, commented: 'As far as I was concerned my father was the epitome of the English gentleman.'³¹⁷ Despite his adaptability and determination to progress, it was not always a wholly 'successful' journey. Salkey later conveyed his sense of loneliness at going to the United States in an interview for *Race Today* when he told his friend, Anne Walmsley, that he had initially, and misguidedly, imagined Britain to be a form of exile, but that his lack of any community in USA provided a much more profound sense of loneliness.³¹⁸

Despite certain similarities which suggested Anancy as something of an alter ego for Salkey, many aspects of his character were at some distance from the individualistic, calculating trickster. In the extensive correspondence which is held in his archive at the British Library there are numerous letters in which his friends ask for support. Although at times these include what seem to be almost incalculable demands on his time, Salkey invariably provides this help or assistance. He arranges lectures and

³¹⁷ 'Keep on Keeping On' a Celebration of Andrew Salkey, Online British Library Event, 8th December 2021.

³¹⁸ Recorded interview with Anne Walmsley for *Race Today* in 1986, held at The British Library.

accommodation; chases up administrative matters; writes reviews and provides support and encouragement. The tributes to Andrew Salkey within his writing and the affection with which he is held is striking within the bulk of the correspondence and seem fitting for the man who devoted so much time and energy to helping his friends. Louis James told me that he perceived part of Salkey's identification with Anancy as: 'avoiding the pursuit of personal reputation to instead remain an invisible enabler, facilitating the transformation of the Caribbean arts into worlds of untrammelled possibilities.' James, recalling a specific example of this generosity, told me: 'When I gave a paper at the London Royal Society on African and Caribbean creative writing, it was Andrew who turned up with a tape recorder and interviewed me on it for the BBC,'³¹⁹ further asserting that he, amongst others: 'owed much to his self-effacing vision.'³²⁰ However, perhaps the writer Samuel Selvon with whom Salkey corresponded for much of his adult life, spoke most poignantly in his recognition of the multitude of talents which aligned him so closely with Anancy in his letter to him in 1975: 'I am greatly comforted in knowing you; even privileged. I say this because you are the only person I know who seems to understand what I am trying to do in my writing. You have an enormous capacity of human understanding which is so rare that it stands to and strikes me with force...I flatter myself that I know enough about Humans and Humanity to say that you are exceptional....you have a great gift, Andrew, so great, that even with those few words, and my inability to express myself as you do, you will understand and appreciate what I am trying to say. That is the quintessence of your genius - that behind the ballad and the episode

³¹⁹ Email from Louis James to Natalie Lucy, dated 23rd September 2022.

³²⁰ Email from Louis James to Natalie Lucy, dated 22nd September 2022.

that other human beings will laugh kiff-kiff at and enjoy you can see with the inner eye and analyse with the unique power that God gave you.'³²¹

In his poetry collection, *Foundations*, John La Rose wrote of the vision of the Caribbean Artists Movement as the 'fireburn of (their) insides',³²² recalling the significance of voice and identity to a generation which settled in Britain. La Rose's determination to preserve and promote the remarkable literature which so many writers of the Caribbean produced, led not only to the formation of *New Beacon Books*, but to the foundation of the *International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books* in the early 1980s. Kamau Brathwaite similarly focused his energies on preservation, meticulously compiling a historic record of the surviving writing of the Caribbean in English.³²³ Andrew Salkey was nicknamed by his friends as an 'archive', his letters and documents carefully stored and sorted, a wealth of correspondence categorised and retained, perhaps with a sense not only of their importance, but his determination that the words and ideas should be preserved and treasured.

Where the portability of the tales ensured their survival in the Caribbean, a sense of unease necessitated the ongoing preservation and celebration of those works through writing. Ultimately, one of the declared purposes and achievements of the Caribbean Artists Movement, was in its emphatic response to Brathwaite's dismay

³²¹ Letter from Sam Selvon to Andrew Salkey, 15th September 1975, in the Andrew Salkey Archive held at the British Library. (With thanks to the Estate of Sam Selvon).

³²² John La Rose, *Unending Journey: Selected Writings* (London: New Beacon Books, 2014).

³²³ E. K. Brathwaite, *Our Ancestral Heritage: A Bibliography of the Roots of Culture in the English-speaking Caribbean* (Kingston, Library of Congress, 1976).

that: 'the West Indian [was] rather being left out of things.'³²⁴ Through Anancy, the writers of the Caribbean Artists Movement provided a link in a notional chain, or thread, which could lead the folkloric trickster with his linguistic verve and indefatigability, from West Africa, through the Caribbean and to Britain. Perhaps most significant to that legacy was the fact that Anancy had been remoulded not only as a symbol of heritage, but that he also signified a celebration of hybridity and fluidity. When asked by Daryl Cumber Dance how he would classify himself, Selvon responded: 'I mean, what do I call myself: am I East Indian, Trinidadian West Indian?' This was the hybridity that Wilson Harris described, and that Sam Selvon recalled from his childhood as an 'assimilation [of] all these cultures and you turn out to be a different man who is the Caribbean man.'³²⁵ At something of a transitional phase, a mobile, active, diasporic Anancy could provide both inspiration and a sense of solidarity. Through Anancy there was also an implied call to discard the constraining descriptions and definitions of a British society, and to instead acknowledge and embrace the multiculturalism which reflected its history.

The Caribbean Artists Movement moulded Anancy into a potent storytelling device, one that was profoundly connected to heritage and identity. Perhaps most importantly for the marginalised, often ostracised, and displaced, Anancy and the tales also offered a way for the writers and artists of the Caribbean Artists Movement, and those who followed, to find a way to be written back into the story.

³²⁴ Letter from Edward Kamau Brathwaite to Kenneth Ramchand, dated 28th December 1966, held in George Padmore Institute Archives.

³²⁵ Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams*, p. 252-253.

PART TWO:***New Foundations; New Beacons***

'It is the next generation of young boys and girls for whom the return to their historical past has for a second time...been cut off, whose way home is genuinely blocked, whose expectations and definitions of themselves as black has been formed and forged in the teeth of the immigrant experience... It is only the very deep breaking of links with that complex past which I think happens not in the first but in the second and third immigrant generations that we begin to see what the truly immigrated West Indian is actually like.'

Stuart Hall, Caribbean Artists Movement Conference, 1968

Chapter 4: Infiltrating the Secret Garden: The Pursuit of Place for Black Britons of the Caribbean Diaspora

In the second part of this thesis I explore the ways in which Anancy and the 'Anancy aesthetic' which I have attempted to delineate, emerges in British writing. Many of a Second Generation, whose parents migrated to Britain in the years following the departure of Empire Windrush, were forced to forge a path in a country in which they felt both invisible and unwelcome. A predictable consequence of the failure to recognise the swathes of the population who did not conform to the prevailing narrative was a sense of displacement not only for the many migrants who made their homes in Britain but their children.

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which a sense of place was cultivated by the raft of more inclusive books which eventually appeared within the schools and wider media and which offered some reflection of their experience. Central to this process were the stories written by Beryl Gilroy in the early 1970s, whose multifaceted, pluralistic characters offered a diversity of voices for school children. It was a foundation which many writers of the Caribbean Artist Movement, including Andrew Salkey, James Berry and Faustin Charles, sought to build upon, further remoulding Anancy and the tales for children. Critical to their objective and to Anancy's purpose as a device was the need to create characters who could offer a celebration of Caribbean cultural heritage. As an archetype and through a style of storytelling which was at some distance from the linear, Eurocentric, narrative style these writers were able to create spaces for those 'left out' of the stories.

For the thousands of Caribbean migrants who travelled to Britain in the years following the Empire Windrush's arrival in 1948, the possibility of a superior education provided a driving force in the decision to sacrifice homes and family for the disparate climes of a chilly, down-at-heel, Post-War Britain thousands of miles away. The numerous anticipated advantages of an imagined 'mother country' were often negated by the realities of the outdated education system that refused to acknowledge the needs of its multicultural population and resulted in an almost complete absence of any reflection of their experience within the wider culture. Whether the blindness towards those sectors of the population who did not conform to anachronistic notions of 'Britishness' was a result of mere ignorance or a conscious calculation to ostracise, it served to powerfully re-emphasise the message that many of the children of the Windrush migrants were not only 'different' but unwelcome. For many of a Second Generation it was a source of anxiety that was unmitigated by any knowledge of the rich Caribbean heritage that might have offered a sense of rootedness.

By the 1970s, the flaws within an already divisive system had extended to the erroneous consignment of many black children to schools for the 'educationally Subnormal,' with no outward concern for those affected by the callousness of such decisions, the majority of which failed to acknowledge the multiple factors which might hinder the progress of those who were continually marginalised. They also failed to recognise the shortcomings of the schools that, for many, had become sites of anxiety. Not only were black Britons refused a recognisable 'space', but they were also repeatedly ostracised by the nature of the material that was purportedly relied upon to 'educate'. Rather than telling stories in which a breadth of experience could

be reflected, much of the reading material reasserted a distorted perception of the world, which, as Jacqueline Rose contends, was calculated to preserve: '[imperialist] values which [were] constantly on the verge of collapse.'³²⁶ Inspired in part by Rousseau's theories which were expounded in *Emile*,³²⁷ and which advocated the power of learning from the natural world, *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the first books specifically focused on educating children. Positioning the main protagonist, Crusoe, as what Matthew Watson describes as an 'enlightenment antihero',³²⁸ the text became ubiquitous, and part of a canon of 'classic children's literature.' *Robinson Crusoe* reasserted a narrative about European cultural supremacy, in which Europe was cast as a civilising force. Perhaps even more damaging for the children of the 'Windrush' generation was the fact that Crusoe was shipwrecked in the Caribbean. It is Crusoe, therefore, who offers an introduction to the Caribbean, and its inhabitants, for Defoe's young and, often inexperienced, readers, his misleading perspective reinforcing the prevalent, imperialistic, narrative. This is done in multiple ways but is perhaps most shocking, and harmful, in its representation of the relationship between Crusoe and the Amerindian 'Friday'. When Crusoe first encounters Friday, he proceeds to 'assess' him, describing him as a: 'comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, with straight strong limbs, not too large; tall and well-shaped',³²⁹ before he comments on his skin colour, which he describes as: 'not quite black, but very tawny and yet not an ugly, yellow, nauseous tawny, as the Brazilians and

³²⁶ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 44.

³²⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (also called 'On Education'), first published in 1762. Described by many as a fusion between a novel and a treatise, it follows the life of a fictional character, Emile. One of the book's fundamental principles focuses on society's potential to corrupt children's development, instead advocating that children should learn from the natural environment.

³²⁸ Matthew Watson, 'Rousseau's Crusoe myth: the unlikely provenance of the neoclassical homo economicus', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 10:1 (2017), 81-96 (82), DOI: [10.1080/17530350.2016.1233903](https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2016.1233903).

³²⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p. 157.

Virginians and other natives of America are but of a bright kind of a dun olive-colour.'³³⁰ Perhaps equally injurious is the fact that *Robinson Crusoe* seems to validate the master/servant dialectic. Crusoe's ostensible moral superiority is primarily founded on his European 'Christianity' so that, as Roxann Wheeler contends, the novel establishes a 'binary of the savage versus the Christian European.'³³¹ This dynamic is further underlined by the fact that Crusoe's inclination is to treat Friday as a 'servant' rather than a companion, when he sets about to 'educate' by 'teach[ing] him to speak,' and 'made him know his name should be Friday which was the day [Crusoe] saved his life.'³³²

Another much-vaunted 'literary classic', Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, presents a similarly distorted, potentially damaging, perspective through its reassertion of its imperialist, racist, narrative. Shortly after Mary arrives from India, she is woken by Martha, a 'young housemaid' who she proceeds to command to dress her, insisting that she is incapable of doing so herself because her 'Ayah dressed [her]'. Discovering that Martha is reluctant to perform such demeaning tasks, Mary attempts to explain away her presumptions with the pronouncement that it is 'different in India.' Martha, an ostensibly sympathetic character, responds: 'I can see it's different,' before she further declares: 'I dare say it's because there's such a lot o' blacks there instead o' respectable white people.' Subsequently, informing Mary that she had expected her 'to be black', and that she 'was fair pleased to think [she] was goin' to see one close,' Mary responds with rage 'and humiliation',

³³⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 157.

³³¹ Roxann Wheeler, 'My Savage,' 'My Man': Racial Multiplicity in 'Robinson Crusoe.' *ELH*, 62.4 (1995), pp. 821–61. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030104>. Accessed 23 June 2023, (p. 835).

³³² Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 158.

unleashing her temper on Martha with the words: 'You thought I was a native! You dared! You don't know anything about natives! They are not people – they're servants who just salaam to you.'³³³ Although Mary is portrayed as an unsympathetic character, deemed '[to] not car[e] about anyone',³³⁴ such derogatory portrayals of those of different racial or class backgrounds still seemed validated by their existence within notional 'classics' of literature, texts which were routinely relied upon within schools. The author and playwright, Caryl Phillips, who arrived in Leeds from St Kitts as an infant, recalled the effect of such material on his sense of self, when he recounted an episode from his own experiences of primary school in the mid-1960s when, as: 'the only black boy in the school, sit[ting] cross-legged on the floor,' the teacher read a story about 'Little Black Sambo.'³³⁵ For Phillips, an inquisitive, exceptionally intelligent, child who sought escape in literature, the available stories proved alienating and in an email, Phillips told me that this specific incident struck him as 'off' even though he was only six or seven years old.³³⁶

Creating Space in the Stories of Britain

The prevalence of reading material which perpetuated stereotypes, doubly excluding many of its pupils through its failure to represent their experience, was in fact misaligned with the spirit of the 1944 Education Act with its focus on the well-being of the child after the traumas of War. The legislation had progression as its focus and promised increased social mobility with its raft of ground-breaking policies directed towards improving nutritional care and extending the age for compulsory schooling.

³³³ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, (London: Puffin Books, 2011), pp. 29-30.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Caryl Phillips, *Color Me English* (New York: The New Press, 2011), p. 107.

³³⁶ Email from Caryl Phillips to Natalie Lucy dated 1st June 2021.

However, as Karen Sands O'Connor emphasises, such 'freedoms', which included the option for schools to independently select stories and reflect a broader experience, ultimately prompted a *lack of change*,³³⁷ with many decisions directed by commercial considerations.

The 1960s and 1970s, a period when many children of the 'Windrush' wave of migrants were in full-time education, was something of a transitional period in Britain. It preceded many of the bolstering stories which emerged from the Caribbean Artists Movement, although one of Andrew Salkey's trio of children's stories was amongst the first books by a Caribbean author that Caryl Phillips recalls reading, Phillips telling me that, although most of his texts for English Literature GCEs were within the 'traditional English canon,' when he was offered the opportunity to order alternative titles, he chose Salkey's *Hurricane*. It was 'as close as I got to the Caribbean,' he confirmed, further clarifying: 'even when I was at university, I never read a book by a Caribbean author.'³³⁸ Despite some ineffectuality of the legislation, the Government's more determined efforts to address the academic underachievement of many immigrants eventually resulted in the Plowden Report of 1967 which outlined some of the disadvantages suffered by those children who did not conformed to misguided perceptions of the 'target' audience. One of the report's findings was that: 'the middle-class world represented by the text and illustrations [was] often alien to the children,' further recommending that: 'research should be instituted into the types of primer and library books which are most effective with children from different backgrounds.' Although its recommendations did not induce immediate, wholesale,

³³⁷ Karen Sands O'Connor, *Children's Publishing and Black Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 27.

³³⁸ Email from Caryl Phillips to Natalie Lucy dated 1st June 2021.

reform, they catalysed meaningful change, signalled by the introduction of the Nippers stories which offered a more inclusive narrative for a diversity and breadth of young children.

Beryl Gilroy and the Nippers Series

It was against a post-war backdrop, some years prior to the Plowden Report with its promise of change, that Beryl Gilroy secured her first teaching roles. The lack of inclusiveness in British schools for the many residents who did not conform to a white, middle-class, profile had been a source of debate for some time. Despite trenchant, eloquent discussion, however, it was not until the Plowden Report that there was any meaningful change. Its effect was, for some, too late, but the Nippers series of books for young school children, with their focus on inclusiveness nevertheless represented some progression within schools. Leila Berg, the initiator of the series, eventually specifically sought out black authors for some of the books, approaching New Beacon Books, where an initially sceptical John La Rose, recommended Beryl Gilroy.³³⁹ In addition to her incisive views on education, Beryl Gilroy had specific, relevant, experience in teaching and writing, an array of attributes which provide clues to her particular success at the 'Nippers' series. Gilroy had already written for schoolchildren in Guyana, including the Green and Gold Readers, which were published between 1967 and 1971. However, perhaps less widely known within her panoply of skills was the rich foundation of insights that she acquired from an unconventional childhood and an education which owed much to the family-led storytelling traditions of her village. Based on oral tradition, Gilroy has discussed the impact of the stories and the storytellers on her appreciation of the

³³⁹ Sands O'Connor, *Children's Publishing and Black Britain*, p. 24.

world and, perhaps more relevant to her personal courage, to her sense of self. With Beryl Gilroy's contribution towards the 'Nippers' stories, she created an important foundation within education and, designed to be taught in schools, the books are credited as providing: 'perhaps the first reflections of the Black British presence in UK for children.'³⁴⁰

Born in 1924 in Guyana, Beryl Gilroy arrived in London in 1951. A combination of factors precluded her from joining the list of 'successful' Caribbean writers that preceded and inspired the Caribbean Artists Movement, including Samuel Selvon and George Lamming. In contrast with the conspicuous success of many of her male counterparts, Sandra Courtman contends that, Gilroy faced a 'double jeopardy of racial exclusion and patriarchal gate-keeping.'³⁴¹ Stymied by a lack of support, with the exception of Andrew Salkey who championed her work, her books were largely rejected in the 1960s with their potential, undoubtedly valuable, contribution to a canon which was almost entirely dominated by male writers ultimately lost. *In Praise of Love and Children*,³⁴² was a story of migration which also explored the legacy of slavery, with Gilroy postulating that it was rejected at the time because it was deemed to be: 'too psychological, strange, way-out, difficult to categorise.'³⁴³ Despite considerable obstacles, Beryl Gilroy's, largely autobiographical *Black Teacher* was published in 1976. It proved highly influential to the Rampton Report's investigations into the underachievement of black children in schools, and several of her other

³⁴⁰ Carole Boyce Davies, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture, Volume 2*, (California: ABC-CLIO, 2008).

³⁴¹ Sandra Courtman, *Discovering Literature: 20th Century: In Praise of Love and Children: Beryl Gilroy's arrival story*, British Library, Published 4th October 2018.

³¹⁶ S. Nasta and S. Courtman, 'An Interview with Beryl Gilroy', *Wasafiri*, 33:2, (2008), 17-21, DOI: [10.1080/02690055.2018.1431101](https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2018.1431101).

³⁴³ Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind, Collected Writings*, ed. by Joan Anim-Addo (Miami: Mango Publishing, 1998) p. 213.

works of fiction were eventually published in the 1980s and 1990s. An impressive plethora of achievements also included Gilroy becoming one of the first black headteachers of a London school in 1968.

In addition to those found in *Black Teacher*, some of Beryl Gilroy's fascinating observations of Britain during the 1950s and 1960s and many of its challenges can be found within her fiction, particularly in the then-overlooked, *In Praise of Love and Children*. However, in *Leaves in the Wind*, a collection of essays published in 2004, Gilroy offers personal recollections, including details of her arrival in London, when she was greeted by the sounds of children shouting 'monkeys' at the boat as she surveyed the 'mother country'. Despite the hostility of the 'welcome' many of Gilroy's early recollections are infused with what seems to be a characteristic combination of excitement, perspicacity, and humour for a London in which she 'experienced conscious overload'. Certain aspects of Gilroy's experiences are disturbing, including being confronted by the 'weekly marches...demanding that [Brixton] be kept white'.

Although there were numerous evident challenges, what stands out within the biographical details of this period, is not only Beryl Gilroy's defiant perseverance but a generosity of spirit. It allowed her to observe that 'the people [were] obeying some interior discipline about behaviour, courtesy, and the expressions of Englishness which were part of [her] heritage.'³⁴⁴ It was an insight that also helped her to comprehend the, conversely, ungenerous behaviour of many in Britain, as, at least in part, the consequences of its Post War impoverishment. Despite the challenges, which also frustrated many of her literary and teaching ambitions, Gilroy was

³⁴⁴ Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, p. 195.

determined to seize those advantages which still existed within the city, including the libraries which she described as ‘so welcoming and accessible, so orderly, so awesome.’ There is something particularly apt, therefore, that in 2022, shortly after the British Library acquired her archive, they hosted an exhibition about Beryl Gilroy within their ‘Treasures’ section.

The stories which Beryl Gilroy wrote for the Nippers series represented a culmination of experience within the education systems of both Guyana and Britain. Her unique perspective enhanced her multifarious skills, and her impact was sufficiently significant that Sandra Courtman described her as: ‘the ultimate outsider who broke down barriers to clear a cultural and creative space for subsequent generations.’³⁴⁵ Gilroy’s insistence on the importance of storytelling to a sense of self helped to instil her determination that children should be able to see themselves in stories, a debate that still continues today amid concerns about a lack of authentic representation of Britain’s cultural breadth within children’s novels. However, Gilroy went further in her conviction that books had a capacity to offer a child: ‘a feeling that some little part of their individual inner desert, that inner desert that has been urbanised and degraded by contemporary life can be made to bloom again.’³⁴⁶

Beryl Gilroy’s accounts suggest that her appreciation of the potential for stories partly stemmed from the rich, lyrical oral tradition she experienced as a child. She celebrated the creativity within the language of her childhood, a style of expression which she recalled as encompassing: ‘spontaneously coined expressions’ such that,

³⁴⁵ Sandra Courtman, Woman Version: *Beryl Gilroy’s Black Teacher*, British Library, 4th October 2018.

³⁴⁶ Susheila Nasta, ‘Interview with Beryl Gilroy’, *Wasafiri. Volume 33: Number 2 (2018)*, pp. 17-21. (NB: Interview took place in 1986).

pointing to the river one could say 'Fish a run tonight' or the fireflies would be described as 'baby stars'.³⁴⁷ Such storytellers 'held [her] spellbound with their appetite for creation in song, dance, gesture and laughter,'³⁴⁸ a tradition she credits with being predominantly maintained by the women. In an interview with Susheila Nasta, Gilroy recalled that: '[she] followed [her] grandmother everywhere. And because of this...learned more about the history and realities of the period of slavery just from listening to stories, the oral tradition.'³⁴⁹ Specifically, Beryl Gilroy was an enthusiast for the Anancy tales and in *Leaves in the Wind* dedicates a chapter to the discussion of the multifunctional Caribbean trickster. However, Andrew Salkey's archive at the British Library contains a further clue to her investment in the trickster character. A brochure for a Symposium, 'Ananse in the Diaspora', which was organised by the publisher Bogle L'Ouverture, lists Beryl Gilroy as one of the key speakers.

Gilroy's experience of Anancy was as a multifaceted, malleable, and opaque figure. In *Leaves in the Wind*, Gilroy recalled how, in her Grandfather's versions of the tales, he often aligned Anancy with the plantation owner, asserting the stories as a lesson against the excesses of power.³⁵⁰ Anancy's multidimensionality positioned him as an ideal storytelling device. He suggested a means to present complex questions and to demand answers and, although Anancy does not transparently feature within the Nippers stories, the potential of the engaging, multifaceted, trickster figure can still be glimpsed within their pages.

³⁴⁷ Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, p. 11.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴⁹ Nasta and Courtman (2018) *An Interview with Beryl Gilroy*, p. 21.

³⁵⁰ Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, p. 184.

The stories which Beryl Gilroy wrote between 1970 and 1975 helped to fill what was something of a chasm, their departure from the ubiquitous portrayals of middle-class, white, children, finally providing an authentic reflection of those who were unable to recognise their own experiences within British books or its media. Her breadth of themes explored the variety of challenges which confronted the diversity of children who were growing up in Britain, specific difficulties which she recognised amongst her pupils.

In *New People at Twenty-Four*, published in 1973, Gilroy depicts a family beset by a ‘curtain-twitching’ racist neighbour who watches them with unspoken but perceptible hostility.³⁵¹ The family in the story is of mixed heritage, which prompts the story's white Grandmother to derisively describe the family as ‘black and white minstrels’ subsequently commenting that ‘it could have been worse[...]they could have both been black.’ Ultimately, when the Grandmother meets the family, she discovers that they are a ‘decent family – just like [her and her family].’ Suspicion and prejudice, and their consequences, form prevalent themes within Gilroy’s work and, in *Knock at Mrs Herbs*, Roy’s mother, who is black, is distrustful of the local park, which she deems to be ‘dangerous’ as well as the ‘peeping’ white neighbour who she describes as a ‘witch’. The errors of her judgement are exposed when the neighbour offers shelter to Roy when his mother has to rush to hospital with his sister.

³⁵¹ The inadequacy of the presence of multicultural characters in British books and children’s books by black British writers is still being discussed in 2020s. The Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children’s Literature 2019 (Published 2020), suggested that, whilst 33.5% of the school population were of minority ethnic origins, only 5% of children’s books had an ethnic minority main character, a notable increase in representation from the even more woeful statistics of previous years which suggested that, only 1% of children’s books published in 2017 for primary school aged children included a main character from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background.

In many of the stories, Beryl Gilroy's message is to step outside the limitations of your experience in order to acquire a more meaningful perspective. This encompasses the opportunities for a wider education which exist outside the confines of school, a theme prevalent in *Outings for Everyone* when Ricky's mother is initially sceptical about the educational value of trips to museums. With Gilroy's typical lack of convention, she embraces the inquisitive, exploring the variety of challenges without suspicion or bias, including the problems presented by being a single parent, poverty, or hunger, as in *The Paper Bag*. However, despite the challenges of many of the lives she portrays, Gilroy creates an appealing, diverse world and, within this work, the multi-footed, ambivalent trickster Anancy can occasionally be discerned, both in a lightness to Beryl Gilroy's stories as she creates visual scenes, often with humour, while challenging societal mores, and in her keen ear for dialogue. A feature of her *Black Teacher*, when her 'voices' reflected a celebration of the variety of language, the sound and creativity of language is also prominent in Gilroy's Nippers books. In *The Paper Bag* the 'victim' of the alleged theft conveys her suspicions over the missing food as: 'someone's nicked it...some sweet-mouthed body nicked it,' and, when she later finds out that the culprit is the hungry Gina, she threatens to 'knock' her. Perhaps most reflective of the stories, although undoubtedly also influenced by her own, often generous, insights, is that Gilroy refuses to impose conventional moralistic judgements on her protagonists. Any 'lessons' within the stories do not follow the traditional, frequently trite, Manichean morals which bear no relation to the realities of many people's lives. In *The Paper Bag*, Gina 'steals' but is not admonished in any way and, when she explains that she was hungry, her explanation is accepted without judgment, with the teacher encouraging everyone to 'share'. Similarly, in *Visitor From Home*, Gilroy

demonstrates the challenges many underprivileged children encounter through a lack of space to sleep or study. When the teacher visits her pupil's home, it offers her an insight into some of the difficulties that might hinder academic attainment. Beryl Gilroy reflects the realities of Britain in the impoverished 1960s and 1970s and, in doing so, not only acts as an advocate for the child, but challenges those in control of education to metaphorically step inside the children's homes.

Despite the absence of an overt presence of Anancy within this set of stories, it is tempting to consider that the Caribbean oral tales not only offered some solace and framework for Beryl Gilroy's life, as they had for Louise Bennett, but that she acted as something of an authorial Anancy in her work. This is particularly evident in her work for children, which is enlivened by her enthusiasm for and sensitivity to language. Beryl Gilroy told a story about how her Grandfather would sometimes hold a mirror up to her and say: 'what you see is how you look. You can be and do whatever you want.'³⁵² In a sense, she sought to offer this valuable lesson within her stories and, with her unique perspective, determinedly navigated a path, creating her own literary revolution through stories and words. In doing so, Gilroy forged a metaphorical bridge between worlds for which Anancy's multi-limbed reach and agility, alongside his brazen determination, undoubtedly provided some inspiration. Louis James described Beryl Gilroy as a 'redoubtable pioneer.'³⁵³ In simple terms, part of what distinguished her achievements was her skill in creating a setting in which multiple perspectives could share a stage. Perhaps most significantly,

³⁵² Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, p. 156.

³⁵³ Louis James, *Caribbean Literature in English* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), p. 94.

however, Gilroy shifted the deracinated, disenfranchised child from out of the shadows and back into the story, not only offering them a place, but a voice.

New Beacons: A Reconstructed Anancy

Many of the artists and writers of the Caribbean Artists Movement identified Anancy as significant to a Caribbean aesthetic. In the writing of Andrew Salkey, Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris he was intertwined with ideas of heritage and offered a specific language which connected much of the Anglophone Caribbean. However, his reinvention was not only a response to a precarious historical period when the Caribbean was seeking to understand the uniqueness and value of its voice, but profoundly connected to ideas of diaspora, the central figure not only providing inspiration but a sense of solidarity for the displaced. The almost complete failure to reflect the stories of a multicultural Britain in the post-war years was eventually remedied by some of the more inclusive stories introduced by Beryl Gilroy. However, in many other spheres of the British media their experience was still absent. It was a predicament that became both profoundly personal and a source of consternation for the many writers with Caribbean heritage who had stayed in Britain, whose children were now forced to negotiate a new identity that did not fit with any visible portrayals in its stories. It is significant that, for many of those writers, Anancy and his tales continued to suggest a useful storytelling device, specifically through his plurality and fluidity. Particularly interesting is that the writers who prominently utilised Anancy as a champion of their stories for a second, or third, generation of children, were all profoundly connected with CAM, reasserting Anancy with a new purpose and at some remove from his earlier incarnations as a champion of the dispossessed. In this writing for children, Anancy with his flamboyance, linguistic verve and

revolutionary potential was honed as a cogent response to being left out of society and as a means to reconnect subsequent generations with their Caribbean heritage. **Faustin Charles** was originally from Trinidad. He studied at London University in the 1960s and attended many of the early CAM meetings. Primarily a poet, Charles was sufficiently invested in Caribbean folk stories that he edited a collection, *Under the Storyteller's Spell*. Charles contributed two stories, including, "Anancy and Monkey Business", in which Anancy is described as 'the cunning trickster spider [who] was caught and taken on a ship bound for the Caribbean,'³⁵⁴ but who, in his current setting, is also the observer who nonchalantly leans against a coconut tree quietly watching. In the story Charles centralises the adversarial relationship between Monkey and Anancy with Anancy typically influencing the way of the world by initiating the trick which not only humiliates the 'vain' Monkey but sees him as 'silly and mischievous' and living in the trees. The story is entertaining, drawing upon Anancy's linguistic skills as well as his intuitive understanding of how to influence others. His trick against Monkey is ultimately successful because of his ability to predict how Monkey will respond. Charles recreates 'theatre' in his tales, physically animating his characters as Monkey 'twists' and 'scratches' at the stinging ants which bite him. As Charles reiterates in his introduction to the collection: 'in the Caribbean, it is not only the story which draws the reader into a world of magic, but also the way in which the story is told.'³⁵⁵

Most overtly building upon the foundation that Beryl Gilroy laid, perhaps, **James Berry** was motivated by his daughter's sense of exclusion within the stories of the

³⁵⁴ Faustin Charles, *Under the Storytellers Spell, Folktales from the Caribbean*, (London: Puffin, 1991), p. 42.

³⁵⁵ Charles, *Under the Storytellers Spell*, p. 1.

nation of which she was ostensibly a part. Berry's versions of the tales explore not only the colourful, but the magic and theatre which is often asserted as carnivalesque. His set of folk tales, *Anancy Spiderman*, were published in 1987, fourteen years after Salkey's *Anancy's Score*. As with many aspects of the task of 'tracing' Anancy or his influence, Berry's tales do not neatly fit to any rigidly linear path, but instead overlap and interconnect with other writers. He was an influential part of CAM, albeit at a later stage and, as such, was both a product of those influences and instrumental to its ideas of an aesthetic and its vision. However, Berry's stories were written with a different objective and explicitly to create new, more diverse, stories for his daughter. Unlike the debate about 'voice' and aesthetic which punctuated the embryonic CAM meetings and conferences, Berry's writing was precipitated by his dismay at the lack of role models for his young, British-born, daughter.

Berry had in fact been involved in education for some time. His anthology, *Bluefoot Traveller* was written in 1976, although the title poem was published much earlier, in 1972. He later recalled at an interview that teachers used the book in their lessons which led to invitations to come into schools, resulting in a fellowship at the South London, Vauxhall Manor Comprehensive school. The importance of this work became apparent to Berry when he 'saw what was happening in schools[...]there were hardly any books which represented black children's background and experience.'³⁵⁶ For Berry, the disconcerting message that he perceived was that: 'black people in Britain were regarded as a kind of strange annexation,' a

³⁵⁶ B. Merrick, 'An Impulse to write: An Interview with James Berry', *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 27, 195-208 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02355641>, (p.202).

perspective that encouraged him to continue to write books ‘to widen consciousness’, books for a ‘multicultural society’ in which he wrote for ‘everybody.’³⁵⁷ However, it was his daughter’s own experiences that specifically precipitated the decision to rewrite the Anancy stories.

James Berry’s archive is held at the British Library. A quantity of material reveals some of the motivations behind Berry’s decision to reinvent the Anancy Tales. Later discussing what impelled him to adopt the Anancy figure, Berry described his discovery of the books that were available to many young children at the time and through which they: ‘entered and discovered the most delightful world of clowning teddy bears, mischievous animals, talking birds and singing fishes and busy insects in summer gardens as purposeful as human beings. But most of all [he] came upon the lives of little boys and girls reflected back to them with great care, great affection.’³⁵⁸ Berry further described how his own daughter was drawn to those superficially ‘magical’ books, particularly those which featured ‘dark-faced’ characters only to discover that the books revealed a series of pejorative depictions of non-Europeans as either dishonest or dependent, stories which were then reasserted on the radio and in other forums. It was this disconcerting, and upsetting, discovery which prompted him to write: ‘in the country [his daughter] was born, [she] inherits books with a grotesque image of herself, read by her contemporary playmates, that are completely acceptable to the rest of the population,’ an insight which also compelled him to assert that the ‘harmony’ of ‘future generations’ depends on ‘the seeds we now sow in children’.³⁵⁹ For Berry, the disillusionment

³⁵⁷ B. Merrick, ‘An Impulse to write: An Interview with James Berry’, p. 203.

³⁵⁸ James Berry’s archive (digitised section), British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items>.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

which informed his perception of his daughter's experience, followed an initial period of enthusiasm about the opportunities which Britain seemed to offer, describing one of London's early advantages as its 'books and accessible libraries.' In fact, Berry's path seems markedly different from many of the highly educated writers and artists who came to Britain in pursuit of academic opportunities. Brathwaite, Ramchand, Rohlehr, Patterson and Ngugi were all somehow engaged in education, either through studying or teaching, at the height of CAM; La Rose had a history of activism and had founded New Beacon Books and Wilson Harris and Andrew Salkey were not only highly educated but were already established either in literary fields or, as in Salkey's case, with considerable writing experience and something of a platform in both publishing and broadcasting. Conversely, Berry had grown up in rural Jamaica, the only son of a smallholder and, like Louise Bennett's mother, a seamstress, and aspects of its influence on his visual sensibility can be glimpsed within his work, particularly in his portrayal of Anancy. However, when he was eighteen, Berry responded to a call to work in the United States of America following a shortage of farm labourers. He stayed there for four years, before the prevailing anathema of racism drove him home to Jamaica in 1948 where he encountered the familiar feeling of being 'stuck'. Successful in securing his passage on the first boat that followed the *Windrush*, the *Orbita*, his arrival in London was, for James Berry, a positive one. Perhaps somewhat inured to some of the hostilities after his profoundly disturbing experiences of racism in the United States and buoyed by his experience of the Caribbean Artists Movement, he enthused: "[I] knew I was right for London and London was right for me.'³⁶⁰ The Caribbean Artists Movement served as an

³⁶⁰ Onyekachi Wambu, 'Black British Literature since *Windrush*', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/literature>.

education, Berry later explaining that: 'coming into contact with the circle of CAM, which had people who[...]were informed, had contact with the Caribbean cultural roots and were motivated politically - helped to give [him] focus and direction.'³⁶¹ By 1971, Berry was one of the organisation's secretaries.³⁶²

Primarily a poet, James Berry had been sufficiently successful that he produced and edited an anthology of Caribbean poetry. He was also the first Caribbean poet to win the Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition in 1981. Perhaps predictably, his principal interests were language and its creative rhythms. In interviews, James Berry spoke of poetry and language, including folklore, as fundamental to a sense of his childhood in which he notably 'questioned' the world. However, his talents were multifarious, and his biography demonstrates a diverse panoply of abilities. In the mid to late 1980s James Berry's desire to 'sow' seeds in which children growing up in Britain could see positive images of themselves materialised in his own series of children's Anancy stories.

Significantly intertwined with ideas of heritage, in his introduction to *Anancy, Spiderman*, Berry emphasises the Caribbean character of his central protagonist, explaining his use of the Caribbean spelling for 'emotional, aesthetic and cultural' reasons. He clarifies this by adding that the folk hero, in the Caribbean, took on 'much that [was] new' so that, for him, this 'familiar spelling has roots magic, a sense of originality and an association with oral truth.'³⁶³ In the blurb to the collection, we are told that Berry 'grew up to the sound of the Anancy stories as they were told, "out

³⁶¹ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artist Movement*, p. 317.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ James Berry, *Anancy Spiderman*, (London: Walker Books, 1987), p. vi.

in moonlight or in dim paraffin lamplight, during rain and storm winds through empty-belly times or big bellyfuls.” Many of Berry’s twenty tales are familiar from those recorded by Walter Jekyll and Martha Warren Beckwith. His ‘players’ are the figures from the stories, Anancy, his ‘son’ Tacoomah, who in other versions of the tales is alternately described as his ‘friend’, Dog and Monkey.

Berry’s tales are told in standard English, his hopes of widening his audience perhaps informing the choice. Nevertheless, in Berry’s tales, the reader can still perceive the orality of the earlier tradition. Music, song, and dance pepper the stories and sounds accompany the tales creating an additional dimension to the story. In “Anancy and Looking for a Wife”, Fire becomes a multi-sensory, auditory presence, which is ‘big and roaring’ against the sounds of Anancy who is ‘speeding’ up the dancing and ‘singing louder.’³⁶⁴ Berry’s Anancy is charming, roguish and clever, an orator who is ‘sweet-mouthed’, persuasive and cunning as he: ‘wrap[s] up his words in tricky traps,’³⁶⁵ but also deceitful and self-centred. Significantly, Anancy is also the ‘creator’, precipitating change. For example, in a reference to ideas of community, Anancy ‘makes’ the ‘Bro Title’ in one of the stories and, in another, “Anancy Mek It” type tale, where ‘ratbats’ are explained as ‘hav[ing] to set up homes in caves to hide from daytime noises,’ we are told that ‘Anancy had a hand in the happening.’³⁶⁶ Throughout Berry’s tales, the setting is distinctively Caribbean, with destructive hurricanes as well as, drawing on some of the metaphysical features, a place where Duppies inform imagination. In the collection, Tiger is still positioned as Anancy’s adversary, tyrannical as he relentlessly pursues Anancy, which, in “Tiger and Anancy

³⁶⁴ Berry, *Anancy Spiderman*, p. 5.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

meet for War”, extends to sending an unprovoked message that he is ‘coming round to Anancy’s house to kill him.’³⁶⁷ Yet, as with the early stories of the plantations, in Berry’s versions Anancy’s ‘brains’ typically overcome Tiger’s ‘brawn,’ and his ability to utilise his powers of persuasion rather than violence, habitually lead to triumph. Tiger, who is usually punished in humiliating and demeaning ways, is reminiscent of some of the earlier tales including “Tiger as a Riding Horse”. A critical part of Tiger’s comeuppance is through his degradation, which include, in one story, an irreverent Anancy succeeding at persuading Tiger, who is trapped in a pit, to ‘pray’ to God, thereby causing him to lose hold of his position, so that he falls further into the pit.

Although Berry’s Anancy usually outwits Tiger, he does not always prevail, particularly against his wife who Berry has elevated to a more meaningful role within his stories and who is sufficiently astute to foil some of Anancy’s nefarious plans, occasionally succeeding at turning them against him. For example, the familiar story in which Anancy pretends to be ill to coerce his wife into allowing him to gorge on the family pig that she wants to sell to acquire land, is reimagined by Berry as “Mrs Anancy, Chicken Soup and Anancy”.³⁶⁸ In Berry’s version, his wife discovers his duplicitousness and outwits Anancy by feeding the coveted chicken to a group of hungry village children who proceed to feast on the food outside the window of Anancy’s ‘sick bed’.

For Berry, Anancy’s appeal is easy to understand and his enjoyment and skills with language make Anancy’s linguistic verve not only a source of appeal but suggest the

³⁶⁷ Berry, *Anancy Spiderman*, p. 34.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-59.

theatrical, ridiculous, trickster as an ideal medium. Berry himself experimented with Nation Language in his poetry, with Sarah Lawson Welsh describing his creative fusion of language as encompassing: ‘nation language and standard English, its experimentation with different poetic forms (the haiku, Jamaican proverb, love lyric, letter home, and creole monologue).’³⁶⁹ However, Berry also focused on creating a visual, potentially enchanting, figure who could specifically appeal to children. A version of the manuscript retained in the British Library includes Berry’s comprehensive notes for the illustrators. Amongst other suggestions, Berry directs that: ‘Anancy should be shown as a man in a spider mask and cloak, which have become parts of his own physical features.’ The accompanying illustrations to the text depict a spider-person with only minimal features attributable to the spider. In “Shine-Dancer-Shine” the potential to create a dynamic and visually arresting figure who can encompass aspirational qualities is illustrated when Anancy is dressed like a ‘prince’ and stands ‘proud-proud.’³⁷⁰

Berry’s aesthetic is not merely visual but draws its roots in the early tales which were imagined as part of a multi-sensory world. In his manuscript for what initially seems to be some kind of play Berry describes all the ‘characters’ as having a musical instrument, which includes monkey ‘on drums’ and rabbit on ‘flute or fife’.³⁷¹ Accordingly, ‘sounds’ feature in all the stories, not only through the music but in the characteristic sounds of animals, including the ‘clop-pi-ti’ in the John Canoo story. Sound also emerges in a familiar aesthetic which not only relies upon a rhythmic

³⁶⁹ Sarah Lawson Welsh, ‘Fashioning Idiom and Poetic Form’, *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, ed. by S. Nasta and M. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 329 – 352, (p. 339).

³⁷⁰ Berry, *Anancy-Spiderman*, p. 9.

³⁷¹ Undigitized notebooks contained within James Berry’s Archive, The British Library, Add MS 89353.

arrangement of the words, but as with many of the earlier tales, incorporates songs. However, Berry does not merely replicate the visual and auditory features which enhanced and animated the earlier tales, he places an additional emphasis, creating dramatic spectacles within his versions. In the attempt to assert a form of storytelling which relies on a different, primarily oral, tradition which draws on both aural and visual features, there is an overt sense of celebration. Anancy's 'battle' with Tiger is markedly theatrical as Anancy emerges to what is a 'dance battle' in a shiny, sparkling suit. In this, Berry not only conjures up ideas of disguise and Anancy's traditional skill of shapeshifting, but the Carnival performer, thereby connecting Anancy to the multitude of cultural traditions that not only inform Caribbean life but that of its diaspora. In Berry's tales, Anancy is playful, flamboyant, and demonstrative, charismatic, and extreme, reflecting his dual nature, with Berry directing the illustrator to portray the character as: 'in triumph no one is more jubilant than Anancy. In sadness no one is more sad.'³⁷²

Berry's notebooks from this period at the British Library demonstrate his determination not only to recreate the tales of the Caribbean but to assert positive role models within other stories, which could represent both a more authentic and inclusive version of the world. His notebooks include plans to write a story about a mixed heritage couple as well as other, predominantly child orientated stories, including an objective to 'write a popular story' that should 'be like a Punch and Judy tale'. The humour and dualities inherent within 'Punch and Judy' performances suggest obvious parallels with his versions of the Anancy tales, most notably in the

³⁷² Undigitized notebooks contained within James Berry's Archive, The British Library, Add MS 89353.

sequences in which Anancy and Tiger are depicted in a series of clashes, tricks, and intrigue, which often suggest a play on 'cat and mouse' structures. However, Berry's fixation on Punch and Judy also suggests a desire to use the stories to 'translate' some of the themes of the Anancy Tales. In another part of a notebook, Berry's ideas are documented through a series of anecdotes, through which to not only explore the challenges and detriments of racism but the vividness and variety of Caribbean heritage. However, as determined as Berry was to create entertaining stories and potential role models that did not merely build upon 'traditional' British ideas, he also sought to reflect themes which were relevant to the contemporary Britain that his daughter was growing up within, in a desire to celebrate cross-culturality.

Ultimately, Berry's Anancy tales created something of a foundation for the many children of Caribbean heritage who had lost a connection to the stories that Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris and Beryl Gilroy could readily recall from their childhoods. In doing so, he mined the many prominent, engaging features of the earlier tales, reasserting the themes of disguise as well as the potential for language and cleverness to achieve a semblance of power through an Anancy who encompassed a multi-sensory experience which utilised theatre, sound, and music. A sense of the tradition that Berry attempts to continue is perhaps most poignantly conveyed in the collection's final story. Anancy, who, apparently has now reformed, having 'done a good deed for a neighbour', witnesses the dual powers of Lion and Tiger in a brutal fight. After the battle, unexpectedly 'Anancy feels sorry for Tiger,' who 'seems the sadder of the two.'³⁷³ Incongruously eager to 'comfort' Tiger, Anancy follows him,

³⁷³ Berry, *Anancy-Spiderman*, p. 118.

trying to reassure Tiger that he was a 'giant fighter'. However, somewhat inexplicably, a series of natural disasters cause the sea to separate Anancy from Tiger so that initially the story suggests something of allegory, its reference to the eventual decline of the British Empire, signified by a saddened, defeated Tiger leaving the Caribbean. It is an interpretation which becomes ambiguous when Anancy is declared to 'miss Tiger' and determines to tell stories about him, as he 'hides in bedrooms and whispers stories like dreams.'³⁷⁴

Andrew Salkey again returned to Anancy in his third collection of reinvented tales in the '*Brother Anancy*' stories. In *Anancy's Score*, Anancy was utilised as a device, conveying a sense of solidarity as a companion for those of the diaspora. In *Anancy, Traveller*, the relentless nomad continued on his path, analysing the history of the Caribbean while also seeking answers as he moved forward. In this collection, Salkey utilises the trickster Anancy for another, perhaps more personal, role when introducing Anancy to a much younger, audience. The book is notably dedicated both to Salkey's grandson and '[his grandson's] parents,' (one of Salkey's sons, Elliot) and, although published in 1993, it is probable that many stories were written earlier. *Brother Anancy* is a disparate, diverse collection which includes a range of stories, many of which are not Anancy stories. Some of them reference Andrew Salkey's wife 'Pat' who features in certain of the tales. In other tales the setting is Jamaica.

As suggested by the title, a quantity of stories are 'Anancy tales' and are divided into 'Retold Traditional Anancy Stories' and 'Original Anancy Stories.' As with Salkey's

³⁷⁴ Berry, *Anancy-Spiderman.*, p. 119.

earlier collections, the stories recall something of the essence of the earlier tales while demonstrating the ways that a reinvented Anancy is capable of being reconstructed and reasserted with a more contemporary purpose. As well as offering a very personal, specific history of his ancestry for his grandson, like Berry, in this third set of stories, there is a palpable sense that Salkey is consciously educating his family, growing up away from the Caribbean, about 'the Spider, who was also a person [who] was well known as tricky spider-man.'³⁷⁵ Acknowledging something of his earlier, youthful, ignorance about some of the symbolism of Anancy, his son, Jason Salkey, told me: 'As I got older I realised [my father] had built a connection between the African and Caribbean origins of Anancy, but as a kid in '73 when Score came out my little brain liked the idea of a wise spider that sometimes pisses people off...'³⁷⁶ If Salkey's *Anancy's Score* contained a message and source of inspiration for the diaspora, in this collection, Salkey reinvents Anancy for a new audience, sketching a world in which Tacuma and Anancy are: 'old friends and partners of very many adventures in West African and Caribbean countries.'³⁷⁷ In doing so, he notionally starts at a different 'beginning' from his alternate Creation story in *Anancy's Score*. Instead, Salkey places the emphasis on Anancy's West African origins, describing him as: 'a spider boy in Nigeria, the old Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone and Mali [before] he brought his craving for honey dumplings all the way across the Middle Passage into the horrors of slavery in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean.'³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Andrew Salkey, *Brother Anancy and Other Stories* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 61.

³⁷⁶ Email from Jason Salkey to Natalie Lucy dated 14th February 2022.

³⁷⁷ Salkey, *Brother Anancy and Other Stories*, p. 70.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Despite Salkey's reference to the brutal history in which the stories were cultivated, a sense of magic still imbues this collection, tales in which Anancy collects the 'common sense' of the world in a traditional African calabash, in an allusion to one of the early Ashanti stories. Anancy is also a more altruistic character in these versions although, parallel to the early West African tales, he defies categorisations, a fluid character who: '[is] severally a spider, a man, a woman, an old world-new-world phenomenon and fighter against all forms of oppression,' Salkey further explaining that, 'indeed, he was a she and she was a he, customarily referred to as he because of the world's lack of education in matters of unity, fusion and transcendent transmutation.'³⁷⁹ In Salkey's poetry for children this fluidity is explained through the simplistic: 'Anancy is a spider/Anancy is a man; Anancy's West Indian And West African/ Sometimes, he wears a waistcoat; Sometimes, he carries a cane; Sometimes, he sports a top hat; Sometimes, he's just a plain/Ordinary, black, hairy spider.'³⁸⁰

Part of the potential of Anancy's fluidity is his ability to adapt and progress, but in these stories, Salkey echoes something of Wilson Harris's vision offering hints of Anancy as a device through which to re-imagine the often constraining, and unjust, social order. In these stories, Anancy is re-positioned as something of an activist, an arch negotiator, who can apply his linguistic skills to fight for the underdog. In "Brother Anancy and the Contract Workers", the habitually lazy Anancy is incited into action through a sense of abhorrence at the exploitation of Jamaican workers in Massachusetts and is ultimately successful in negotiating more favourable conditions

³⁷⁹ Salkey, *Brother Anancy and Other Stories*, p. 100.

³⁸⁰ Cited in Cecil Gray, ed., 'Parang: A Poetry Anthology for Caribbean Primary Schools', Volume 14 (Sunbury-on-Thames: Nelson, 1977).

for the workers through an amalgam of abilities which include his magical powers and his visual, physical strengths. At times humorous, or even farcical, Anancy's exploits are reminiscent of the satirical story "The One" and, while Salkey uses somewhat diluted, more simplistic language and themes, Anancy's athletic, fantastical feats are still impressive when he: 'spirit[s] himself to the Ministry of Labour, hurling his sleek body ballistically from an old, convenient web-hold to a new one, ending up at the exalted portals of the government office.' When Anancy is later refused entry to the Minister by 'minions' who 'stand rock-steady' he takes matters into his own hands, going 'into a fast spin of decisive, emergency action...spin[ning] a vast laughing-web over the Ministry building which certainly affected the pompous attitude of the ever-grumpy, disobliging minions.'³⁸¹ In these tales, Anancy is audacious and physically active, his energy and spontaneity allowing him to seize advantage by bringing about change, yet always informed by an innate and intuitive cleverness. More consciously created to convey the richness of the heritage, it is notable that Salkey asserts what Anancy could be, utilising his skills for a less self-centred gain within the magical, oral style of the folktale, so that, symbolically perhaps, the resistance figure of the plantations has once again been reasserted.

The Anancy who was adopted in the 1960s and early 1970s by many of the contributors to the Caribbean Artists Movement was consciously moulded and reasserted to say something trenchant about heritage and hybridity. In the writing of Beryl Gilroy, and the later versions of the Anancy Tales by Faustin Charles, James Berry and Andrew Salkey, there has been something of a shift in focus. Berry and

³⁸¹ Salkey, *Brother Anancy and Other Stories*, pp.. 94-95.

Salkey in particular have remoulded Anancy as a figure for children, one who not only celebrates their heritage but creates a sense of place for the children who, as Hall says, had their identities 'forged in the teeth of immigration.' The suggested hostility of Hall's description is not overstated, and the ability of these writers to carve out a space within the stories of Britain created a crucial foundation for the generations that followed. For some it was too late, but for those who had access to the rich cultural oral tradition of the Caribbean the stories undoubtedly offered comfort and a sense of validity. Symbolically and powerfully, James Berry in particular, went further in his reimagining of Anancy, not only in his vision of an Anancy who was both intoxicating and engaging, flamboyant, clever, and at times revolutionary, but in conveying the message that his Caribbean Anancy was in Britain to stay.

Chapter 5: Towards a Sense of Belonging: Anancy, the Tales and their Emergence in British Writing of the Caribbean Diaspora

‘Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness...where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative or even oppositional act of political insubordination.’³⁸²

(Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic)

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which an ‘Anancy aesthetic’ emerges within the literature of a ‘Second Generation’ of British writers with Caribbean heritage. The majority of the writers within this chapter were born in Britain between the late 1950s and early 1960s to parents who had migrated from the Caribbean in the years which immediately followed the Empire Windrush’s departure in 1948. Unable to locate their specific experience within Britain’s books or media, a prominent theme within the work of these black, British writers, which spans a period from the 1990s to 2010s, is a palpable sense of ‘unbelonging’. It prompted many of these writers to embark on what became profoundly personal, metaphorical and literal, journeys in an attempt to understand their pluralistic, protean, identities. In its navigation, the fluid, malleable, Anancy who evaded classification, emerged as a pertinent archetype. A specific question for this chapter is the extent to which these writers utilise a narrative style which draws upon both features of the tales and a

³⁸² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 1.

recognisable Anancy archetype as a way to negotiate ideas of belonging. Part of this is their attempt not only to recover history, reasserting it from a non-Eurocentric perspective, but to utilise a different style of narrative which draws more substantially upon an oral tradition and which foregrounds specific characteristics from the Anancy Tales.

For many Second-Generation Caribbean migrants, particularly those born in the 1950s and 1960s, much of their education was driven by an imperialistic perspective within a Britain which, despite its significant history of migration, still insisted upon perceiving itself as a 'white' country. A period distinguished by ideas of transition, it preceded the initiatives of the Caribbean Artists Movement and their efforts to identify the Caribbean aesthetic which drew upon, and celebrated, the vivid, multi-sensory, elements of its oral tradition. It was also before the raft of more inclusive stories were eventually introduced within schools, signalled by the Nippers Series in the early 1970s. Any attempt to categorise writers solely according to 'generation' is predictably problematic, particularly when so many Britons now have mixed heritage and when the most significant, post-war, periods of migration, span decades.

However, as well as being of a Second Generation, Andrea Levy, Alex Wheatle, and Winsome Pinnock, share other characteristics and were all born between the late 1950s and early 1960s, to parents who arrived in Britain during significant early waves of migration from Jamaica. While generational factors are still important considerations both to issues of identity and proximity to the Caribbean, I have also included several writers in this category who satisfy other criteria, most notably through their age and, therefore, albeit in a loose sense, the nature of their education in Britain. For this reason, I have included Caryl Phillips, who was born in St Kitts in

1958, arriving in Britain as a baby before he spent his childhood in Leeds, and Ferdinand Dennis, who was born in 1956, and moved to London from Jamaica to join his parents when he was eight years old.

A profound sense of disconnection emerges as a defining feature of the childhood histories of many of a Second Generation. The innumerable challenges of growing up were heightened by the complexities of navigating an identity as black Britons, particularly when few models existed to offer any form of inspiration or validation. It was also compounded by both an absence of role models and the pejorative stereotypes that typified portrayals of those who did not conform to the prevailing, narrow ideas of 'white' Britishness. The consequence was that books and stories, which, to Beryl Gilroy, offered the potential for escape and a restorative 'oasis', were frequently a source of anxiety. As a young boy Caryl Phillips, whose immersion in books was such that he perceived their events to be 'real' was enthusiastic about Enid Blyton's fiction,³⁸³ stories which, while often compelling, also assert racist and gender stereotypes. With no obvious point of connection for the young Caryl Phillips any solace that books could provide within a frequently challenging childhood, may have been eclipsed by an exacerbation of his sense of isolation and rejection. A woefully common experience in a 1960s Britain, Andrea Levy attributed her own sense of deracination to: '[not being] able to read about [herself]. That experience of being Black and British. That new sort of identity.'³⁸⁴ In interviews, Alex Wheatle has similarly decried the complete lack of positive black role models in his youth, either in

³⁸³ Caryl Phillips, *Color Me English*, p. 108.

³⁸⁴ "British Library." [2013]. *www.bl.uk* <<https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/recording-andrea-levy-for-authors-lives>> [accessed 1st June 2023].

literature or Britain's other forms of media or the arts.³⁸⁵ It was a cultural vacuum that might have been occupied by a sense of the rich Caribbean cultural traditions which included folklore. However, while undoubtedly passed on within some families, this was not a universal experience. Ferdinand Dennis told me that he could not recall being told Anancy tales in childhood,³⁸⁶ and Caryl Phillips said that he 'hadn't read the stories.'³⁸⁷ There are several possible reasons behind this, including a growing ambivalence towards Anancy. For Andrea Levy, her parents' determination to assimilate may also have accounted for the neglect, with Levy later confirming of her childhood that they: 'never discussed Jamaica with anyone.'³⁸⁸ For others, the geographical distance from grandparents together with the demands of surviving financially in Britain, resulted in a lack of time and space to meaningfully pass on these stories.

Within something of a cultural desert, therefore, many black Britons were forced to seek out a sense of identity and heritage elsewhere. The well-established African American literary tradition which had been burgeoning since the Harlem Renaissance, offered an obvious and appealing resource for Black Britons, providing, what Paul Gilroy described as: 'the raw materials for creative processes which redefine[d] what it means to be black.'³⁸⁹ That it achieved this so profoundly is evident from the recollections of many Second Generation writers growing up in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Ferdinand Dennis described African American literature as offering him: 'a language which helped to make sense of [his] situation

³⁸⁵ Carolyn Cooper, 'Reggae, Roots and the Brixton Bard: Carolyn Cooper talks to Alex Wheatle', *Wasafiri* Volume 35, No. 3 (2020), 34-38.

³⁸⁶ Email from Ferdinand Dennis to Natalie Lucy dated 26th October 2020.

³⁸⁷ Email from Caryl Phillips to Natalie Lucy dated 19th November 2019.

³⁸⁸ Andrea Levy, *Back to My Own Country: An Essay by Andrea Levy*, British Library Website: Articles, (2014).

³⁸⁹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2013) p. 202.

which seemed to lack historical precedent and about which no books had been written,³⁹⁰ and, in numerous interviews, Alex Wheatle has recalled the impact of literature upon his sense of self. In addition to the transformative effect of reading C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins*, and its impact on his understanding of his Caribbean heritage, he credits the writing of Chester Himes and Richard Wright as profoundly informing his sense of identity.³⁹¹

For many of these writers, their early adult years were also substantially affected by the work of the Caribbean Artists Movement. Through the sustained efforts of many of its members, its work and initiatives gradually seeped into the culture, the aesthetic they had honed within a diversity of written and artistic forms suggesting a 'language' specific to their experience. For Dennis, the encounters with the Caribbean Artists Movement proved particularly defining, with the writing and wisdom of John La Rose's speeches, together with the spoken poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson, opening him up to the possibilities of language. The inspiration of its activism was such that, as a member of the Black Student Society, Dennis later recalled the impact of: 'listen[ing] to speakers like Darcus Howe, Cecil Gutzmore, John La Rose and[...]Linton Kwesi Johnson in performance with his band One Love...'³⁹² Fittingly, perhaps, such connections were rarely simple and linear, but formed part of a series of oral chains, symbolically emerging as an intricate web. For example, Linton Kwesi Johnson describes John La Rose and Sarah White as opening up a 'whole new world' for him in his youth, with La Rose and Andrew Salkey introducing him to black literature which he describes as: 'discovering an

³⁹⁰ Ferdinand Dennis and N. Khan, *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, The Caribbean and Africa* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), p. 43.

³⁹¹ Email from Alex Wheatle to Natalie Lucy, dated 28th March 2020.

³⁹² Dennis, and Khan, *Voices of the Crossing*, p. 43.

oasis in a desert of knowledge.³⁹³ Yet, these exciting exchanges stimulated further, emanating circles such that, in turn, Alex Wheatle has described Linton Kwesi Johnson as: ‘the only [writer he] could really relate to, growing up as a teenager.’³⁹⁴ While not always visible on school or library shelves, therefore, the words of Salkey, La Rose and Brathwaite, and initiatives which included *The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books*, increasingly impacted on the literary and political landscape helping to instil and hone a specific sense of cultural identity. Significantly, it was an aesthetic which was intertwined with Caribbean oral tradition with its foundations in the stories of Anancy, central to which were ideas of fluidity and hybridity.

Despite the apparent ambivalence of many of this generation towards Anancy, which may reflect the lack of familiarity with the significance of the stories to Caribbean history and heritage, the tales offered a way for those who did not conform to the narrow stereotypes to ‘fit’. They also suggested a creative tool through which to explore and reaffirm protean forms of identity and a hybrid heritage. Notably more creolised and more fixed, in simple terms, the diasporic, fluid Anancy, could suggest alternative ways to tell the story, proffering a fragile, yet recognisable, means of securing a sense of place. The multiplicity of ways in which those influences impacted upon the writing of the Second Generation, raises a number of questions: firstly, whether the work of this Generation of Writers reveals traces of the ‘Anancy aesthetic’ that I have sought to define in this thesis and what that might reveal about Anancy’s legacy and shape, some years after his arrival from the Caribbean. The

³⁹³ ‘A Conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson’, *Wasafiri*, Vol. 24, No 3, (2009), pp. 35-41.

³⁹⁴ Carolyn Cooper, ‘Reggae, Roots and the Brixton Bard: Carolyn Cooper Talks to Alex Wheatle’, *Wasafiri*, 35.3, (2020), pp. 34-38, DOI: [10.1080/02690055.2020.1760456](https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2020.1760456).

second, more tangential, and less tangible, question concerns the possibility that any decline in the significance of Anancy within the work of subsequent generations of Britons with Caribbean heritage might be intertwined with notions of being ‘fully immigrated.’

‘Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact...we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.’³⁹⁵

(Stuart Hall)

Alex Wheatle’s Problematic Anancy-Hero

The son of Jamaican immigrants, Alex Wheatle’s experiences within a brutal Care Home, and his education at a predominantly ‘white’ school, resulted in an almost complete disconnection from his Caribbean heritage and the folklore that formed such a rich part of that culture. It was not until the late 1970s when the fourteen-year-old Wheatle was rehoused in Brixton that he began to understand something of his heritage, Wheatle later recounting how: ‘Rasta bredrin informed [him] about the lineage of Haile Selassie going back to King Solomon.’³⁹⁶ As part of this wider education, which he described as ‘offer[ing him] a rush of cultural and storytelling reference points,’³⁹⁷ he also heard about Anancy stories and Louise Bennett and it is significant to his perspective of Anancy that Wheatle’s perception of the folkloric

³⁹⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by J. Rutherford, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237.

³⁹⁶ Email to Natalie Lucy from Alex Wheatle dated 20th March 2020.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

character was acquired via another spoken chain of influence through the conversations with a wider, surrogate 'family' that he encountered in Brixton.

Wheatle's enthusiasm for Caribbean storytelling is evident and, in much of his writing there is an overt attempt to continue a folkloric tradition which he typically invokes to convey ideas of heritage. In *Island Songs*, the Anancy Tales evoke a rich, continuous oral tradition with its roots in West African folk culture which is habitually conveyed by female family members: 'telling African Anancy stories to seven captivated children.'³⁹⁸ In *East of Acre Lane*, Jah Nelson attempts to instil a sense of a proud Caribbean tradition in part through reference to the Anancy stories³⁹⁹ and, in Wheatle's *Cane Warriors*, set during the Tacky Rebellion, Moa, the principal protagonist derives much of his confidence from the Anancy tales. Amidst the grief occasioned by the death of one of the principal storytellers on the plantation, is the question: 'Who gonna tell de Liccle pickney Anancy stories now?'⁴⁰⁰

Despite the evident importance that Wheatle places upon Anancy as a 'culture bearer' and his role in conveying a sense of heritage within childhood, Wheatle typically invokes Anancy in the historical, plantation setting of the Caribbean. As such, the shapeshifting and liminal figure who Brathwaite and Harris imbued with a transformational, transnational, potential, is primarily a static figure who, despite acting as a banner for Caribbean heritage, is typically described in negative terms. In *Island Songs*, Anancy is separately described as: 'deceitful, manipulative [and]

³⁹⁸ Alex Wheatle, *Island Songs* (London: Quercus Publishing, 2022), Kindle Book, Chapter Four, paragraph 51, n.p.

³⁹⁹ Alex Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), p. 133.

⁴⁰⁰ Alex Wheatle, *Cane Warriors* (London: Andersen Press, 2021), Kindle Book, Chapter One, paragraph 7, n.p.

plotting'⁴⁰¹ and 'wily, manipulative and secretive.'⁴⁰² It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that within Wheatle's adult fictional world, any emergence of Anancy is either problematic or opaque. In fact, in response to my question about the possible inspiration of Anancy for his characters, Alex Wheatle (generously) explained that, in his 'Brixton' series, his primary motivation had merely been to create characters 'who [didn't] have to conform to society norms and [could] work outside of that,'⁴⁰³ distancing his characters from any potential archetype for Anancy within his work. It is interesting that, despite Wheatle's assertions, his non-conformist character, Floyd, bears numerous similarities to Anancy. Floyd appears in both *Brixton Rock*, and *East of Acre Lane*. In the latter novel, Floyd has notably developed into a more politically aware but concomitantly more disenfranchised figure. Still unable to maintain a constructive path as he carries out risky, petty thefts and burglaries, despite the examples of both his close friend, Brenton Brown, who has found both a flat and work, and his girlfriend who has hopes of training to become a social worker, the older Floyd is, however, described as politically motivated, frequently attending a local library to 'take out dese books 'bout communism an' dat Marxist t'ing.'⁴⁰⁴ Within the earlier, *Brixton Rock*, Floyd is predominantly a 'hustler', indolent, reckless, irresponsible and manipulative. Floyd is often shown in contrast with Brenton, his 'hostel mate' who, despite his anger at being abandoned by his parents, still musters some concern for others and a sensitivity which ultimately endears him to his social worker who jokes that 'one day he will [adopt] him.'⁴⁰⁵ Despite his flaws, it is through Floyd's superficial, Anancylike, charm, and an overt physical attractiveness, that he

⁴⁰¹ Wheatle, *Island Songs*, Kindle Book, Chapter 17, paragraph 90, n.p.

⁴⁰² Ibid., Chapter 18, paragraph 14, n.p.

⁴⁰³ Email from Alex Wheatle to Natalie Lucy dated 28th March 2020.

⁴⁰⁴ Alex Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane*, p. 59.

⁴⁰⁵ Alex Wheatle, *Brixton Rock* (London: Black Amber Books, 2004), p. 43.

wrests some semblance of power. At points of the narrative and, in spite of Wheatle's denial of any conscious influence of Anancy, the parallels with the folkloric trickster are glaring. For example, Floyd's girlfriend, Sharon is pronounced to: 'like Floyd's roguish looks and trickster personality.'⁴⁰⁶ In other parts of the narrative he is described as 'grin[ning] like a two-timing fox,'⁴⁰⁷ exhibiting both 'crafty habits,'⁴⁰⁸ and 'cunning' alongside an enthusiasm for clothes and a sexual voraciousness, which is pertinently expressed as Floyd 'crav[ing] enough women.'⁴⁰⁹ Floyd's girlfriend, Sharon, further emphasises the connection when she threatens Floyd that, if he cheats on her, '[she] will sack [him] so quick [he] won't have time to think of some trickster explanation.'⁴¹⁰ Again, like Anancy, Floyd's philandering seems more about the appearance of achieving 'conquests' than any physical desire, a motivation which is underlined by Floyd's attempts both to persuade Brenton to introduce him to his sister Juliet, and his boasting about the idea of propositioning Brenton's nemesis, the violent and ruthless Flynn's, girlfriend.

In one sense, Floyd is the disaffected 'hustler,' typical of many second-generation immigrants in the 1970s whose struggles to belong were exacerbated by a dismal economy that offered few opportunities. It is a sense of frustration that is starkly illustrated in *Brixton Rock* by Floyd's 'disrespect' for his father, dismissing the job that he has held for twenty-five years, as 'a job the white man didn't want to do.' Symbolic and demonstrative of his sense of abandonment, after his parents' evident sacrifice for 'better opportunities,' Floyd represents a response to the socio-

⁴⁰⁶ Wheatle, *Brixton Rock*, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

economic challenges of the sprawling estates where Wheatle's principal characters grapple with the injustices of police persecution, gang rivalries and an economic recession which has eroded any sense of hope. Despite this, the innumerable allusions to Anancy often seem specific, made more pronounced by the fact that Floyd emulates a raft of vices that are attributed to Anancy in Wheatle's *Island Songs* when he is described as cunning, deceitful, and manipulative. Perhaps ironically, however, Anancy's influence emerges most persuasively and positively in Floyd's use of language. In contrast with the confused, angry, Brenton, Floyd's confidence is founded on a 'Brixtonian wit and smooth, melted coconut chat.'⁴¹¹ More nomadic than rootless we are told that 'from Floyd's voice you could guess he had spent most of his childhood in the watchfulness of a West Indian influence, but if you heard Brenton speak without seeing him in the flesh you would have taken him for a white cockney teenager.'⁴¹² Something of a 'creolized' Caribbean figure, Floyd's ability to navigate the challenges within a hostile environment seem reminiscent not only of Anancy but of a form of verbal virtuosity which Wheatle associates with the energy and sounds of Brixton in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In contrast with Brenton, whose anxiety arises from his sense of 'straddling' two distinct groups, dual heritages that he knows nothing about, Floyd exhibits an Anancy-like swagger. It is a sense of confidence that is rooted in place, with Floyd's dialogue emulating many of the oral speech patterns which are specific to the Caribbean, displayed through a repetition of words, including: 'fool-fool,'⁴¹³ and his exaggerated storytelling, which is deemed to be, 'over hyped.'⁴¹⁴ It is a foundation and potential rootedness which Brenton perceives as wasted. In contrast with Floyd's childhood experience, Brenton

⁴¹¹ Wheatle, *Brixton Rock*, p. 11.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

is still haunted by the nightmares of his children's home and is almost immediately offered a solution to his sense of deracination through reconnecting with his Mother and the support and example of his well-groomed, well-educated, sister Juliet who seems to have found a 'space' within the society he feels excluded from. Employed in a bank and moving in a culturally diverse sphere, her encouragement prompts Brenton to inquire about college courses and to glimpse the possibility of progress in contrast with Floyd's willful disconnection from society.

If Floyd proves unable to harness any of Anancy's transformative potential, in his portrayal of Jah Nelson, who features in both *Brixton Rock* and *East of Acre Lane*, Wheatle suggests a restorative potential of storytelling and, specifically, of Anancy. Alex Wheatle told me that he perceived Jah Nelson as: 'our link to Africa and the African traditions.' He further clarified this by explaining: 'he's not simply an eccentric character who buys weed from Biscuit.'⁴¹⁵ However, any doubts about Jah Nelson's relevance within *Brixton Rock* are further clarified by his later emergence in *East of Acre Lane*, where he exhibits many of the aspirational, 'culture bearing', features of the Caribbean folkloric figure, the 'clever spider who can change into any shape he wants.'⁴¹⁶ Jah Nelson represents a 'quasi' Anancy figure, a nomad who comments upon society's injustices from the borders and establishes a thread of rootedness towards Africa, providing a notional anchor for the uprooted and displaced. It is a purpose that Winsome Pinnock, another 'Second Generation' writer who was born in 1961 in London, utilises through the Obeah, 'Mai', in her play, *Leave Taking*. Enid migrated from Jamaica, determined to create a better life for her two daughters, both

⁴¹⁵ Email from Alex Wheatle to Natalie Lucy dated 28th March 2020.

⁴¹⁶ Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane*, p. 133.

of whom struggle with a sense of belonging. It is an inner conflict which is exacerbated by their lack of understanding of the brutality of Enid's poverty in Jamaica, which included hunger which she describes as: 'the sort that roar in your belly day and night till you think you going mad with the thought a food.'⁴¹⁷ Mai ultimately intervenes in the attempt to help each family member to achieve some resolution, despite their distinct, at times, distant perspectives. However, it is interesting that, in Pinnock's play, the Obeah assumes something of the role that Brathwaite or Salkey might have attributed to Anancy. There are no simplistic, binary, solutions and the many similarities between Mai and Anancy encompass her ambiguity, dubious morality, and, in the 2018 revival of the play at Bush Theatre, suggestions of gender fluidity. Significantly, despite a series of negative traits, Mai provides an essential and symbolic connection to a Jamaican past with one of her most powerful attributes emerging as her ability to 'see the truth.'

Unlike Salkey, whose multifaceted Anancy could be utilised within a panoply of contrasting contexts to suggest solutions, Wheatle seems to doubt Anancy's potential to resolve many of the contemporary dilemmas which affect his diasporic home. Whether Wheatle's apparent reluctance to adopt Anancy as seer or culture bearer stems from a decline in his popularity in the Caribbean is uncertain, but, in contrast with the potential that Brathwaite, Salkey and Harris perceived within the trickster's armoury it is notable that Wheatle attributes this role to Jah Nelson and Pinnock to the Obeah rather than to an overt, recognisable, Anancy figure.

⁴¹⁷ Winsome Pinnock, *Leave Taking* (Bush Theatre, 2018), p. 42.

Wheatle's Anancy 'aesthetic' and the creation of a sense of belonging

Although Wheatle's Anancy remains a static signifier of heritage, the narrative style of the Anancy tales can still be glimpsed within Wheatle's work. Features of what I earlier sought to define as an 'Anancy aesthetic' emerge in Wheatle's specific use of language, especially to describe place, and in the auditory and visual facets of the tales. It is also particularly conspicuous in his characters' speech, with Wheatle explaining to me: 'If I was conscious of anything, it was the way I presented my characters in dialogue[...]I wanted to give them that distinctive feel – [that] they could have come from nowhere but Brixton[...]Language identity and that preservation of who we really are is important to me.'⁴¹⁸ In fact, Wheatle's dialogue not only creates a sense of belonging but suggests a celebration of that world and, in contrast with the physical geography of the council estates of the time in their run down, at times squalid, environment, he cultivates a vibrant aural backdrop to his narrative. Wheatle re-appropriates specific traditional forms of literature, reinventing them from a new, equally valid, perspective. Just as *Brixton Rock* alludes to *Brighton Rock*, which is now perceived as 'classic' British literature, his book for children, *Crongton Knights*, reimagines a crusade. Wheatle's literary worlds are hewn from the people and places of Brixton and the fictional South London area, Crongton, in which his casts of characters interlink and evolve within a variety of connected stories. As already discussed, a prominent feature of any 'Anancy aesthetic' in Wheatle's work emerges in the sound and lyricism of his distinctive language. It is a lexicon that encompasses a specific form of appropriation through dialogue, which refers to 'yard,' 'brethren' 'fam' 'ends' and 'brud' and 'bredrin.' This use of language is not only specific to place but he 'claims' it in a way that is distinctly 'Brixtonian.' Although Wheatle does not,

⁴¹⁸ Email from Alex Wheatle to Natalie Lucy, 28th March 2020.

therefore, use Anancy as a device to appropriate place, in the way that Bennett's Anancy 'mek' his world, he still claims space by carving out a world that is both familiar and hospitable. It is a place in which friends are described as 'spars' and dialogue is 'lyrics', in another symbolic reference to music. Wheatle's characters also speak in a version of language which has its roots in Caribbean oral patterns, including practices which include boasting, or trading insults for humorous effect, a dynamic which is particularly apparent in his children's Crongton Series. While such oral patterns were undoubtedly drawn from the voices of Brixton, they are also attributable to the practices of the Caribbean, the 'broad talking', or 'rhyming', which resemble the African American 'signifying' and 'playing the dozens,' and which emerge in much of the Anancy-Monkey interaction in the early tales. Floyd in particular demonstrates a linguistic creativity and enjoyment of language through an inventiveness which extends to words which include 'grabbalicious'. In Wheatle's dialogue such 'sparring' or exchanges are infused with humour, which provides further relief from the challenges of the characters' lives. Like the Anancy tales, his world is inclusive and familiar, a multi-dimensional space that he achieves mainly through his manipulation of language.

Naming

An important facet of Wheatle's linguistic world building stems from his use of names. It was also a significant feature of an Anancy aesthetic, with its symbolism and resonance on the plantations. In the earlier Anancy Tales, its function was twofold: to appropriate the world and provide a sense of rootedness and agency. At times Wheatle's own distinct use of naming is playful; at others symbolic, as a means to reclaim a sense of identity. It is also notable that Wheatle's casts are

frequently named either as a form of tribute to his 'heroes' including DJs and musical inspirations, or, at other times, are descriptive of place. 'Brenton Brown' contains an allusion to Brixton and, possibly, Brent, a device which 'Second-Generation' writer, Ronnie McGrath also utilises in his reference to 'Brackney' as the setting for *On the Verge of Losing it*, when he conflates the names of Hackney and Brixton. For Wheatle, names can be suggestive of personality traits, with nicknames representing one of his most creative uses of the device such that, in the *Crongton Knights* series, characters include 'Boy from the Hills,' and 'Liccle Bit' and, in the *Brixton Rock* series, 'Coffin Head', the malevolent 'Nunchuks' and 'Skeptic.' There is a further symbolism of names in Wheatle's work. Reminiscent of Samuel Selvon in *The Lonely Londoners*, they conjure up a particular form of language which informs identity and place, a 'shorthand' which can create a sense of community and, a self-affirming, linguistic code.

Theatre and the Rhythms of Wheatle's World

A former musician, Wheatle describes music as 'always in [his] head.'⁴¹⁹ It seeps into the narrative not only in the rhythms but as a backdrop to his world. In *Brixton Rock* and *East of Acre Lane*, it also suggests a sense of heritage. A prominent characteristic of the early Anancy tales of the plantations, it was further honed by Louise Bennett, Andrew Salkey, and James Berry whose Anancy stories featured a cast of characters who played drums and fiddles in so many tales. However, Wheatle's use of music seems to align with his comment about its constant presence, and he uses it as an accent to his world, offering a background soundtrack which can define and reflect the condition or mood of many of his characters. In a

⁴¹⁹ Cooper, 'Reggae Roots and the Brixton Bard: Carolyn Cooper Talks to Alex Wheatle'.

rare moment of 'contentment' Brenton 'bounded off, whistling the Gong's *Could you be Loved*,⁴²⁰ and Bob Marley's *Pimpers Paradise*' plays at the brothel when Denise is rescued. At times, music also suggests a message of hope, which is sensed through the lyrics and sentiment of *'Time will Tell'* and *'Redemption Song'* constructing an auditory background at critical points of the action.

In his introduction to the twenty-year anniversary edition of the novel, Paul Gilroy wrote: *'East of Acre Lane* is not about music, but reggae music flows through it, supplying the vital fluid to its pressured ground.' Music offers a backdrop, for which lyrics literally pepper the narrative, which, at times, convey joy or, for Brenton, a sense of 'home'. Wheatle's world is an imagined space or community described by the knowledge of every road down which his casts 'tread' and the people that live in them. It not only provides a signal to meaning but is a call to action, suggesting a source of power. For Floyd in particular, it 'reflect[s] the struggle for black freedom and the persecution of the black race throughout world history,⁴²¹ signaling protest and potential rebellion so that, 'Floyd knew the Black Panthers had a small following but the influence they spread, mixed with the lyrical content of music winging in from Jamaica bred a feeling of unease and revolt.'⁴²²

In his afterword to *Brixton Rock*, Alex Wheatle wrote that music was: 'the only thing that kept us going through those dark days of early Thatcherism. It spoke of our plight and our struggles.'⁴²³ It also provided relief from the 'burglar alarms [which]

⁴²⁰ Wheatle, *Brixton Rock*, p. 129.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

shrilled,' and 'isolated shouts from unseen voices' within the 'concrete jungle,'⁴²⁴ the backdrop of sounds affording some retreat from the brutality of the landscape.

The potentially transformative Anancy of Brathwaite and Harris's imagination rarely emerges in Wheatle's stories. This is, perhaps, not surprising. Wheatle, who lived in care from a young age had limited reference points through which to develop a sense of identity and heritage. His perspective of the Anancy tales was, therefore, at some remove from Brathwaite's or Salkey's, whose childhoods were steered by these traditions. Wheatle's path to the stories was instead via a disparate collection of influences, which were primarily oral. However, despite their absence from his childhood, Wheatle's storytelling style still owes much to an aesthetic which drew upon the Anancy tales. It is evident in the writing's orality and humour and, despite Wheatle's diffidence towards any similarities, in the unmistakable shape of Anancy who can still be glimpsed in both the brazen, duplicitous, and linguistically skilled Floyd and the sagacious Jah Nelson, characters that seem to suggest two distinct parts of Anancy's potential. It is also perhaps most evident in his determination to assert largely untold stories via a different narrative.

Despite the opaqueness of any reference to the stories within the work, it is poignant that the influence of the shapeshifting, indefatigable, Anancy can be glimpsed in the message that Alex Wheatle, himself abandoned to a care system which was at times brutal, was able to create a vivid imaginary world through his own prowess with words. If nothing else, it is an achievement which conveys something of the spirit of the trickster storyteller, representing the most effective means of resistance.

⁴²⁴ Wheatle, *Brixton Rock*, p. 238.

Ferdinand Dennis: 'Conquering Ghosts'

Born in Jamaica in 1956, Ferdinand Dennis joined his parents in Britain when he was eight years old. Much of his formative years were, therefore, spent in the skewed education system of Britain in the 1960s and 1970s with any influence from his parents in terms of an awareness of heritage inhibited by both absence and the challenges of navigating life in a new, and sometimes hostile, country. However, as is evident from the title of his most prominent novel, *Duppy Conqueror*, Dennis's work draws upon a host of mythological figures from African and Caribbean tradition.

Perhaps more than any of the other writers in this chapter, Dennis was most consciously influenced by the Caribbean Artists Movement, describing the period in which he studied at a sixth form college in Brixton as something of an, 'awakening' for him, and when he 'began to describe [himself] as Black.'⁴²⁵ However, in common with many other 'Second Generation' writers, his sense of identity was ultimately consolidated via a series of both physical and metaphorical journeys and, most significantly, after he had followed his own triangular route between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean in an effort to understand not only the history and personal effect of those paths, but a nuanced understanding of his own complex identity.

Within the Storyteller's Armoury: Anancy and Other Tricksters

In Dennis's work, journeys and identity represent central themes. Echoing his own personal odyssey in his early adult years, the significance of such geographical paths is conveyed most transparently in *Duppy Conqueror*. The principal protagonist,

⁴²⁵ Dennis and Khan, *Voices of the Crossing*, p. 46-7.

Marshall Sarjeant, is assigned a specific, personal quest to rid his family of the 'curse' which local fable suggests has afflicted his family for generations. It is a task which leads Marshall from the Caribbean to Britain and, ultimately, to Africa, symbolically following Dennis's own journey, and that of many other artists, including Kamau Brathwaite, in an attempt to make sense of their heritage and personal, pluralistic identity.

Duppy Conqueror represents a re-assertion of a history of the twentieth century from an Afrocentric perspective. It is also a story about stories. In *Duppy*, the narrative is driven by supernatural features which, at times, force the reader to interrogate the veracity of the tale, mirroring Marshall's determination to investigate and comprehend the stories which informed his perception of both Caribbean, and world, history. *Duppy* most overtly draws upon mythology in its evocation of the West African Legba as well as the central premise of the Duppy. However, within *Duppy Conqueror* a series of alternative myths punctuate the plot, although they are invariably dismissed, or exposed for their deceit, at some point in the narrative. In the opening sequences, Marshall is enchanted by a 'creation story' of the island which is subsequently dispelled. At other points, and emphatically more earth-based, he is disillusioned by the corruption which seems intertwined with the political idealism that Marshall initially perceives to be a solution to his sense of disenfranchisement.

Despite the prevalence of mysticism and mythology, it is surprising, therefore, that, superficially, there are few references to Anancy in *Duppy Conqueror*. When specifically asked, Dennis told me that he was unaware of any overt influence of Anancy in his writing, with the explanation that other folkloric figures were more

potent within what he perceived to be the 'armoury' of the rich resource of African stories⁴²⁶ available to those who were enslaved in the Caribbean. Instead, it is the Yoruban trickster, Legba, who is most recognisably invoked in *Duppy Conqueror*, in the character 'Alegba' and who conveys something of the revolutionary power that Brathwaite and Wilson Harris perceived as inherent to Anancy's potential. Dennis's misgivings about Anancy seem to derive, at least in part, from a sense of his impotence, as an inert, more 'playful' trickster, than Legba. However, despite the complexity of Dennis's relationship with Anancy, he still emerges in *Duppy Conqueror*, most prominently in the characters of Scoop and Pharaoh. Like Wheatle's Floyd, Dennis denied any conscious inspiration of Anancy for the character of Scoop Fearon, citing: 'sometimes a treacherous fellow is a treacherous fellow,'⁴²⁷ yet, despite an apparent ambivalence towards Anancy, at times, the references to the Caribbean trickster are not only frequent but pointed. Scoop is a traveller with an ability to adapt, and mimic, so that he 'spoke a language sprinkled with pungent profanities acquired from his fellow dock workers.'⁴²⁸ Perhaps most appealingly, Scoop is also a storyteller, so that Marshall later acknowledges that he: 'missed Scoop's visits, missed the exaggerations, and lies which Scoop insisted on telling, as if testing his own skilfulness in mendacity and Marshall's credulity. He missed those amusing accounts of supposed adventures told in such great detail and with such absolute conviction that they would have convinced the sighted let alone the blind.'⁴²⁹ Scoop's linguistic flair is, notably, entirely oral, a point which is aptly illustrated when Scoop is later forced to seek Marshall's assistance in

⁴²⁶ Email from Ferdinand Dennis to Natalie Lucy, dated 26th October 2020.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ferdinand Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror* (London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 40.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

composing a letter to Soledad.⁴³⁰ Any analogies to Anancy are not confined to his linguistic verve. Scoop also demonstrates something of the Caribbean trickster's swagger, as well as his childish excesses. He later describes his obsession with Soledad through a style of language which conjures something of the excesses of the Anancy of the tales: 'cause since I saw her, I haven't eaten a thing. Can't eat. Can't even drink water, not even coconut water. I'm starving from love.'⁴³¹ There is also a sense of the theatrical in Scoop. His freneticism serves to punctuate what is at times a melancholic tale with humour, his actions not merely that of a 'treacherous fellow' but with a determination that is, at times, admirable, in his intrepid pursuit of the impossible, only to emerge after a failed 'scheme'. In this, Scoop displays something of Anancy's aspirational and appealing indefatigability, a feature which Salkey emphasised in many of his stories. In this sense, even though Scoop's motives are usually self-serving, Dennis allows a sneaking admiration and affection for the character whose cleverness purportedly allowed him to survive in shark-infested waters by: 'detering sharks by eating garlic which he had stuffed in his pockets on the advice of a ship's chef,'⁴³² and who, despite being wheeled back into Paradise on the back of a donkey cart, completely emaciated, metaphorically re-emerges so that, not much later, he is described dressed in finery in pursuit of Soledad.⁴³³ Perhaps most reminiscent of Anancy, however, is the fact that any power possessed by Scoop is derived from a linguistic agility and charm which proves sufficiently persuasive that, despite being mistreated by his so-called friend, Marshall offers him work in his bar, and proves able to enthuse that: 'It was Scoop who greeted customers with that broad smile and direct gaze and moved about all

⁴³⁰ Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror*, p. 57.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

night ensuring that people were comfortable and having a good time. When Scoop laughed everybody within earshot laughed with him...'⁴³⁴

Ultimately, Scoop is a relatively minor character in the narrative, an anodyne, one-dimensional 'villain' whose meaning and impact to the bigger questions that Dennis explores remain minimal. Something of a 'cameo' for Anancy, Scoop is a comedic figure who, as a literary device, helps Marshall to define his own character and to recognise his desire for truth, but who proves woefully devoid of any revolutionary potential, a role which Dennis assigns to Legba. However, despite his perceived inertness, it is significant that Dennis invokes the Anancy trickster in two further portrayals within *Duppy Conqueror*. 'Holy Joe' is a 'master raconteur' in Toxteth and 'an eternal optimist' who 'claimed to have escaped or survived numerous misfortunes because he was protected by the spirits of the ancestors.'⁴³⁵

Subsequently becoming a property landlord, Joe is even described as 'one Anancy' when he later goes missing.⁴³⁶ If Joe represents what amounts to a 'nod' to the Anancy trickster, with limited impact on the narrative, through Pharaoh Dennis reveals a more potent aspect to the trickster. Pharaoh's connection to a common African heritage is suggested by his name. A Pan-Africanist, his notoriety is ostensibly based upon his repeated destruction of a statue of Queen Victoria. However, despite his well-known anti-colonial stance and erudite, far-reaching ambitions, it is significant that Dennis still connects Anancy with Pharaoh. On one occasion, when observing him, Marshall muses: '[when Pharaoh smiled] his eyes sparkled and his face betrayed a hint of mischievousness that belied his mature

⁴³⁴ Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror*, p. 160.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

years and involuntarily evoked in Marshall's mind an image of Anancy, though he was certain that Pharaoh who grew most of what he ate and bought the rest from nearby farms without haggling over prices would see little to admire in the cunning, lazy character of that fabled creature.⁴³⁷ It is also through Pharaoh, that Dennis suggests something of the reach of the spider, with his ability to connect people on different continents, to Africa, to Europe and to the Caribbean, Dennis's Anancy emerging as something of a diasporic, nomadic figure whose storytelling ability suggest a line, or metaphorical thread, between Britain, via an often-deviating path towards Africa. Ultimately, Pharaoh exhibits some of Anancy's vices, proving amoral and untrustworthy as he fathers numerous children, only to abandon them, as he continues his journey around the world. Yet in his demonstration of sagaciousness and his role in conveying the significance of Marshall's personal family history, he creates a sense of continuity and an essential connection to Africa. It is notable that Pharaoh's important function as a 'culture bearer' was a role that Brathwaite attributed to Anancy. However, although in Dennis's *Duppy*, this role has largely been usurped, possibly amid doubts about his suitability, Anancy still exists, pertinently at the periphery, creating a layer to the stories in the text. Ultimately, in many ways, *Duppy Conqueror* is a novel about stories, and the importance of vanquishing the ghosts of the past in order to progress and prosper. While Anancy has been relegated to a more passive role within *Duppy Conqueror*, fittingly, his existence still serves to raise questions, pertinently adding a layer of fragility, and ambiguity, to aspects of the story.

⁴³⁷ Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror*, p.50-51.

Despite the many overt references to folklore which are peppered throughout *Duppy Conqueror*, and the occasional glimpses of a purposeful, potentially meaningful Anancy, it is perhaps in Dennis's earliest work, *The Sleepless Summer*, that he most significantly explores Anancy as a way to achieve some semblance of power, particularly through the central character of Max, the scheming, persuasive and authoritative, educator. In *The Sleepless Summer*, Dennis's principal protagonist, the eighteen-year-old Colin is positioned at a metaphorical crossroads, as he is forced to decide between the cultural education that 'the Black House' seems to promise, suggesting a possible solution to his confusion about his cultural identity, and the 'solid' path which can be achieved through further pursuing his education. On the brink of adulthood, with his parents choosing to return to the Caribbean, Colin's dilemma is typical of many Second-Generation Britons of the Caribbean diaspora. Colin's geographical knowledge and outlook was shaped by Britain, and particularly London, with Colin musing that he had: 'never been beyond its boundary except on a school day trip.'⁴³⁸ Despite this profound geographical connection to London, Colin is unsettled when challenged by a neighbour: 'what yo know 'bout Jamaica Colin? You is a little Englishman.'⁴³⁹ Colin's insecurities about his identity are initially superficially resolved by the Black House with its mission statement to 'promote[...]positive images of [black people].' However, the flaws represented by the contrasting, dual, influences of the intellectual but profoundly disaffected Rastafarian Ziggy, who teaches him the history of Africa as a 'home of mankind,'⁴⁴⁰ and the calm reason of Max, who ostensibly navigates a more conventional, overtly 'acceptable' path

⁴³⁸ Ferdinand Dennis, *The Sleepless Summer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. 33.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

through his reliance on both a superficial charm and calculated assuredness, emerge through the course of the narrative.

In *The Sleepless Summer*, which is set in the heatwave of 1976, the environmental conditions serve as both a metaphor and catalyst for the increasing racial and economic tensions within Britain. The themes of *Sleepless* remain more accessible than in *Duppy Conqueror*. While Colin is haunted by dreams, Dennis's landscape is more earthbound and devoid of the metaphysical dimension of *Duppy*. Despite this, Max is a trickster figure whose connection to Anancy seems pronounced. It is Max who displays the nonchalance, eloquence, charm, and swagger of Anancy, features which have helped to ingratiate himself to a string of women, and it is also Max who proves able to assume a disguise, facets which further underline both his lack of responsibility and the connection to the folkloric figure. At times the references to Anancy are even more explicit. When Colin is later informed by a mutual acquaintance, Bunny, that Max was his 'star' pupil, Bunny further explains that he: 'used to call him Anansi. You know Anansi, Youngman?'⁴⁴¹ It is notable that Bunny focuses on Anancy's unscrupulous characteristics, a plethora of references highlighting his vices, which include 'cunning'; irresponsibility and deceit. While Anancy's emergence as something of an archetype for Max is neither inspirational nor impactful, Max is still capable of proving aspirational through his demonstration of tactics which he relies upon not only survive but to prosper. He is also at least partly redeemed by the revelation that the funds which he steals from the Black House, having successfully persuaded several investors of its importance, will be used to help his daughter who suffers with the under-researched sickle cell disease,

⁴⁴¹ Dennis, *The Sleepless Summer*, p. 153.

which Max earlier described as ‘the curse of the Blackman.’⁴⁴² Despite their pejorative associations, it is notable that it is through such ‘Anancyisms’ that Dennis’s often beleaguered characters demonstrate techniques for survival within a diasporic world.

The Tales: The Wider Aesthetic in Dennis’s work

Despite Dennis’s tentative use of the trickster character as an example of ways to survive in a hostile world, it is in his style of narrative, which makes use of a breadth of features of the wider Anancy ‘aesthetic’, that Dennis most emphatically demonstrates the significance of the tales, and their connection to heritage. As with Wheatle’s reassertion of fairy tales, myths and biblical stories, *Duppy Conqueror* does not follow a chronological storytelling path. It is instead conveyed in vignettes and stories within stories, so that the tale of the teacher who Marshall discovers dead in the woods, the victim of a horrific, ritualistic killing, and the curse of his family are interwoven, with Dennis’s storytelling owing much to both myth and the trickster characters who featured in the tales. While this is perhaps unsurprising in a work of fiction that references the Caribbean mythical ‘duppy’ in the title, what is notable is that Dennis’s aesthetic draws specifically on the themes of many of the Anancy stories. Prominent within Dennis’s storytelling are references to music and sound. They not only punctuate the narrative but can be perceived both visually and aurally, adding a significant sensory dimension to his fiction. Sometimes the musical references are literal, with the title of *Duppy Conqueror* itself drawing inspiration from the Bob Marley song. It is also significant that both Marshall in *Duppy Conqueror* and Boswell in Dennis’s *The Last Blues Dance* own jazz bars, which represent both a

⁴⁴² Dennis, *The Sleepless Summer*, p. 103.

microcosm of their worlds and a central meeting point for friends and acquaintances of Caribbean origin.

Of all the writers in this chapter, it is perhaps Ferdinand Dennis who most emphatically references the names which were so key to the early Anancy tales and to their re-emergence in the panoply of reinventions of the tales. When Marshall arrives in Africa, signifying the final stretch of his journey, he is told: 'Names carry our strengths and weaknesses so a lioness should know the name of the hunter stalking her pride.'⁴⁴³ In line with this adage, Dennis's characters are given names which are descriptive of personality or role: Marshall Sergeant seeks truth, Scoop Fearon, is a storyteller, deceitful at times, foolish and comical, Pharaoh has an authority and even Soledad is the lonely virtuous daughter. Constance Castle and her imperious and arrogant twin, Alexander, perhaps named for the invader/coloniser Alexander the Great, have the surname 'Castle' suggestive both of their British heritage but also their self-confidence and privilege. In Dennis's work, names are intrinsically linked to identity, but also to ownership. When Alexander seeks to 'apply foreign names to familiar plants and creatures, classifying and categorising them, [he] seemed to be possessing them, then subjecting them to the cold intellectual scrutiny of the scientist,'⁴⁴⁴ the foreboding shadow of slavery provides a sinister emphasis to the relationship between Marshall and Alexander.

⁴⁴³ Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror*, p. 253.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Perhaps the most symbolic aspect of Dennis's 'naming' is revealed in the final stages of Marshall's physical and metaphorical journey when he is given the name 'Segun Dada' and is told to 'carry [it] in [his] soul until the day [he] is forced to speak it.'⁴⁴⁵ In the concluding sequences, Marshall is impelled to 'speak' his name when he is challenged by Alegba, the African trickster god who dwells with the supposed 'treasure' which has been buried in the ground and which previously provided temptation for Scoop to steal the map. The 'treasure' is, in fact, not gold, but a book. It reveals the history of both his destiny and his past. Marshall's name is written as 'the duppy conqueror' and Marshall's ultimate act of sacrifice is in his attempt to rescue his children from the curse. Although Ferdinand Dennis never explains the meaning of the name given to Marshall, 'Segun' is an apparently 'common' Yoruban name, meaning 'conqueror'. 'Dada' alludes to the Yoruban deity fabled to 'look after the embryos of unborn children' and, as can perhaps be surmised, also means 'one's father'. It is a name which provides a connection to his heritage, and reflects the composite of his journeys, from Jamaica to London and to 'Kinja', a fictional place which references the troubled histories of many African nations that were forced to reassert and re-evaluate themselves in the wake of independence, including Kenya and Nigeria.

Anancy, Hybridity and Belonging

James Procter has described Ferdinand Dennis as 'ultimately more concerned with routes than roots.'⁴⁴⁶ In much of his work, the principal protagonists pursue a

⁴⁴⁵ Dennis, *Duppy Conqueror*, p. 273.

⁴⁴⁶ James Procter described Ferdinand Dennis as more concerned by 'routes than roots' ("Ferdinand Dennis." [2008]. *Britishcouncil.org* <<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/ferdinand-dennis/criticalperspective>> [accessed 15th March 2023].

journey, often portrayed through allegory, towards a sense of heritage and confidence not only in self, but in their sense of belonging. In *The Sleepless Summer* Colin says: 'What I really wanted was a home, a place to which I could belong, could participate in its celebratory rituals, its reaffirmations of identity.'⁴⁴⁷ Colin's journey reimagines something of Dennis's own path, from the teenager in Brixton who became aware of the Black Panthers and Garveyism, embryonic ideas which he further developed and, at times rejected, to his later experiences in West Africa. These journeys ultimately afford both Dennis and Colin the tools to negotiate their worlds, in part through reliance upon the ethos expressed within Dennis's *The Last Blues Dance* that, 'a mahn who know where 'im coming form is a mahn who know the way forward.'⁴⁴⁸

Ferdinand Dennis's own journey to Nigeria exposed what appeared to be the complexities of identity that were so often shrouded, and simplified, by a tendency to categorise people through binary racial classifications. Dennis perceived this to be in denial of: 'the incredible diversity of the peoples defined as Black. The Afro-Caribbeans with their shattered cultures and Asians with whole cultures which enabled them to better withstand the pressures of racism were lumped together. That we all carry within us a plurality of ever shifting and often conflicting identities and all immigrants even more so was considered a distraction from the anti-racist project. We were imprisoned in Black-White duality.'⁴⁴⁹ It is this duality, or plurality, to which Anancy's fluidity suggests a potential solution. As a storytelling device Anancy is capable of expressing that hybridity while offering a palpable connection to

⁴⁴⁷ Ferdinand Dennis, *The Last Blues Dance* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 187.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁴⁹ Dennis and Khan, *Voices of the Crossing*, p. 46-7.

a specific, rich heritage, a multifaceted history which Dennis himself learned to embrace: 'I had to rediscover and assert my Jamaicanness but qualify it with reference to my London upbringing. I began to take pride in the diversity of my past, the cultural journeys I had made, which enabled me to mourn the death of John Lennon one Christmas and Bob Marley six months later, celebrate Gabriel Garcia Marquez winning the Nobel Prize for literature and watch with passionate interest the marriage of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer on Nigerian television. I embraced the complexity of my being and decided to begin exploring that in writing.'⁴⁵⁰ At the end of *The Sleepless Summer*, Colin declares: 'I could protest loudly that I am a Jamaican, that I am a Londoner, contradictory though the two may appear. But I won't. Because above all else, I am me, Colin Morgan.'⁴⁵¹

In *Duppy Conqueror* it is Legba who represents a potential catalyst for change with Anancy confined to the theatre's wings, a 'side' character who provides humour and vibrancy but who is ultimately inert. However, within Dennis's work, Anancy repeatedly emerges as part of a Caribbean landscape or narrative. Perhaps it is apt that his existence is only hinted at with Anancy revealed through glimpses. The rare celebratory references to the former folk hero are offered through the voices and actions of a panoply of characters who are distinguished in their linguistic, storytelling strengths. Where Dennis's Legba is potent and even fearsome, Anancy remains earthbound and human. Yet, while Legba suggests revolutionary change, it is Anancy that offers a device through which to explore diasporic identity, his spidery limbs extending into different worlds, as he connects all parts of the 'Black Atlantic'. It

⁴⁵⁰ Dennis and Khan, *Voices of the Crossing*, p 45-46.

⁴⁵¹ Dennis, *The Sleepless Summer*, p. 190.

is Anancy who offers challenges and, most significantly perhaps, it is Anancy who emerges as a symbolic reference to storytelling, serving as a metafictional reminder that, although it is a story, within his many-circled influence, the tales also permeate and shape Dennis's fiction. In this, the Anancy Tales and features of an aesthetic are prominent in Dennis's work, informing a unique style of storytelling, which evolved from, and which celebrates, the non-European visual and aural aspects of the story. Perhaps more importantly, the shadowy, ambiguous figure of Anancy symbolises a particular hybridity of experience that was capable of both epitomising and clearing the way for the displaced.

Andrea Levy's Cyclical Song

In many respects, Andrea Levy's path towards a form of self-discovery parallels that of many of a Second Generation, growing up in the 1960s and 1970s Britain. Yet it was also distinct from that experience. Levy's increasing awareness of her Caribbean heritage was acquired in fragments, with her parents' determination to assimilate proving at least partially successful. Their perspective was partly driven by the 'light-skinned' appearance which her parents erroneously believed should afford them a higher status in Jamaica and Britain. Levy considered this attitude to be part of an unofficial hierarchy based on 'pigmentocracy' which was embedded in Jamaican culture at the time, explaining: 'My family is fair-skinned. In Jamaica this had had a big effect on my parents' upbringing, because of the class system, inherited from British colonial times, people took the colour of your skin very seriously. My parents had grown up to believe themselves to be of a higher class than any darker-skinned person. This isolated them from other black Caribbeans

who came to live [in Britain] and they wanted nothing to do with them.⁴⁵² According to Levy, her appearance frequently prompted confusion about her origins, with her singing teacher demanding to know her background and querying whether she was Jewish.⁴⁵³ What she later described as an epiphany is now a well documented episode. Compelled to take part in a 'racism awareness project' at work Levy described how: 'We were asked to split into two groups, black and white. I walked over to the white side of the room. It was, ironically, where I felt most at home – all my friends, my boyfriend, my flatmates, were white. But my fellow workers had other ideas and I found myself being beckoned over by people on the black side. With some hesitation I crossed the floor. It was a rude awakening. It sent me to bed for a week.'⁴⁵⁴ For Levy, it was a process which also encompassed a life-affirming trip to Jamaica, a place to which Levy had previously been indifferent, later writing of the visit: 'I discover[ed] a family I had never really known I had. I realised that I meant something to people who lived on the other side of the world. I met my aunt and cousins and saw where my mum grew up. I realised for the first time that I had a background and an ancestry that was fascinating and worth exploring. Not only that, but I had the means to do it – through writing.'⁴⁵⁵

The Storyteller at the Centre of the Story: The Many Circles of Anancy

Andrea Levy's literary archive, which is held by the British Library, demonstrates the extent of research and consideration which went into that writing, which Levy recognised as a significant tool to both explore and celebrate heritage. Included

⁴⁵² Andrea Levy, 'Back to My Own Country: An Essay by Andrea Levy', in *British Library Website: Articles (2014)* <https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles> [accessed 1st March 2023].

⁴⁵³ Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (London: Tinder Press, 1994), p. 186.

⁴⁵⁴ Levy, 'Back to My Own Country'.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

within those documents are sets of manuscripts and notebooks in which details of Levy's research are frequently handwritten in her bold, slightly irregular, but artistic style, many of which relate to *The Long Song*, a novel which explored life on a Jamaican plantation in the early 1830s. Levy's research was meticulously carried out, but she also noted ideas for stories, which were often in fragments, or anecdotes from people's lives which she also hoped to incorporate into her work. These were stories through which she not only sought to display the horrors of slavery but to represent the humanity which somehow emerged within it, Levy postulating that: '[her] 1833 slaves are going to be a canny, feisty, thriving lot.'⁴⁵⁶ Within the notes is also an instruction from Levy to herself. In a manner which seems typical of her, while exploring the early stages of her planning and research she writes: 'Find out about Anansi stories. You will need them.'⁴⁵⁷ The extent and breadth of the subsequent research into the Anancy Tales is easy to trace. Contained within the notes in the British Library are copies of the folklorist Martha Warren Beckwith's versions of the tales, "Tiger as substitute", "The King's Two Daughters", "The Gub Gub peas", "Tiger as Riding Horse," and "Tiger's Sheep-Skin Suit". A principal theme within these stories emerges as humour, with its typical features of farce and disguise, as well as Anancy's trademark ability to extricate himself from difficult situations through his linguistic verve. These traces of Anancy are, perhaps predictably, most conspicuous within Andrea Levy's *The Long Song*, and, as early as the opening passages of that novel, Anancy emerges when the tale of July's birth is declared to be 'a story that was more thrilling than anything the rascal spider Anancy could conjure,'⁴⁵⁸ rooting the folk hero in an early storytelling tradition of the

⁴⁵⁶ Undigitized notebooks in the Andrea Levy Archive, specifically relating to research for *The Long Song*, held at the British Library, Deposit 11256.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Andrea Levy, *The Long Song* (London: Headline Review, 2010), p. 13.

Caribbean plantations. However, Levy goes further, using an archetype of Anancy to create several of her prominent characters.

While Nimrod and Godfrey are significantly contrasting figures, each of them exhibits and exploits an array of 'Anancyisms' or the 'Anancy tactics' which Emily Zobel Marshall particularly identified in her work. Dishonest and arrogant, Nimrod, is a freeman. Clever and confident with an Anancy-like determination to be noticed, he remains superficially attractive, despite a series of physical and aesthetic 'imperfections'. For example, Nimrod's legs are described as: 'bowed as if waiting for the horse he had just dismounted to return and slip back under him,' with a 'nose too flat and broad,' a 'scar upon his lip [that] looked like a disfigurement,' and 'one of his eyes [was] apt to wander[...][the hair upon his head [was] lush at the front but at the back there was a sovereign-sized hole in the covering that did not glisten in sunlight.'⁴⁵⁹ The description conjures up the lisping, physically debilitated, Anancy of so many existing depictions, but he is simultaneously brazen and sufficiently cunning to have successfully manipulated his former 'owners' such that he: 'walk[s] proud, for Nimrod was a freeman [and] now commanded white people to look upon him within the eye.'⁴⁶⁰ The similarities with Anancy are innumerable within the text. He is coarse, verging on the scatological, with a penchant for music and dance, which is referenced by accounts of Nimrod organising balls. In this context, even Nimrod's clothing draws upon the Anancy of the tales, when he insists on dressing up in finery for the dance that he has arranged, 'borrow[ing]' from the 'massa' a 'fine damask waistcoat and linen jacket.'⁴⁶¹ Despite the superficial similarities, one of Nimrod's

⁴⁵⁹ Levy, *The Long Song*, pp. 108-109.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

most persuasive 'Anancy features' is his ambivalence, which is illustrated in part by his ability to attract censure and admiration in almost equal measure with the 'nonchalance' he conveys to authority figures representing what Laura Tanna identified as one of Anancy's most appealing characteristics.⁴⁶²

While any traits of Anancy are most overt in Nimrod, it is in the quieter, superficially compliant and dutiful Godfrey, that Levy suggests the use of the most obvious 'Anancy tactics'. Whereas Nimrod is self-motivated, Godfrey's ability to seize a degree of power is most reminiscent of the 'tricks' frequently employed by slaves as a form of resistance, features which could wrest a degree of agency, while avoiding the risks of punishment, behind a façade of loyalty. Godfrey's 'mask' which affords him a semblance of freedom, is described as his: 'dutiful gesture [which] gave the impression that he was listening to his missus's words when, in truth, he was peering out of the window at a distant tree.'⁴⁶³ He is similarly covert when he humiliates his 'missus', through his calculated instruction to July to lay the table with bedsheets and he achieves a modicum of power with the small sums of money that he can acquire through his habitual exaggeration of the costs of household items, which also expose his 'mistress' Caroline's ignorance and stupidity. Like Anancy, Godfrey's actions are often accompanied by humour and 'merriment in his eyes'.⁴⁶⁴ Godfrey is also something of a lothario, his sexual antics reminiscent of the specific aspects of the trickster's plethora of 'attributes' which include his pursuit of women as potential 'conquests'. While Godfrey, like Anancy, undoubtedly wrests some power from his

⁴⁶² Laura Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales, and Oral Histories* (Kingston: Jamaica Publications Limited, 1984), p. 81.

⁴⁶³ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 74.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

sexual appetite,⁴⁶⁵ any success in manipulating others is acquired through his ability with words and an intuitive understanding of people. In stark contrast with his ignorant and egocentric 'mistress', Godfrey's 'tactics' are reminiscent of those that were recorded by Matthew 'Monk' Lewis in his journal which was written in a similar timeframe to Levy's *The Long Song*. I have discussed Lewis's journal in this thesis and, although I found no specific reference within the notes within Levy's archive at the British Library, it seems probable that Levy encountered Lewis's journal as part of her research. Significant for a number of reasons, it was noted for containing some of the first references to the Anancy Tales. However, perhaps most relevant to understanding the modes of resistance employed by Godfrey and Nimrod are the key passages of that journal in which Lewis emphasises his naïve misconception of some of the behaviour on his plantation, as incompetence rather than the often-blatant displays of resistance.

Despite Nimrod and Godfrey's displays of 'Anancy tactics', with Nimrod most overtly resembling a physical manifestation of the trickster figure, it is in July that Levy fully realises any potential force of the trickster figure. Like Nimrod and Godfrey, July's use of 'Anansi tactics' are exhibited through a series of wilful mistakes. Designed to humiliate the Mistress, they were possibly inspired by the specific stories which Levy retained with her notes, including *Tiger as Riding Horse*, in which Anancy both degrades and humiliates Tiger, or feigns ignorance and stupidity in order to seize any available power or limited sense of freedom. Like Anancy, July's success is based upon an estimation of her power and the likelihood of being punished for any perceived misdemeanours. Accordingly, she risks attracting the wrath of her

⁴⁶⁵ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 59.

'mistress' in circumstances in which she knows that the plantation owner has no 'energy' for whippings and that the brutal overseer is too busy. It is a calculation that is also based upon her knowledge that she is indispensable, because: 'who but July would know to tip a near hogshead of sugar into her missus's morning coffee? For anything less would see her grimace with the pain of a child flayed or squeal that it was too sour. Or that she liked her sangaree, not with the juice of a lime, but embittered with the peel from a lemon. And that she required salt fish, yam and cured pork at her breakfast table[...]and that her back needed to be rubbed after she had drunk her Epsom salts...' ⁴⁶⁶ July exhibits other features which align her with Anancy: she is theatrical and dramatic, entreating Caroline Mortimer, to 'come beat [her]' as she sobs and throws herself flat on the floor in a calculated attempt to avoid punishment for ruining her dress. ⁴⁶⁷ She also has a notable agility in evading her 'mistress' which leads her to 'jump, weave and spin to avoid her.' ⁴⁶⁸ While relevant to descriptions of nimbleness, Levy's references to 'spinning' and 'weaving' are also carefully selected to emphasise the spider analogy. In other parts of the narrative, spiderlike, July hides, 'squatt[ing] in the farthest corner behind a chair,' ⁴⁶⁹ and, significantly, one of her first means of attracting Robert Goodwin is her ability to kill the cockroaches that he detests, in addition to other insects: 'more than one hundred, July managed to capture. Most were crushed, for they were the devil to keep in one place. And not all were cockroaches, but beetles and centipedes and tumble-bugs.' ⁴⁷⁰ Descriptions of July frequently draw on arachnid skills or qualities,

⁴⁶⁶ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 72.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

as well as a freneticism which, together with her wit, agility, and luck, enable her to survive a series of potentially hazardous ‘scrapes’.

As with many other writers of a Second Generation, it is in July’s linguistic skills that an archetype for Anancy emerges at his most creative. At times, July’s behaviour even mirrors some of the ‘cruelty’ habitually displayed by Anancy in the early versions of the tales. July is willing to tell lies, to exaggerate and be theatrical, ‘dropping to her knees, snivelling and crying.’⁴⁷¹ While arguably reprehensible through a contemporary lens, the factors that mitigate Anancy’s behaviour within a plantation setting also apply to July. Taken away from her family at a young age, she is routinely brutalised, with Caroline Mortimer frequently meting out violent punishments which include habitually hitting her on the head with a shoe. The fact that July’s attempts at physical escape also proved unsuccessful further justifies the ‘fictions’ that she creates with her limited agency. However, in *The Long Song*, Anancy is invoked not only as a figure of resistance, but as a way of demonstrating the multifaceted humanity that Levy was eager to show in her depiction of her ‘canny, feisty,’⁴⁷² cast of characters enslaved on the Amity plantation. When Caroline first observes July’s mother, Kitty, she whispers to her brother, ‘Is it a woman?’ before musing without any awareness of irony at her supposed Christian values: ‘how any man under God’s sky would want to lie with such a loathsome creature. And how a beast so ugly that she blocked out all sunlight before her could mother such an adorable child?’⁴⁷³ Levy’s determination to assert the multi-dimensionality of her characters, is conveyed not only through their frequent acts of resistance but in

⁴⁷¹ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 150.

⁴⁷² Undigitized notebooks in the Andrea Levy Archive, specifically relating to research for *The Long Song*, held at the British Library, Deposit 11256.

⁴⁷³ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 41.

the significance of their names to a sense of their individuality. It is perhaps Godfrey's most assertive and aspirational moment when he repeatedly insists that July be called by her given name, rather than that imposed by her the plantation owners. It reflects his determination that Caroline should recognise both July's, and by extension, the humanity of all those enslaved on the plantation. This sensitivity to names and their potential importance to a sense of identity, undoubtedly resonated with Levy, having altered her own name from the given 'Angela' to 'Andrea'.

However, Levy's use of names is not only symbolic, but conveys a breadth of literary and mythological references. Nimrod, the Anancy-like character of *The Long Song*, evokes ideas associated with the biblical rebel of the same name, an agitator with a skill with languages. It is perhaps of additional significance that, in American English, the term is habitually used as a form of sarcasm to describe a dim-witted person and, while Nimrod is brazen, it is his boldness, unmitigated by reason, which ultimately contributes to his demise. At other times, names are pertinent to specific characteristics with, in Levy's earlier work, *Small Island*, Hortense's name becoming descriptive of personality traits when considered as a conflation of the two words, 'haughty' and 'tense'.

For July, like Anancy, her greatest power is conveyed through her storytelling ability. At times this extends to her 'fictions' which are persuasive, particularly when delivered theatrically. Perhaps most convincing, and significant, is the fact that July is at the centre of her own story. Levy's own notes contain additional clues to her intention within *The Long Song*, which extend to the critical importance of the narrator. Towards the end of a series of handwritten notes which amount to musings in which Levy explores ideas about the identity of the narrator she writes: 'OR I want

it narrated by an elderly woman. My mother.⁴⁷⁴ In the additional, handwritten notes to her manuscript which are held at the British Library, Levy also writes: 'July herself is like a slave story-teller...' and, in a separate manuscript note: 'Important July is the Anansi (?)'⁴⁷⁵ Through these references Levy suggests the two principal roles of Anancy within what amounts to a double circle, of storyteller and storytelling. For Levy it is critical that the perspective is that of July, who was habitually silenced, and that the form of narration is through a style of storytelling which does not follow the linear rigidity of a written, European, model. In this way, Levy's unreliable narrator weaves images and humour into the narrative, effectively piecing together fragments in a vibrant, creative hybrid. Such aspects are perhaps most prominent in *The Long Song* when July's spoken tale recalls the orality of African and Caribbean storytelling. It represents a reassertion of words and stories as a form of armoury, specifically against the 'fist or whip', violence which featured in many of their lives.

The Theatre of the Tales: The Sound of Music, and Words

While Anancy and his tactics emerge in a plethora of characters, Levy's use of the wider 'Anancy aesthetic' is prominent in *The Long Song*. In common with several other Second-Generation writers, it is also most emphatic in her use and emphasis on sound. Music is less prevalent than it is in Wheatle's work; more pronounced are July's words, which are rhythmic as she instructs: 'Do not worry yourself with the openings of slatted wood which allow the breeze to carry in the raucous rattle of croaking night creatures.'⁴⁷⁶ These passages are reminiscent of the aural features which were essential to the early tales, the stories containing an array of

⁴⁷⁴ Undigitized notebooks and manuscripts in the Andrea Levy Archive, specifically relating to *The Long Song*, at the British Library, Deposit 11256 .

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 47.

accompanying sounds, including the beat of a foot, and music, which may have also facilitated communication in an environment in which the stories were reserved for the night-time and darkness. The stories were also spontaneous and interactive with the potential to alter and evolve, a theme enhanced by the narrator's unreliability, which forces the reader to question the narrative. It is a feature which can be glimpsed in Levy's style, the preparatory notes for her stories containing her comments in the margins, which are often light or sarcastic. At one point, she writes in her notes, 'get her' in a sarcastic reference to an ambitious concept in her writing.

In *The Long Song* the indebtedness to the tales can also be glimpsed in Levy's visual theatricality, which is most transparent in a farcical style of humour, evident in the sequences which feature Nimrod, who is frequently portrayed as ridiculous or absurd. Such a keen acuity for these features of the tales undoubtedly collided with Levy's own specific sensibilities. Not only did Levy work in costume but she also told oral historian, Sarah O'Reilly, that she 'learnt storytelling from television and film,'⁴⁷⁷ attributing a lack of reading to the cramped house in which the whole family resided in one, heated, room, the background noise of the television predictably proving distracting for Levy. Despite these apparent obstacles, it is clear from the recorded interviews with Andrea Levy that she had a strong aural sense. Not only was she a proficient singer but a skilled mimic who was able to perform an array of accents and dialects, particularly those of her childhood and her parents' voices. Listening to interviews on television and radio, it is easy to detect that Andrea Levy's sense of identity was partly informed by language and, specifically, her accent. For BBC's *Imagine*, she switches easily between her 'London' voice and her mother's Jamaican

⁴⁷⁷ Andrea Levy: 'In Her Own Words', *Archive On 4*, (2020) (London: BBC Radio 4).

English, the woman who provided inspiration for Hortense in *Small Island*, and whose voice is accentuated by a particular gentility and grammatical correctness in her desire to project the superiority of her education. Describing her experience of Secondary School in the substantially autobiographical novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin*, Levy writes: ‘The school looked grand amongst the old decaying houses around it. All sorts of girls went there, from ‘ok yah’ to ‘Gordon Bennett’.⁴⁷⁸ It is, therefore, unsurprising that language and dialect exert a particular force in Levy’s writing. Language is capable of suggesting a means for inclusivity or ostracism, a perspective informed by Levy’s own experiences and, most notably perhaps, her memory that her Father was discouraged (by her mother) from using Jamaican idioms. In *Small Island*, Hortense similarly imagines that her grammatical correctness and eloquence will signify the quality of her education, affording her an elevated status, an expectation which is trampled by the unapologetic rejection of her teaching qualifications in Britain. In *Small Island*, it is also notable that Queenie takes elocution lessons in the hope of using voice to ‘better’ herself socially and through opportunities for work. It is a mask which both wears, each disadvantaged, Queenie by her working-class roots and her uncaring and, at times, stifling family, Hortense by both her ethnicity in a racially prejudiced country and her lack of family.

Anancy as Device in Levy’s Small Island: Bold, Brazen and Belonging

While Levy’s use of Anancy as a motif in her work is most obvious through the multiple references to the resistance character of the plantations, a folk figure who is indelibly connected to ideas of heritage, glimpses of Anancy as a device can still be found within *Small Island*. The draft manuscripts and notebooks which are retained

⁴⁷⁸ Levy, *Every Light in the House is Burnin*, p. 179.

in the British Library offer many 'hints' to Levy's sources of inspiration for a story which amounted to a tribute to the challenges experienced by her parents on arrival in Britain. Her father came on the Empire Windrush with hopes of a 'better future' which the realities of the cramped conditions in a post-war Britain did little to satisfy and her educated mother provided a main resource for the story. *Small Island* preceded much of the research that specifically informed *The Long Song*. There is therefore a predictable absence of spiders scuttling across the page which featured in Wilson Harris's imagery within *Palace of the Peacock* or even the resonance of the oral stories told on the plantations. Despite such conspicuous omissions, Levy draws upon an aesthetic that is reminiscent of features of the 'voice' that was defined by the Caribbean Artists Movement, even though at that time, she seems unaware of its specific debt to Anancy. Instead, *Small Island* is infused with the influences of orality, possibly derived from the people around her, which may have included her father's style of speech, sequences in television, or Levy's love of music. While less transparent than the series of characterisations that emerge within *The Long Song*, therefore, in *Small Island*, Levy still creates a character in Michael Roberts who owes much to a storytelling style that evolved from the oral tales. A wordsmith, able to entrance with his poetry, Michael's linguistic power enables him to travel both metaphorically through the story and literally across the world, creating interwoven strands of connection. Significantly, Michael is never categorized, and, through him, Levy is able to push against the insistence on classification which pervaded, and tainted, the Britain of her childhood affecting her sense of self-worth as a child. Instead, in Michael Roberts, Levy portrays a diasporic figure whose ability to survive in a hostile environment is derived from a combination of linguistic skill and the

unwavering belief in his authority in an environment that frequently insisted that he should not belong.

Reminiscent of Salkey's *Anancy's Score*, Levy's *Small Island* commences as something of an alternative, Caribbean-centric, Creation Story. As a re-appropriation of the biblical 'Fall' story in which Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden, Michael seeks knowledge, before leaving the purported 'Eden' after challenging his pious, traditional father about ideas of evolution: 'Tell me Papa, what do you think of this notion that men are descended from monkeys?'⁴⁷⁹ Michael's determination to challenge his father's orthodox, and anachronistically literal, Christian views precipitates a sequence of events which result in Michael's departure. Amoral and irresponsible at times, Michael Roberts leaves the notional 'Eden' of Jamaica, relying upon his cleverness and charm to secure a sense of place within a world into which many of his fellow colonial migrants have been denied. Symbolically depicted as having a 'crooked smile'⁴⁸⁰ his sociable nature ensures that he is 'as well loved and respected in the town as his father. He knew everyone. Hello, good morning accompanied every step...' ⁴⁸¹ However, perhaps his greatest relevance is his conduct, and success, in a diasporic setting. Michael is able to demonstrate Anancy's swagger, proving successful in securing a place whereas fellow Jamaican, Gilbert, who is similarly capable and deserving, fails. Signified in part by the fact that his fellow (white British) RAF officers make casual, inclusive jokes about his lateness, Michael is welcomed, but it is his ability to rely upon his cleverness and intuitiveness that afford him a semblance of equality. Whereas Gilbert's hopes of

⁴⁷⁹ Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Review, 2004), p. 48.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

becoming a pilot are dismissed, so that he is instead relegated to what he perceives to be the demeaning position of a driver despite his early hopes of studying Law, Michael attains a degree of 'acceptability.'

Wilfully nomadic, Levy's character Michael pushes against boundaries, seizing every opportunity in the knowledge that his charm and his 'picture-house smile'⁴⁸² will provide a means of entry. The astuteness of his judgement means that his 'rudeness' does not alienate Queenie. Instead, Michael both intrigues and challenges her, a connection which he proceeds to cultivate with his story of a hummingbird, a 'small but beautiful - blue, green, purple, red - every colour you can see in its tiny, featured body. And when it flies, its wings flicker so fast your eye cannot see them...' Michael enchants Queenie both with his figurative language and the story of the vivid, vibrant bird, 'his fingers the fluttering wings.'⁴⁸³ While his story is undoubtedly reflective of his poetic sensibility, it also illustrates his acute awareness of the most effective way to coax and entrance this lonely woman, who is sufficiently drawn to him that she muses that he 'deserved a fanfare and dancers.'⁴⁸⁴

It is perhaps notable that, in Levy's notebooks in the archives at the British Library, there is limited mention of Michael. Levy instead utilises the sense of the charming, nomadic, Anancy archetype to create something of a creolised character who connects her principal characters. Like Anancy who rarely shows any loyalty towards friends or family, in his determination to survive, Michael ultimately abandons all those who love him, and, despite Queenie's willingness to accompany Michael to

⁴⁸² Levy, *Small Island*, p. 292.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

Canada, she ends up mournfully watching his departure, 'hoping for a whiff of hesitation – an over the shoulder glance that expelled a sigh. But with his coat casually thrown over his shoulder, his hat cocky, his gait was as purposeful as a fleeing thief.'⁴⁸⁵ Ultimately, Michael serves as a device. He creates a chain between the often-disparate characters of the story, such that Michael fathers Queenie's child before he pursues a future for himself without the responsibilities that stymie Queenie who is bound to her (presumed dead) husband and his father. Emulating the type of Anancy trickster that Salkey envisaged, Michael displays a confidence which defies her other characters, including Queenie and Bernard. Despite Bernard's presumptions of white superiority and privilege, Michael proves able to exercise a degree of freedom, and traverse continents, without the shackles of responsibility as he repeatedly creates a semblance of 'home'.

A 'long song' Andrea Levy tells us, refers to a song, or story, without end, such that the story, would 'go on'. 'The fable would never be lost and, in its several recitals, might gain a majesty to rival the legends told while pointing at the portraits or busts in any fancy house in Jamaica.'⁴⁸⁶ In *The Long Song*, Levy's thread not only connects Britain to the Caribbean, but demonstrates how Britain's history *is* the Caribbean. The sense of urgency which infuses the story signifies her attempt to redress the many distorted narratives about slavery and colonialism. It is an ignorance which in *Small Island*, is underlined by Queenie's belief that she has actually visited Africa when she has merely been paraded around a few 'mud huts' at an 'Empire Exhibition'. In *The Long Song*, July's insistence upon telling her story is

⁴⁸⁵ Levy, *Small Island*, p. 495.

⁴⁸⁶ Levy, *The Long Song*, p. 1.

not only a challenge to these errors in history, but to the importance of being at the *centre* of the story. It is a theme which emerges in much of the writing of Second-Generation writers of the Caribbean diaspora, and through the retelling of the history of slavery, the central focus of both Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* and Alex Wheatle's *Cane Warriors*.

In Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*, his 'long song' can poignantly be heard reflected in a 'chorus of a common memory,' and a collective grief.⁴⁸⁷ It is significant that its opening sequence is symbolically mirrored at the end of the novel: 'A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I remember.' Levy's writing also reflects this cycle, conveying the importance of confronting the past in order to move forward. In doing so, her stories do not follow a straight, unwavering line, but a circle, not only towards an understanding of herself and her identity but through her reflections of the lives that were habitually omitted or sidelined within the stories of the Caribbean. There is a determination to her voice, and an insistent pattern to the words, which not only draws upon the definitive storyteller, but Andrea Levy herself, as she creates a very specific and personal version of her own history.

For many of this Second Generation, any pursuit of a sense of identity frequently proved confusing, the preoccupations with 'roots' and 'routes' not always allowing a direct path towards understanding their heritage. It is significant that for so many of these writers, the impact of the Caribbean Artists Movement and its interweaving, overlaying, threads was seminal to a discovery of identity and place. Although persistent anxieties about Anancy's suitability as a folk 'hero' remain, he continues to

⁴⁸⁷ Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (London: Random House, 1993), p. 1.

feature within the work of Second-Generation writers whose experience of the Anancy tales and perspective was formed at some distance from his Caribbean homeland. As a motif he can be discerned within the traits of many of the characters within their writing and, while they are rarely morally robust, they nevertheless demonstrate certain aspirational features which are connected to the acquisition of a sense of place: Nimrod secures his freedom through cleverness and trickery; Godfrey retains his pride through his ability to 'trick' his masters, which permits him some agency behind a façade of docility; Floyd, Scoop and Max all demonstrate an adaptability and intuitiveness which allow them to seize a degree of power and prosperity within an alien, often hostile, world and Michael Roberts in *Small Island*, surges forward, embracing opportunity and able to find a degree of acceptance through a combination of brazen confidence and determination.

Despite an apparent ambivalence towards the figure, Anancy and the tales still suggest a specific aesthetic which repeatedly emerges within the work. It is most vivid within a style of storytelling and language which uses rhythms and patterns, conveying a sense of a portable theatre and a synthesis of music, sound, and laughter. Perhaps fittingly, Anancy is most potently invoked as the storyteller, repeatedly able to offer a different version of the story and one in which the traditionally marginalized are restored to the centre. In this, there is a sense that, for these writers, Anancy has become something of a flamboyant and audacious, yet grudgingly admired, almost-friend, as he walks at their shoulders.

Chapter 6: New Generations and the Shape of Anancy in Contemporary British Writing for Children

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which an Anancy archetype and any 'Anancy aesthetic' emerges within contemporary British writing for children. This encompasses two primary areas. First, an examination of the predominant themes which emerge within contemporary reinventions of the Anancy tales and, second, whether there is a material influence of any aesthetic on the writing for children of those with Caribbean heritage. At some distance from the Caribbean, a primary question for this chapter is whether Anancy still has a cultural resonance for these writers, some of whom are now of a 'Third Generation' and whether any influence, or absence, of the Caribbean trickster now suggests an increased ease in negotiating identity in Britain.

Addressing the CAM conference in 1968, Stuart Hall conjectured that the process of being 'truly immigrated' might only become apparent within a Second or Third Generation.⁴⁸⁸ At the time his perspective might have seemed unduly cautious, yet his words have proved disconcertingly portentous. It is seventy-five years since the Empire Windrush docked in London, a tranche of writers and artists following its arrival that included Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Beryl Gilroy, and Andrew Salkey. It is also over fifty years since the writers of the Caribbean Artists Movement debated an 'aesthetic'. When considered alongside the current ambivalence towards the Anancy trickster, the question of whether Anancy still provides a source

⁴⁸⁸ Stuart Hall addressing the 1968 Caribbean Artists Movement Conference, cited in Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*.

of inspiration, or relevance, for writers with Caribbean heritage seems inextricably connected to ideas of belonging.

Any attempt to neatly categorise 'contemporary' writers according to generation, is predictably problematic. It is complicated by its non-specificity to time, especially as the prominent waves of immigration typically described as 'Windrush' spanned decades. Despite these potential variables, it still seems logical to continue along Anancy's historical path to examine contemporary British writing for children in an effort to understand his 'legacy', particularly as it might impact future generations. Although there are multiple reasons for this approach, in the Caribbean, Anancy stories formed part of a family tradition, significant to specific rituals which stemmed from childhood experience. Another, obvious, point is that the currently available stories for children have a potential to inform the literary and cultural imaginations of future generations of adults within Britain. Perhaps more tangentially, an examination of contemporary children's literature might offer a useful comparison with the cultural desert of the 1960s and 1970s that I explored in Chapter Four, and which was eventually filled by the 'Nippers' series of stories and the Anancy tales that Salkey, Berry and Charles reinvented. However, any attempt to identify Anancy's emergence within children's literature and what that might mean for his 'legacy' is further convoluted by the need to consider two principal ways in which Anancy might emerge within children's literature: the first is the ways in which Anancy has been reinvented within a host of available stories; the second is through any influence on a style of storytelling and choice of themes. Relevant to both of these approaches is a further, potentially ambiguous, question about whether or not Anancy, who now

seems to have acquired a degree of ubiquitousness, remains bound to ideas of heritage.

New Homes; New Configurations

Any superficial attempt to survey the range of books available for children in Britain reveals a multitude of different versions of Anancy and the tales, in addition to those of James Berry, Faustin Charles and Andrew Salkey, which are all still obtainable within Britain. While this seems heartening at first glance, it does not clarify the extent of their impact on younger generations of Britons, although the versions of the stories at least suggest some breadth and variety. **Trish Cooke**, who was born in Bradford in 1962 to parents who migrated from Dominica, is perhaps one of the most prominent storytellers to reinvent the Anancy tales in the last decade, with her *Tales from the Caribbean* published in 2017.⁴⁸⁹ Cooke's investment in the tales is bound up with ideas of family and storytelling, with Cooke recounting how her parents: 'told [her] stories about sookooyahs and Jab and characters like the mischievous Compere Lapin,' musing that, at the time, she: 'did not realise [that her] parents were passing on a legacy.'⁴⁹⁰ Where Anancy appears in Cooke's folk stories, he is reminiscent of the familiar 'rascal' of the earlier iterations, the tales emphasising humour to convey the breadth of ostensibly impossible situations in which Anansi is forced to utilise his skills to 'always [be] able to get himself out of a tight spot.'⁴⁹¹ Cooke's "Brer Anansi and Brer Snake" is notably set at a 'time of famine', in a reference to the hunger which was a prominent feature of the West African tales and dominated thought on the Caribbean plantations. Examples of Anancy using his

⁴⁸⁹ Trish Cooke, *Tales from the Caribbean* (London: Puffin Classics, 2017).

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

cunning to obtain food, which have also been responsible for the fact that one of his principal vices is often described as 'greed' offered an enjoyable, vicarious means of escape. Beckwith and Jekyll's versions of the stories frequently portrayed an avaricious Anancy gorging on food which was habitually obtained through either trickery or theft, with any perceived wrongdoing justified as a requirement for survival. However, Cooke also reinforces Anancy's trademark characteristic of 'laziness' in this tale when an unabashed Anansi confesses to his plan that his fellow villagers would 'do all the work' while he'd 'just steal what [they'd] planted.' Anansi does not waiver from his intended, if selfish, plan and, despite remaining idle, is still offered food by his fellow villagers, displays of generosity which precipitate a chain of events in which Anansi repeatedly evades the consequences of his dishonesty. The tale, which is reminiscent of the original styles of storytelling, is entertaining and humorous as Anansi initially succeeds in manipulating the villagers. However, Cooke's story ultimately deviates from the original tales by providing a less equivocal moral 'lesson', when Anansi receives his comeuppance and 'vows' that he will: 'stop begging and stealing and instead work hard for himself.'⁴⁹²

Although Cooke adapts the story for her young audience by including a 'message', through her use of a distinct narrative style that encompasses the traditional format of the tales and features of an oral tradition she celebrates Caribbean heritage as well as the community-oriented practice that is both interactive and inclusive. Cooke explains one of its key, and captivating, features as: 'When the raconteur announced, he was going to begin a story, he would call to the people 'Eh Kwik', and the people would answer 'Eh Kwak.'" Cooke describes this as a pattern designed to

⁴⁹² Cooke, *Tales from the Caribbean*, p. 102.

structure and inform the narrative, features which, she emphasises, 'ha[ve] their roots in African storytelling.'⁴⁹³ Reminiscent of the host of features that informed and shaped the tales, Cooke's stories are also punctuated with frequent references to music and song alongside specific descriptions which necessitate a perception of the sound. Such aural accents include Snake's tale lashing and the aural backdrop of the drum that is present when Anansi habitually arranges his parties. In another of her folktales, the popular West African story, "How Anansi Got His Stories", Anansi is primarily motivated by jealousy. In Cooke's version, Anansi repeatedly reveals a panoply of weaknesses. Notable as common 'human' flaws, they include 'being afraid'. However, Anansi is ultimately buoyed by his recognition of his other strengths, most prominent of which are his 'cleverness and wit'. Understandably in a story designed to offer some inspiration for a young audience, Cooke moulds Anansi to impart a message about resourcefulness alongside the variety and importance of a disparate array of individual characteristics.

For Trish Cooke, whose background is in children's television and theatre, the appeal of Anancy is obvious. Like Louise Bennett, Cooke's interests, and sensitivity to the theatrical and musical features of the tales make them an ideal vehicle for what is ultimately an empowering purpose. Despite this appeal, Cooke's choice of stories and her evident affection for them derive more substantially from their connection to an ancestral, community-based, family tradition.

While Cooke's commitment to the Anancy stories is rooted in their connection to heritage, it remains interesting that many other available 'Anancy' stories for children

⁴⁹³ Cooke, *Tales from the Caribbean*, p. 102.

are written by British authors with no discernible Caribbean ancestry, with many of these writers focusing on the 'universal' messages of the tales. Fiona French is a British illustrator who specialises in rewriting world folktales, an interest which was possibly precipitated by her considerable experience of the rich and diverse cultural contrasts offered by Lebanon, a place where she spent periods of her childhood. French depicts the story of *Anancy and Mr Dry Bone* in a colourfully animated version of the tales. French does not ignore the Caribbean origin of the myths, and although the setting is not specified as either the Caribbean or Africa, the depicted characters in her illustrations are black. In French's version of the story, specific themes are adapted for a contemporary, young audience. Mr Dry Bone is a 'conjurer' who uses numerous tricks to entice the 'unsmiling' Miss Louise, who Anancy also wishes to 'charm'. Despite his lack of circus skills, Anancy demonstrates his brazenness as he clings to an irrational belief that he can triumph. Perhaps most regrettable within the story is that Anancy does not showcase his characteristic cleverness with words. Instead, the story is more reminiscent of "Anancy and the Dumb Child", the early Caribbean story in which Anancy, wordless as he plays the violin, eventually 'wins' the King's challenge by charming the silent child into speaking. French exploits other, less explored, features of the early tales, therefore, and in doing so, emphasises themes of collaboration, disguise, and costume. For example, when Anancy fails in his quest to pursue Miss Louise alone he somewhat incongruously, 'borrow[s] a suit' from Tiger and a top hat from Dog, alligator and Monkey, the effect of the mismatched clothes and Anancy's conspicuous and eccentric appearance ultimately inducing Miss Louise to 'laugh' at his strange 'get up'.

An illustrator for whom the story's visual elements are predictably prominent, French distils many of the characteristics which made the early stories so appealing through her recreations of a visual, colourful theatre. The story also conveys an appealing message, primarily through Anancy's characteristic boldness and humour. However, it is still at some distance from both its Caribbean origins, and although a probable consequence of the age of its audience, of Anancy's multifaceted, often ambiguous nature.

Other writers have attempted modern British retellings of Anancy tales, several of which are explicitly intended for young children. Perhaps predictably, these have resulted in stories in which the nuanced messages from the earlier tales are restricted to overt, simplistic points. Popular among these is the retelling of the Akan tale: "How Anansi Got the Stories of the World". British writer, Kate Dale, wrote *Anansi and the Box of Stories* for 'early stages' primary school children. In the story, she draws upon its African heritage with named characters, including Mmboro, the hornet. When I asked why the character appealed to her, writer Kate Dale told me: 'my publisher was seeking traditional tales, and I remembered seeing an Anansi video when I was a child at primary school, and the story stayed with me...I think it's Anansi's resourcefulness and cunning in the face of enemies who are much stronger and more powerful than him that is appealing.'⁴⁹⁴

The potential for lessons within the Anancy tales, with their most immediate, accessible message relying upon the triumph of 'brains over brawn' seem to exert an appeal within contemporary teaching. A frequent message in Trish Cooke's stories is

⁴⁹⁴ Message from Kate Dale to Natalie Lucy, dated 7th June 2021.

to 'rely on your own individual strengths'; in Kate Dale's story, it is the similarly appealing message that: 'everyone will know that even the smallest animal can achieve the greatest things.'⁴⁹⁵ However, while an apparent plethora of available versions of the Anancy tales have undoubtedly helped to sustain the trickster character within Britain, his connection to the Caribbean and heritage seems to have been obscured within many of the versions which rely upon a didactic, often simplistic, message. Some of Anancy's multifaceted functions have been diluted, with the central trickster reduced to the caricaturist, but without his fluid, liminal qualities, and his interrogatory purpose.

It is also, perhaps, a potential indicator of the historic 'gate keeping' difficulties within British publishing, resulting in an absence of both black writers and black protagonists in children's literature, that the acclaimed and prolific white British author, Neil Gaiman's *Anansi Boys*, is one of the most well-known examples of the presence of Anancy within contemporary British children's fiction. Gaiman does not ignore the Caribbean origins of the stories. In fact, his book is something of a celebration of the tales with condensed versions of the Anansi tales interspersed within the narrative, both rooting the character in a tradition and acting as signposts to some of the themes. The 'Anansi' of the title is further imagined as a flamboyant, musical, nomadic, and outrageous trickster who emerges within a worldly setting, occasionally capable of achieving the unachievable, through his reliance on a brazenness and charm. In the story Gaiman draws upon the dualities inherent in the stories, with Anancy's notional 'sons' separated from what was originally one person,

⁴⁹⁵ Kate Dale & Valentina Bandera, *Anansi and the Box of Stories*, Independent Reading 11 (London: Franklin Watts, 2018), p. 28.

with one of the brothers characterised by being 'sensible', while the other brother, who is more overtly 'Anancy-like', amoral, charismatic, and clever.

During an interview, Gaiman confirmed that he used the trickster Anansi as a 'springboard' for his novel *Anansi Boys*, further explaining: 'You begin with the folk tale, and then you start thinking, "What does that mean? What does that mean for the rest of the world?"' Ultimately, Gaiman clarified this as: 'The thing that made me happy is that it really represents the point where people stop trying to hit their way out of trouble and start trying to think their way out of trouble.'⁴⁹⁶ The appeal of Anancy for Gaiman is easy to understand, particularly as his many celebrated creations typically include morally ambivalent, complex characters, many of whom appear within a visual, comic book, realm. One of Gaiman's most well-known characters is 'Sandman', as well as the sexually and morally fluid TV 'Lucifer' who moves between worlds, his appeal and sense of morality both ambivalent and ambiguous. Gaiman is also known for his interest in the 'dark' potential of books, including *Coraline*, which he describes as a 'horror' book for children.⁴⁹⁷ It is, therefore, unsurprising that Gaiman opted to use Anancy as a hero in his work. However, despite Gaiman's sensitivity to the tradition of the tales, which include the fact that his characters have Caribbean heritage and that the audio book is narrated by Gaiman's friend, Lenny Henry, who offered both a source of inspiration and worked on BBC productions of the novel, Anancy still seems at a distance from his roots, with his function and nature, subtly diluted and less specific to the importance of heritage.

⁴⁹⁶ NPR, (National Public Radio, USA) 9th June 2008: Neil Gaiman Takes Questions On 'Anansi Boys'.

⁴⁹⁷ BBC Desert Island Discs, broadcast 28th November 2021.

No longer perceived as specific to the Caribbean itself or even to Caribbean history, Anancy now seems to offer an appealing storytelling device for writers with diverse backgrounds, sometimes replacing many of the explicitly moralistic stories which were used in previous decades, most notably both Aesop's fables and Kipling's *Just So Stories*. Whether it is merely a consequence of the fact that many of the contemporary versions of Anancy are within stories for young children, he seems more linear in many of these iterations than his ancestor. At times something of the bold and confident wordsmith is evident, but he is still stripped of the many layers of complexity that made him both ridiculous and a revolutionary; a vain 'dandy' yet also at the borders, quietly observing the injustices and incongruities within society as he remains determined to push against its boundaries.

Seeking an Anancy 'aesthetic' within British Writing for Children

Anancy's 'legacy' within Britain is not, of course, confined to reinventions of the stories for children, some of which resemble 'roughshod' appropriations. It can also potentially be found in an aesthetic, or storytelling style. In my search for traces of Anancy in contemporary British literature, I am conscious that any connection with the trickster figure is now at a considerable distance, both spatially and generationally, from the experiences of Louise Bennett or Beryl Gilroy whose appreciation of the tales was intertwined with family and community traditions. Identifying any meaningful 'legacy' of the tales is further complicated by the persistent problems of categorisation and periodisation. A number of these writers are also multifaceted, with an impressive breadth of skills and interests, making the task of attempting to neatly categorise their work difficult. For example, Alex Wheatle

is a novelist whose books span a career of over twenty years but whose children's fiction, while drawing upon different themes from his 'Brixton' series, seem to belong to a different cultural context. Catherine Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah, whose work I also consider in this chapter, similarly belong to a Second Generation, although their work was published in the last decade and Dean Atta and Alexandra Sheppard are both of a 'third generation'. Despite the apparent disparity within this 'group' of authors, their writing still satisfies two principal criteria: it is contemporary, and its intended audience is children.

Anancy and His Story: Reasserting History

Alex Wheatle has already been the subject of considerable discussion in this thesis. Technically, a Second-Generation writer, he spans both genres and generations, being born in 1963. His books for children represent a raft of popular and acclaimed novels that continue to be published and to win awards. Whereas *Brixton Rock* and *East of Acre Lane* were written in 1999 and 2001, respectively, and drew upon many of the experiences which formed the backdrop to his adolescent years in Brixton in the early 1980s, Wheatle's writing for children seems to signal something of a new consciousness. Wheatle's adult novels of the 1980s specifically referenced an experience that he considered to be under-represented at the time. Within many of his recent books for children, Wheatle explicitly reasserts aspects of history which have traditionally been told from an often skewed, colonialist perspective.

The story of an enslaved young boy, *Cane Warriors* specifically demonstrates the reality of life on the plantations and the many acts of resistance which were common features of that experience. At an interview, Wheatle explained: "It's very important

that readers know that it wasn't just men in Parliament. Slaves indeed empowered themselves[...] I would like my children's children to learn about the mighty cane warriors just as they read about Richard the Lionheart, Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth I repelling the Spanish Armada."⁴⁹⁸ Wheatle's Moa is a fourteen-year-old boy who is inspired to join the Tacky Rebellion. His story offers its history from a new perspective, that of a child revolutionary, while establishing the importance of stories to a sense of rootedness and identity. Within this context, Wheatle's invocation of Anancy is central to ideas of resistance and is specifically referenced when Tacky, the Resistance fighter, is described as: 'strong like de trunk of ah blue mahoe tree. And him brain work quick like Anancy.'⁴⁹⁹

As well as being a story about rebellion, Wheatle's multi-layered narrative creates a novel space in which to represent the rich culture which existed on the plantations. In *Cane Warriors* the oral Anancy tales are utilised not only as portals for escape but as a means to sustain enslaved people through the ritualistic storytelling circles. In this, Wheatle constructs a world which draws upon community, friendship and family, features which the plantation owners, with their brutal policies of separation, strove to extinguish. In the later sequences of the book, the significance of the stories of Anancy Nyame and Asase Ya guides the young protagonist Moa towards a sense of hope, the stories conveying a dreamland, imagined as part of a collective memory, of a visceral, vivid Africa.

⁴⁹⁸ <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/story/13067> (interview dated, October 2020)

⁴⁹⁹ Alex Wheatle, *Cane Warriors*, Kindle Book, Chapter Eight, Final Paragraph, n.p.

Central to the narrative and to Wheatle's investment in the importance of the story is the idea of resistance. In this context, Wheatle's references to Anancy do not merely evoke a sense of nostalgia for the stories heard 'around a fire as an old man,'⁵⁰⁰ but offer an alternative way of telling stories. They suggest a way to centralise their own experience and, in doing so, Wheatle not only reasserts a part of history which has frequently been denied, repositioning many 'forgotten' aspects of British history at the centre, but demonstrates the potential of storytelling itself, both to a sense of heritage and through the creation of new and diverse role models.

Born in London in 1962, to a Welsh mother and Jamaican father, **Catherine Johnson** is another author whose novels seek to reassert many aspects of British history that have been distorted or obscured. Like Wheatle, Johnson belongs to a Second Generation of writers who had lost a connection to aspects of her heritage, telling me that she '[didn't] know much about Anancy stories,' further clarifying that, 'she didn't have many books...'⁵⁰¹ According to Johnson, this was not an absence of Caribbean influence but a question of interests, her family being more 'politically motivated'. It provided her with a strong awareness both of the historical injustice which had affected Jamaica and its long tradition of resistance and protest, so that she 'knew about Paul Bogle and the Jamaican Baptists...'⁵⁰² Johnson confirmed that the rich oral traditions and storytelling were not prioritised in her childhood home which she attributed to her father's style of parenting, further speculating that, although her Grandparents might have offered this, traditional, role, the expense of travelling to Jamaica meant that she was unable to establish any meaningful

⁵⁰⁰ Wheatle, *Cane Warriors*, Kindle Book, Chapter Fourteen, paragraph 68, n.p.

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Catherine Johnson, by Natalie Lucy, 12th April 2021.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

connection with them. Despite the limited books which were available to her in childhood, Johnson still 'loved stories' and, while she was, by her estimation, 'weak' at history at school, as soon as she understood its potential to reflect 'people's stories' she developed a determination to write historical novels.⁵⁰³

Johnson does not mention Anancy in her 'Middle Grade' book, *Freedom*. It tells the story of an enslaved boy who arrives in Britain with his 'owners' but who, in London is enlightened and educated by his encounters with a trail of black freedom fighters and heroes, who include Equiano Olaudah, who 'astounds' him because '[he is] a black man writing his own story!'⁵⁰⁴ Nathaniel also follows the infamous Zong trial, where he meets numerous influential and educated black people who made London their home long before any reference to ideas of a 'Windrush generation.' These include Ignatius Sancho, when Nathaniel becomes friends with his impassioned, crusading daughter who explains to Nathaniel the importance of the Zong trial as a 'way to change minds' about slavery.⁵⁰⁵ Consciously educational, a series of explanatory notes follow the conclusion to the narrative of *Freedom*. However, the novel also shows the multi-dimensional characters of the young protagonists, illuminating their potential power to change wrongs either by speech or action. At a pivotal point in the story, Nathaniel asks: 'Why is it we are the slaves, and they are our masters?[...]Are they different from us? Underneath?' It is notable that Nathaniel is told: '[they are] the same. But they tell us – and themselves – a load of stories that we deserve nothing else.'⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Interview with Catherine Johnson, by Natalie Lucy, 12th April 2021.

⁵⁰⁴ Catherine Johnson, *Freedom* (New York: Scholastic, 2018), Kindle Book, Chapter 8, paragraph 34, n.p.

⁵⁰⁵ Johnson, *Freedom*, Kindle Book, Chapter 4, n.p.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, paragraph 3, n.p.

When we discussed some of the impetus behind the novel, Catherine Johnson told me: 'As a mixed-race person I am not Jamaican, and I am not a Welsh person, so it's very important to say that people like me have a place here and have done for a long time.'⁵⁰⁷ Ultimately, Nathaniel manages to escape and, towards the end of the narrative, is living as a free person in Hackney, where he works in gardens which are reported to have 'rivalled' those of Kew. For Johnson, critical to her story was its setting, which is not only the dynamic and multicultural London but the countryside. Darren Chetty and Karen Sands O'Connor described the British countryside in British children's books as 'a green and pleasant land indeed – but only if you are white or accompanied by someone white.'⁵⁰⁸ In *Freedom*, Catherine Johnson creates a different type of 'space' for her protagonist when he escapes slavery and, 'away from the city,'⁵⁰⁹ is offered work 'in the gardens[...] out of town up in a village called Hackney.'⁵¹⁰ In *Freedom*, Johnson reclaims a place which, in so much of children's literature, seemed barred to many of its potential readers.

Despite themes of escape, manipulation, language, and storytelling, Anancy does not appear in *Freedom*, possibly because Johnson perceived the trickster to be too 'playful' to warrant a place beside the political force of the revolutionaries she learned about in her childhood. Ultimately there is something regrettable about the absence of the storytelling, resistance figure which offers a possible reminder of the disconnect experienced by many of a Second Generation for whom the stories,

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with Catherine Johnson, by Natalie Lucy, 12th April 2021.

⁵⁰⁸ Darren Chetty and Karen Sands O'Connor, *Beyond the Secret Garden? England's White and Pleasant Land*, No. 229 (March 2018).

⁵⁰⁹ Johnson, *Freedom*, Kindle Book, Chapter 11, paragraph 14, n.p.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

which now seem ubiquitous, were absent. Any 'spirit' of Anancy in *Freedom* is, therefore, without a conscious awareness of the pockets of home that the audacious Anancy carved out through his linguistic verve and brazen disregard for the misplaced perception of social 'place'.

Echoes of the Caribbean's Orality and Linguistic Power in Alex Wheatle, Benjamin Zephaniah, and Alexandra Sheppard

Prominent within Anancy's armoury was his ability to manipulate and to persuade, his command of language reflecting a rich culture which even the many ill-informed, early European visitors to the plantations acknowledged, including the vivid sounds and rhythms of storytelling. In his *Crongton* series for Young Adults, Alex Wheatle does not invoke Anancy as conspicuously as he did in his earlier novels, when he could be glimpsed behind some of the irreverent characters who existed outside convention, including the embittered but audacious Floyd. However, despite the 'absence' of an identifiable Anancy, the themes which dominate the Young Adult *Crongton* series draw upon a plethora of oral and linguistic features of the tales. Set in an imagined space which resembles aspects of the Brixton that formed the backdrop to his earlier works, *Brixton Rock* and *East of Acre Lane*, Wheatle's protagonists struggle to contend with the challenges of growing up. Unlike the casts of his Brixton adult novels, which were set in the politically and racially hostile early 1980s, such contemporary concerns are often not specific, or limited to, constructions of racial identity. The landscape of *Crongton* has evolved, becoming a more racially integrated space and many of the issues that the protagonists are forced to confront derive from a series of 'ordinary', ubiquitous problems, including family break ups, or familial or financial pressures. The temptations to join gangs and

the prevalence of violence and drugs also suggest points of navigation for Wheatle's characters, emphasized by his choice of chapter headings which include '*Home Front*' and '*Crongton Warfare*', highlighting the territorialism which represent distinct features of the stories.

Crongton Knights follows a group of teenagers, many of whom also appear in Wheatle's *Liccle Bit*, as they travel to North Crongton to seek the return of a mobile phone with its compromising photograph of a female member. It is a 'mission' which forces them to stray outside the normal bounds of their 'territory' and quickly results in a hostile confrontation with a resident of North Crongton who challenges the group: 'you don't just stroll into our ends like you own 'em.'⁵¹¹

Despite the ever-present threat of violence, Wheatle's Crongton world is realised not only through its meticulous description of physical place and streets but a style of language that draws on the Caribbean roots of many of the characters. Myriad words within their vocabulary denote a sense of place and family so that Wheatle's young teen characters refer to each other as 'bredren' and 'fam,' and their homes as their 'yard', linguistically staking a claim. However, this is not merely an appropriation of space but, as with his Brixton series, a linguistic 'code' which is specific to place. Wheatle's characters describe being 'niced up', 'messed up' and 'sick' in language which is reliant upon the audible rhythms of spoken dialogue, which include the lines, spoken by Liccle Bit: 'I went over to Gran, peeped into the pan and saw Bolognese bubbling sweetly[...] Gran hugged me like I was a money tree.'⁵¹² The residents of

⁵¹¹ Alex Wheatle, *Crongton Knights* (London: ATOM, 2016), p. 154.

⁵¹² Alex Wheatle, *Liccle Bit* (London: ATOM, 2015), p. 8.

Crongton demonstrate both command and creativity in their language. It is a form of control that is notably lacking in other aspects of their lives, so that a classmate is described as '[not] exactly hav[ing] all the letters on the keyboard.'⁵¹³ While the physical 'world' of these characters is the urban greyness of housing estates in which there are numerous recognised battle lines and perceived 'territories', a community of language supports and defines these relationships and, despite the privations of the London estates, there is a tangible sense of hope.

Typical of Wheatle, any evocation of Anancy remains most obvious within a historical Caribbean context. In *Cane Warriors*, references to the Anancy stories enable his physically constrained characters to envisage and create an alternative world, a landscape in which, when the fourteen-year-old Moa pleads with his injured, dying friend Keverton to find some strength, he does so by conjuring up images of Anancy: 'Me want to play tee-tax-toe wid your pickney. And me want you to tell dem Anancy stories from de land of our mudders.'⁵¹⁴ However, traits of a storytelling style can also be glimpsed through Wheatle's description of the Caribbean setting, which is visually and aurally conveyed against the 'chanting of tiny creatures' that permeates the night.⁵¹⁵

There is a palpable sense of opportunity within Wheatle's Young Adult books which represents something of a departure from his earlier, adult, Brixton series, in which his characters' circumstances frequently frustrated their attempts at progress. In *Cane Warriors*, it is demonstrated through the potential for resistance, and change

⁵¹³ Alex Wheatle, *Liccle Bit*, p. 13.

⁵¹⁴ Wheatle, *Cane Warriors*, Kindle Book, Chapter 17, Paragraph 47, n.p.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1, n.p.

and it is significant that Wheatle invokes the brazen, bold, energetic trickster in his portrayal of the revolutionary, Tacky. While language is the currency of all writers, the spoken language of Wheatle seems more emphatically connected to place. It offers a semblance of power, albeit limited, to its speakers, which is rooted not only in the 'Caribbean sensibility' that Wheatle referenced in his portrayal of his Anancylike Floyd, but to the traces of an Anancy aesthetic that appear in his work. Wheatle's writing is informed by, and emanates from, features of both the Anancy of the plantations and the diasporic, nomadic Anancy who negotiated a sense of place within a hostile world. In doing so he adds something of a distinct Anancy-inspired aesthetic to the legacy for future generations of British children.

The variety of themes which punctuate **Alexandra Sheppard's** Young Adult novel, *Oh My Gods*, also seem to substantially draw upon the Anancy stories. However, whether it is a result of ambivalence towards the trickster character or a lack of knowledge of his potential, Sheppard, a Third-Generation writer of mixed heritage, told me: 'I am familiar with Anancy and recall reading the stories as a child. Of course, everything I've read and consumed has influenced me, but I'm not sure if I was influenced by Anancy's tales in a substantial way.'⁵¹⁶ Despite an apparent diffidence towards the trickster figure, the themes of *Oh My Gods* correspond with many of the prominent features of an 'Anancy aesthetic', particularly as they relate to the potential power of voice. *Oh My Gods* also notably explores themes of claiming space, an anxiety of belonging which, for her principal protagonist, Helen, seems derived from her lack of knowledge about both her heritage and 'place'. Derisively described as a 'half lifer', Helen is the daughter of the Greek God, Zeus, and sister of

⁵¹⁶ Email from Alexandra Sheppard to Natalie Lucy dated 26th April 2021.

the self-absorbed and at times capricious Aphrodite, who have come down to earth and are now attempting to live 'normally' within a North London suburb. Helen, whose deceased mother had Jamaican heritage, struggles with not only looking, but feeling 'different' from everyone in her family, her sense of inadequacy precipitated by a perception that: '[they] had these incredible gifts and talents. Gifts that made the world a better, more interesting place.'⁵¹⁷ Helen's anxieties are, however, in contrast with the experience of Alexandra Sheppard, who told me: 'I felt pretty connected to my Jamaican roots[...]As a teenager, I spent pretty much every day at my Jamaican grandparents' house surrounded by aunties and cousins, so I've always felt connected with it.' Sheppard further clarified that '[she] went to Jamaica twice as a child to visit family but [she] wouldn't say it feels like home in the same way that London does.'⁵¹⁸

Despite Sheppard's apparent ambivalence towards the Caribbean trickster figure, certain features of an 'Anancy aesthetic', still permeate her work. At times these seem specific and unmistakable and are evident in a host of themes which include an authorial style of 'voice' which is frequently humorous as she lightly paints the anxieties surrounding identity for her confused central protagonist, the teenage Helen. Other themes that frequently emerge in her work include fluidity and the challenge of negotiating pluralities with a specific focus on the significance of language and voice. Within *Oh My Gods*, racial identity becomes an issue when her 'Greek God' cousin compares the colour of their skin, but it is rarely an explicit source of anxiety within her school in the multicultural London that Helen effusively

⁵¹⁷ Alexandra Sheppard, *Oh My Gods* (London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2019), pp. 52-53.

⁵¹⁸ Email from Alexandra Sheppard to Natalie Lucy dated 26th April 2021.

describes as a 'pretty incredible place to call home.'⁵¹⁹ Although Sheppard most overtly draws on Greek mythology to explore issues of belonging, parallels with the Anancy Tales are evident, and perhaps most conspicuous in Helen's adeptness with language.

Reminiscent of Wheatle's Crongton and Brixton characters, Helen's sense of comfort and security stems from a distinct, regional vernacular which is capable of traversing class and, to some extent, cultures. Parallel to many of Wheatle's characters, Helen's confidence in place is realised through the oral language patterns specific to London and the Caribbean, with its mixed influences of 'Your Mum jokes', and the 'slang'⁵²⁰ which unites her friends. Language also has significance when the silent words of Helen's diary and her letters to her deceased mother offer some solace. However, it is most potent when, at the end of the narrative, Helen is forced to advocate on behalf of her family in an attempt to avoid the threatened return to their mythical and 'dull' home, Mount Olympus.⁵²¹ Despite persistent insecurities, which extend to doubts over her ability to influence a panel of judges when she exclaims: 'Me? Give a powerful speech? I can't even read a poem in English without stumbling over a line...'⁵²² Helen is ultimately able to persuade the court to facilitate her family's freedom which, in the wake of the Windrush Scandal, has a perceptible, additional resonance. While Sheppard does not consciously draw upon any 'Anancy aesthetic' the host of specific themes evident within Sheppard's work which encompass fluidity, place and ideas of protest still hint at the influence of Anancy. At

⁵¹⁹ Sheppard, *Oh My Gods*, p. 116.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

times these seem pointed, carrying echoes of the nomadic, audacious, voice of Anancy, perhaps less urgent or even less audible, but still heard.

This potential of voice also represents a principal theme within the writing for children of **Benjamin Zephaniah**. In *Refugee Boy* the protagonist, Alem, is persecuted for being both Eritrean and Ethiopian within those respective countries. When Alem comes to Britain his father leaves him in a children's home in the hope that he will be allowed to stay. It is an act of courage and love reminiscent of the sacrifices made by many former refugees or migrants seeking opportunity, including many of a 'Windrush' generation. Although Zephaniah does not explicitly draw upon the Anancy tales, his themes correlate with many of those evident within the stories, particularly fluidity and hybridity and, while the Britain portrayed in *Refugee Boy* is not always hospitable, it offers the possibility of mutability without the rigid, and illogical, demarcations that impelled Alem and his father to leave Eritrea.

A sense of belonging remains a central question within *Refugee Boy*, a theme encapsulated by Zephaniah's opening question in his introduction: 'What kind of refugee are you? And what are you scared of?' Alem ultimately finds a semblance of freedom in London, but it is via an often-deviating path, and he has first to be disabused of some of his preconceived ideas, both in respect of the treatment of refugees and his understanding of the complex heritage of many people in Britain. Becoming friends with the irreverent, but kind, Robert, who has Chilean ancestry, Alem asks if he 'wants to go back'. Robert's response, which is expressed 'loudly' is that he doesn't feel like he comes from 'there' (Chile) and 'how can [he] return to a

place that [he's] never been to?'⁵²³ Part of Zephaniah's perspective within *Refugee Boy*, was conveyed within his poem, 'The British', when he asserted: 'The Celts, the Angles, the Saxons, the Jamaicans are all refugees of one sort of another.'⁵²⁴ In *Refugee Boy*, Zephaniah frequently highlights such inconsistencies. While emphasising a celebration of hybridity and pluralism he also explores the illogicality of the government's policies, and attitudes, that inform Alem's experiences in Britain in a story which is often unsettling. Alem is mercilessly moved through a series of homes and court hearings, a lack of humanity which is portrayed as both stark and disturbing. However, despite being buffeted by a system that is frequently devoid of compassion, Zephaniah's centralises the potential power of language and voice, either through protest or advocacy, as a means to acquire a sense of agency.

As with Catherine Johnson's work, any explicit references to the Anancy trickster are absent from *Refugee Boy*. Despite this, Zephaniah's themes share notable similarities with those encapsulated in the early stories. Perhaps most prominently, Zephaniah's principal characters emerge with a capacity and power that emulates Anancy's greatest strengths, not only in his linguistic agility but in his brazen determination to speak. Despite his vulnerability, Alem's ability to tell stories, emerges as a tangible form of power. Early in the narrative, two representatives from the Refugee Council invite Alem to tell his story. After relaying the realities of the precariousness of his life in Eritrea, the room is described as '[falling] silent.'⁵²⁵ Later, at a court hearing to debate his asylum status, Alem demonstrates the power of his words. Invited to speak, he provides a simple statement to the effect that 'if

⁵²³ Benjamin Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2001), p. 179.

⁵²⁴ Benjamin Zephaniah, 'The British'.

⁵²⁵ Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, p. 44.

Christmas makes us nicer to each other, we should celebrate as many Christmases as we can.' Following Alem's display of magnanimity, the adjudicator's attitude is shown to shift, with his apparent detachedness replaced with an acknowledgement that Alem's perspective has made him 'wiser'.⁵²⁶ Despite the evident impact of his words, Alem's skills are perhaps most effective when, at a pivotal moment of the story, his friends are motivated to demonstrate against his immigration status, challenging the authorities through peaceful protest. The initially reluctant Alem, is eventually sufficiently emboldened to speak, his school friends later enthusing that he: 'sounded wicked, guy[...]like Martin Luther King or some freedom fighter.'⁵²⁷

Pluralities; Fluidity and Disguise

*'Like any black child in Britain who grew up in the sixties and seventies it had long been clear to me that the full complexity of who I am – my plural self, if you like – was never going to be nourished in a country which seemed to revel in its ability to reduce identity to cliches.'*⁵²⁸

(Caryl Phillips)

For many writers, including Louise Bennett, one of the principal themes of the tales, Anancy's shapeshifting, was adapted to disguise through the exploitation of the stories' visual, theatrical, potential. Despite the apparent ambivalence towards Anancy of many of a Second and Third Generations, it seems significant that they still adopt this theme within their work. I have already referenced Zephaniah's emphasis upon the historical nomadism and hybridity of Britain's populace. In

⁵²⁶ Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, p. 152-3.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁵²⁸ Caryl Phillips, *Color Me English*, p. 123.

Catherine Johnson's *The Curious Tale of Lady Caraboo*, this is perhaps at its most prominent, alongside a panoply of other themes from the oral folktales, despite Johnson indicating to me that she had no sense of being consciously influenced by the Anancy Tales. Set in 1817, *Lady Caraboo* follows the real-life story of 'trickster' Mary Wilcox who was famed for her success at: 'hoodwink[ing] professors and academics [and] outwit[ing] the upper classes.'⁵²⁹ In Johnson's narrative, Mary Wilcox impersonates a princess, although the extent of her lack of agency gradually emerges throughout the story and is demonstrated by the dual Eighteenth Century barriers of poverty and being a woman. In Johnson's version there is also a suggestion that the principal protagonist comes from the Caribbean, at a time when the plantations still relied upon the labour of enslaved people. A variety of possible clues to this include the fact that Lady Caraboo is deemed to be 'exotic' and 'brown' and is 'found' not far from Bristol with its historical connections to the slave trade, a fact that is reinforced by a later, pointed, allusion to 'the days of the Sugar Barons [being] over.'⁵³⁰ In addition to its relevance to potential Colonialist, Feminist and Socioeconomic, interpretations, it was a period which was also interesting for its collective sense of possibility. The privileged Cassandra Worrall with whose family Mary finds a temporary home, is inspired by Frankenstein's experiments, the dramatic 'promise' of electricity being a well-known influence on Mary Shelley who believed that 'creating' life was not only dangerous but potentially possible. Ideas of rebirth and invention form a symbolic foundation to the narrative of *Lady Caraboo*, which, in the opening sequences, is further emphasised when Mary is described as

⁵²⁹ Catherine Johnson, *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* (London: Corgi Children's, 2015), p. 265.

⁵³⁰ Johnson, *The Curious Tale of Lady Caraboo*, p. 90.

resembling a 'savage', although she is later categorised as 'foreign', and is subsequently transformed into an 'exotic' beauty.

Johnson's narrative does not merely echo contemporary interests, however. The themes increasingly resemble Anancy and the tales, with Mary's fluidity and ambiguity making it impossible to discern her motives at any point of the novel. A nomad, she acquires a series of 'costumes' through a range of guises which she assumes during the course of the narrative, and which are principally used to identify her and, perhaps, more importantly, her status. Sympathetic, yet survivalist, it is also significant that Mary is a proficient storyteller, able to reinvent herself so that she is afforded greater freedom and power through a cognisance that 'stories ha[ve] never let her down.'⁵³¹ However, voice has a further significance in the story which provides a specific reference to the Anancy Tales. Towards the conclusion of the narrative, Mary's temporary benefactor, Mrs Worrall, pronounces that: '[she] should like to hear her speak.'⁵³² Reduced to something of a scientific specimen, Mary is examined by a 'professor' to elicit her true origin. Language becomes key both to heritage and class and, although this echoes aspects of Pygmalion, in *Caraboo* it is more intertwined with place. Mary who, watching a ship at the nearby docks, a prominent motif for exploration or escape, listens to the voices of 'all sorts of people: lascars, even browner than Caraboo, white-turbaned, lugging sacks off a huge four-master. And Africans, Americans and some West Country men – she could tell by their speech.'⁵³³ Significantly, Mary is ultimately exposed through her voice, although the reality of Mary/Lady Caraboo's crime is her poverty and lack of freedom such

⁵³¹ Johnson, *The Curious Tale of Lady Caraboo*, p. 46.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p 179.

that she later seeks to explain away her actions through an amoral, Anancyesque individualism as: '[thinking] nothing of the future but only of the present, of comfort[...] I thought of not wanting to go back to living on the road and being vulnerable.'⁵³⁴

For Dean Atta, themes of fluidity and disguise similarly offer a device through which to navigate and express pluralistic identity. Atta's *Black Flamingo* charts the main protagonist's journey from age six to nineteen, through his exploration of an identity which is not only rooted in the complexities of heritage but gender and sexuality. For Michael, who has grown up in London, with both Jamaican and Greek heritage, any anxieties are primarily attributable to his inability to 'fit', a sense of confusion that is heightened by the absence of his Jamaican father. In the concluding chapters of the narrative, Michael finds a 'place' as a Drag Artist, a route towards a sense of equilibrium which is deceptively complex as Michael deviates through periods of experimentation to recognise what Caryl Phillips termed the 'full complexity' of identity. When Michael's best friend, Daisy says that she is 'not ashamed of being mixed but has nothing to claim, nothing handed down to [her]',⁵³⁵ Michael responds that she is 'hiding a part of herself'. It is a sense of inhibition which is reinforced when his uncle is arbitrarily pulled over by the police and later explains to Michael that he can 'never get comfortable' in his role as a black man in Britain.⁵³⁶ However, it is only when Michael lives outside London, that the pressures of stereotypes, which relate to both race and gender, emerge most forcefully. Michael is told that he is not 'black enough' for the African Caribbean Society at university but 'doesn't feel

⁵³⁴ Johnson, *The Curious Tale of Lady Caraboo*, p. 195.

⁵³⁵ Dean Atta, *Black Flamingo* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2019), p. 92.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.184.

Greek enough' for other societies.⁵³⁷ These anxieties are heightened by a determination to 'categorise' and stereotype, experiences that are emphasised within the narrative by a sequence of unsettling incidents. When Michael goes to a nightclub he is described as wearing a 'Bob Marley costume' and he later tells a friend: 'I don't like white people to know I smoke weed – they assume I'm a dealer.'⁵³⁸ Atta never explicitly mentions Anancy or the folktales and, when I asked about their influence on his work he politely and pleasantly responded that he 'could not help'. Despite his apparent ambivalence to the folklore character numerous, pointed, features of the tales emerge in his writing, aspects which serve an essential function in helping Michael to understand and express the uniqueness of his identity, both in terms of his sexuality and his heritage. When Michael becomes involved in Drag, he reinvents himself as an 'animal' and, prior to his incarnation as the conspicuous and flagrant flamingo, he opts to be the well-known folkloric figure of turtle, explaining its significance as it 'carries its home on its back.'⁵³⁹ In another echo of the tales, Michael's decision to assume a new 'name' towards the end of the narrative is described as: 'not letting anyone forget your name. It's Marsha P. Johnson smiling down on you. It's ancestry.'⁵⁴⁰ However, it is not only in the pervasive themes of reinvention that Atta builds upon a foundation of Caribbean folk stories. His style of narrative is also reminiscent of the oral tales. A spoken word poet, *Black Flamingo* is told through verse, Atta's writing conveyed in short passages, sequences which, while loosely chronological, do not follow the conventional structure of the novel.

⁵³⁷ Atta, *Black Flamingo*, pp. 189–190.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Any attempt to understand the possible impact and, what I term, 'legacy' of Anancy within contemporary Britain, remains a complex question partly because of the numerous available reinventions of the Anancy Tales, particularly for young children. While the stories still exist in some abundance, heritage no longer seems to represent a principal theme in many of those stories. Apart from Trish Cooke's vivid story collections of Anancy, he no longer resembles Brathwaite's 'culture bearer' or stands as a symbol for social change. With the exception of Alex Wheatle whose Anancy is habitually confined to a historical, Caribbean context, he also no longer signifies the rootedness that was so critical to his early purpose. As an archetype, in the work of a Third Generation, Anancy's emergence is, at best, oblique, with writers, Alexandra Sheppard and Dean Atta, remaining diffident about the influence of Anancy on their writing.

When I mentioned to the writer Ferdinand Dennis what I perceived to be a decline in the significance of Anancy amongst contemporary writers with Caribbean heritage, he responded that it 'ma[de] sense that folk tales and characters brought to the UK from the Caribbean are of diminishing relevance to the migrants' children and their literary works.'⁵⁴¹ At first glance, there is something almost disconcertingly accepting about this statement which belies the gravity of the loss. However, while these writers dismiss the extent of Anancy's influence, a proliferation of themes in their work still underline what seems to be more than a coincidental reference to the tales. It also seems significant that Johnson, Atta, and Sheppard all explicitly build upon the influences of their predecessors, drawing upon a chain of writing and voices which captures something of those early sounds. When, in *The Black Flamingo*,

⁵⁴¹ Email from Ferdinand Dennis to Natalie Lucy, dated 20th October 2020.

Atta's Michael affirms: 'I come from looking online to find myself, I come from stories, myths, legends and folk tales[...]I come from griots, grandmothers and storytellers,'⁵⁴² it emerges as a testament to the unifying aspects of the Literature of a Black Atlantic, and to the African American writers who, listed at the end of his book, include Alice Walker, Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansberry. Each of these writers has at the heart of their literature themes of hope, injustice, and identity; each is cognisant of the fact that they built upon a foundation laid by others. Alice Walker's famous essay, "Looking for Zora", in her seminal, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*,⁵⁴³ discusses the incalculable legacy of Zora Neale Hurston and the title of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, was inspired by Langston Hughes's poem 'A Dream Deferred'.

While many of these contemporary British writers seem unaware of an influence of Anancy, their stories still reflect aspects of an 'Anancy aesthetic' in a choice of narrative style in which sound and voice are uniquely intertwined as part of a synaesthetic landscape. Whether or not these are specific features of an Anancy storytelling aesthetic or attributable to the broader influence of oral tradition, is a difficult question to answer. It is tempting, however, to be content that, while Anancy is not always detected, as he shapeshifts and scuttles away, his influence still seeps into their writing. It is not only evident in the lone, lyrical, advocate of the stories, a quiet revolutionary, pushing against authority, but in his liminality, in the penchant for names and in the celebration of hybridity, fluidity and possibility. It is also there in the structure of the non-linear, unorthodox, narrative which celebrates the lyrical sounds

⁵⁴² Atta, *Black Flamingo*, p 218.

⁵⁴³ Alice Walker, *In Search Of Our Mother's Gardens*, (Oxford: W & N, 2005).

of the stories. It still seems possible, that something of Anancy's voice, and the music and rhythms of those early tales can still be heard, if listened for. Ultimately, while it is disappointing that so many of these writers seem unaware of the specific chain of influences originating with Anancy, perhaps Ferdinand Dennis's words about a decline in the significance of the tales are not an acknowledgement of loss. Perhaps his words reflect a quiet optimism in the ability to find a space and sense of place, without the need for Anancy to always be there, a rhythmic tapping of his feet, as he walks alongside them.

CONCLUSION

'All I ever want to do is to tell a story that would cause some soul to laugh, to cry or to say: "That's me in that book."'

(Beryl Gilroy)⁵⁴⁴

In 2021, Regent's Park Open Air Theatre announced that *'Anansi the Spider'* was being presented as part of its summer programme. The production, which was aimed at young children, was billed as a performance of 'West African and Caribbean folk stories', with a particular focus on the 'infamous Anansi – the original trickster and the master spinner of yarns.' Previously performed at the Unicorn Theatre, an acclaimed London venue with a focus on productions for children, the information that can be gleaned from the previews supports the visual and auditory richness of the production. However, it is perhaps the fact of the performance, in a prestigious Central London location, that suggests some progress for a country that, fifty or sixty years prior to this, demonstrated a complete failure to represent the experience of many of its inhabitants within the available reading material of its educational institutions or media. Perhaps more significant is its suggestion that Britain now wants to convey itself as multicultural within its stories.

The reinvented versions of the Anancy Tales, which now exist both in British theatre and within a disparate range of books, seem to point to some evolution for Anancy beyond his previous, significant, purpose as the fortifying, almost-friend that accompanied so many of the displaced migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Essentially oral, the rhythms of the tales emulate a format which has

⁵⁴⁴ Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, p. 32.

always proved popular for children, providing a forum for its simple moral lessons. The array of children's stories by contemporary British writers which feature Anancy suggest that his symbolism is no longer bound up with his status as a culture bearer. He is more frequently depicted as a champion for the dispossessed, with his cleverness and wit reasserted to demonstrate something of the power of words over might. Although this, potentially universal, focus is 'worthy' and offers a potent and mobilising symbol for children in particular, it also raises further questions. Most prominent is whether or not Anancy is still rooted in ideas of heritage. The distant version of Anancy whose perceived applicability as a banner of hope for those with Caribbean heritage seems to have declined within a panoply of reinventions. In many, Anancy is reduced to a linear, diluted, approximation of the brazen and multifaceted figure of the plantations. Whether this is the result of a perceived lack of resonance for a contemporary generation of Britons with Caribbean heritage or because of an ambivalence towards the trickster is difficult to determine. Despite appearing as something of a shadow of the brazen flamboyant figure, features of an Anancy aesthetic can still be glimpsed within the writing of what in many cases is a Third Generation. Frequently evident through a focus on themes which emphasise disguise, humour, fluidity, and the power of individual voice, it offers a multisensory, alternative to the traditional, Eurocentric, narrative style. While something of an aesthetic still emerges within a synaesthetic form of storytelling, the Anancy who suggested modes of resistance against the brutality of the plantations, offering a means to appropriate and reinvent their world, seems to have lost much of his significance to a sense of heritage or identity. Within a breadth of the available stories for children the Anancy who, both sinister and comforting, hovered in a corner of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry, providing a connection not only to the

Caribbean but, beyond that, to West Africa, has metaphorically shrunk. Drawing back into the dark recesses, his long, spidery limbs retracted, the indefatigable 'man of words' seems to have lost many of the circles of his potential when he existed at the borders, brazenly able to illuminate the absurdity of so much in society.

Although the outrageous and audacious trickster seems to have lost some of his relevance as an archetype within contemporary literature, there are still signs that he has evolved into other cultural and artistic spheres within Britain. Whether a symbolic sign of Anancy's ability to remould himself and reform, the trickster, bold and determined to push against boundaries, can instead be glimpsed in a disparate range of art forms. Within contemporary poetry, the continued relevance of Anancy is perhaps most prevalent in the work of John Agard whose poetry is prominent on many British school syllabuses. John Agard is Guyanese, arriving in Britain in 1970s when he was in his late twenties, the tales already embedded in his consciousness through a tradition of storytelling within the Caribbean, particularly as it was conveyed by elderly family members, and prominently, women. Agard explores Anancy's multifunctional and transformative potential in his collection *Weblines*, reasserting the fluid and flamboyant figure as he consciously builds upon the tradition founded by the Caribbean Artists Movement. Agard's 'Anansi's Thoughts on Colours' is notably dedicated to Andrew Salkey who Agard thanks for his 'cannily spun' Anancy. Through his reference to limbo dancing, other prominent members of CAM are acknowledged. In 'Limbo dancer in dark glasses' Agard encapsulates Anancy's fluidity asking: 'who can pin a gender/on this limbo dancer/who can dare decipher/this human spider.' Agard credits both Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris for 'first making [him] aware of the limbo dance/slave ship connection' before he

outlines a ‘history’ of Anancy which draws a line between Walter Jekyll, Louise Bennett and James Berry, who he references for ‘adding his spin to the Britain-based web’.⁵⁴⁵ While Agard speaks with the voice and experience of someone from the Caribbean, therefore, he also adds something to a foundation that was specifically cultivated in Britain, extending its metaphorical chain by reasserting something of Anancy’s power and creative potential.

Now some distance from the multifaceted protagonist of the stories of the plantations, it seems fitting that a version of Anancy, reconstructed and reassembled, can also be glimpsed in other art forms within Britain. Prominent amongst these is the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson. Widely credited as the ‘father of dub poetry’, an art form which represents a coalescence of disparate yet overlapping cultures, his poetry has attracted sufficient acclaim and affirmation that, in 2020, he won the Golden PEN award. Johnson defined dub poetry as: ‘a new form of [oral] music-poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on to the rhythm background of a popular song.’⁵⁴⁶ Characterised by ‘speaking’ verse in Jamaican patois over reggae rhythms Fred D’Aguiar describes Johnson’s dub poetry as: ‘speaking a truth that cut across race and cultural differences in a form that people from a variety of backgrounds found irresistible.’⁵⁴⁷ It was a popularity that stemmed from the 1970s when Johnson’s ability to traverse boundaries not only afforded him an insight into multiple, often exclusive ‘worlds’ but offered a form of licence. Much of Johnson’s poetry constitutes a specific commentary on Brixton street life and the

⁵⁴⁵ John Agard, *Weblines* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 2000), in Acknowledgements.

⁵⁴⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson, ‘Jamaican Rebel Music’, *Race & Class*, 17.4 (1976), 397–412, (p. 398) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/030639687601700404>.

⁵⁴⁷ Fred D’Aguiar, *Introduction to The Selected Poems of Linton Kwesi Johnson* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. ix.

recurrent police brutality that frequently targeted black people in the 1980s. In 'Di Great Insohreckshan', Johnson offers a specific response to the 1981 Brixton riots and, in other poems, he calls out the police apathy that followed the horrors of the New Cross Massacre. Part of Johnson's particular skill is his ability to perceive and convey humanity through what Salkey was credited with as an 'inner eye,' and the art form that Johnson cultivated offers a unique vehicle for his purpose. Rooted in the traditions of the Caribbean, it fits with the 'experiential' function of certain popular music from Jamaica which, as Johnson terms it: 'tell[s] of the burden of the history of oppression, rebellion, and repression; of the 'tribla' wars, the political 'skank'...'⁵⁴⁸ In the explanatory footnotes, Johnson defines the word 'political skank' as 'to fool around to fool someone or to play the fool for the purpose of deception,' a reference which draws another unequivocal line between Anancy and his dub poetry.

Part of Johnson's appeal, which Fred D'Aguiar also emphasises, was as one of 'inclusion'. Johnson achieves this skill both through his immersive style and a specific style of delivery in which he commands his audience, to engage and question. In 'New Craas Massakah' Johnson places the listener at the centre of the scene. The rhythms of his poetry provide an echo for the action in which the innocent, fated guests of the party are described as: 'dancin /an di scankin/ an di pawty really swingin.' Swept along by both the innocence and hedonism of the scene, the auditory, and assonant, 'crash' and 'bang' provide a prelude to the shock of 'di people staat fi choke.' Johnson's poetry is not only multi-sensory and multifaceted, but he also conveys ideas in a visual and audible explosion, the lines from his 'Dread Beat' proving urgent and visceral within the lyrics: 'Black veiled night

⁵⁴⁸ Linton K Johnson, 'Jamaican Rebel Music', p. 398.

is weeping/ Electric lights consoling, night/ A small hall soaked in smoke/A house of ganja mist/ Music blazing, sounding, thumping fire, blood/ Brothers and sisters rocking, stopping, rocking/ Music breaking out, bleeding out, thumping out fire, burning.'

In certain of his poems, Johnson calls out Government policies, with the demand: 'Wat about di Workin' Claas?' At other times Johnson speaks as a direct challenge to those in power, not only as an advocate for the voiceless but to those who dismiss their people. In 'Mekkin Histri' Johnson's words are unflinching: 'now tell mi someting/mistah govahment man.' Like Anancy, Johnson is always in dialogue, challenging the tyrannical, the unjust and the irresponsible through his self-styled literary revolution. With the inimitable style that D'Aguiar describes as cultivated as early as the 1970s, Johnson wears 'multiple' hats as he straddles worlds. It is a versatility which further underlines the analogy between Linton Kwesi Johnson and the Caribbean trickster. It can be discerned in the juxtaposition of humour and lightness with serious, often urgent, political themes and in the fusion of music with an oral literary tradition. Johnson displays both erudition and an ability to appeal to a wide spectrum of society as he conveys a unique and intrinsic Jamaicanness within the Britain that he has known and lived in for nearly sixty years. Intellectual and knowledgeable, he crafts his words both with the pen and through the vibrant and creative oral influences of the Caribbean. As a unique art form, it is founded upon dual strands of influence, in both the Caribbean's reggae and calypso, and its oral storytelling tradition, one which undoubtedly found some inspiration in the spoken poetry of Kamau Brathwaite.

Linton Kwesi Johnson has spoken in the media about the importance of libraries. For Johnson, literature was also political, the intensity of his words not only rhythmic and powerful but able to convey a complex tangle of emotions while conjuring up what, in the poem 'Dread Beat', is a cacophony within the fire. Dilek Sarikaya who credits Johnson with the 'revival of Afro-Caribbean oral tradition through his poetry,' further posits that Johnson 'succeeds in turning poetry into an act of cultural activity in which the audience also is involved. Therefore, Johnson attempts to define a distinctive black cultural identity as the only medium to fight against racism.'⁵⁴⁹ In doing so, he consciously builds upon the foundation of those who preceded him and whose struggles he references as both creative and productive, individuals, including C.L.R. James and Walter Rodney, whose courageous efforts to call out corruption, and oppression, resulted in violent threats, and, in Rodney's case, death.

There is a further, albeit tangential, connection between Anancy and Linton Kwesi Johnson's art. When referencing the Maroons of Jamaica's music as an early form of reggae, the writers Chang and Chen (1998) argued that Anansi, who they describe as 'the venerable African hero,' can be located within these songs.⁵⁵⁰ S.A. Prahlad expands upon this theme, describing Anansi as a 'potential simile' within reggae music. For Prahlad, part of this can be found within the structure, and circularity, of its tradition, a theme both of the earlier Anancy stories and of the aesthetic that, as I have sought to contend within this thesis, emerges in some of the writing of a Second and Third Generation. Prahlad contends that: "the music destroyed all

⁵⁴⁹ Dilek Sarikaya, 'The Construction of Afro-Caribbean Cultural Identity in the Poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, (2011), 7.1: 161–75, (p. 161).

⁵⁵⁰ Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998).

notions of beginning, middle, and end, as the rhythm surged and resurged, circular but never quite arriving any place it had been before.⁵⁵¹ This resistance to linearity also reflects the often-meandering path that Anancy takes as well as his physical movement, particularly evident in the limbs that extend, allowing the spider to scurry and scuttle rather than following a direct, straight route.

Extracts from Johnson's incisive and poignant reflections of the cultural impact of Andrew Salkey, Louise Bennett and John La Rose have all found their way into earlier parts of this thesis. It seems fitting that one of Johnson's most affecting poems is the luminous, 'Beacon of Hope', which is dedicated to John La Rose. Notable for its shift in tempo and sound, Johnson illustrates this multifaceted ability as he writes: 'tonight you will illuminate the path of dreams/like glow-worms of the northern climes/your flashing fluorescence/are eyes of light/flashing sparks/that pierce the dark/of my moonless starless tropical night.' Perhaps it is not surprising that Linton Kwesi Johnson, a product and mentee of so many of the originators of the Caribbean Artists Movement should have listened so attentively to the voices of Andrew Salkey, Kamau Brathwaite, who Fred D'Aguiar describes as a prominent influence on Johnson's 'poetic form rooted in Caribbean oral culture',⁵⁵² and his treasured friend and mentor, the 'beacon of hope',⁵⁵³ John La Rose, and that this should result in a unique poetic and political voice which bears echoes of their Caribbean champion, Anancy.

⁵⁵¹ S. A. Prahlaad, *Reggae Wisdom. Proverbs in Jamaican Music*, (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

⁵⁵² Fred D'Aguiar, Introduction to *Linton Kwesi Johnson's Selected Poems*, p. xi.

⁵⁵³ In Johnson's poem, 'Beacon of Hope' dedicated to John La Rose.

If Johnson and Agard help to reassert the 'voice' of Anancy within contemporary Britain, there is also something of the spirit of Anancy, dismantled and reincarnated, in the arena of Carnival. The grand-scale Carnivals in Britain evolved from their embryonic origins to celebrate culture and community, most prominent of which is the annual Notting Hill Carnival, founded by the trailblazing Claudia Jones, and which is now 'claimed' by Britain, as epitomising something of the vibrancy and multiculturalism of London. Even in its earliest guises, Carnival made a profound impression on London, although its origins were less unequivocally embraced which perhaps contributed to its dynamism and endurance, because as Dwight Conquerwood posits: 'performance flourishes within a zone of contest and struggle.'⁵⁵⁴ While the connections between Carnival and the Anancy tales may not be immediately apparent, the characterisation of certain principal players of Carnival draw upon many features of the trickster. Bakhtin emphasises that one of Carnival's distinguishing features is its literary and verbal freedom, in common with the early functions of the Anancy stories. Its purpose in offering some freedom from the established order: 'marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions [representing] the feast of becoming, change, and renewal.'⁵⁵⁵ As I discussed earlier in this thesis, Wilson Harris also referenced carnival performers and their potential connection to Anancy, describing them on high stilts, others, similarly like a spider, moved spread-eagled on the ground.⁵⁵⁶ Visually stimulating and theatrical, at the centre of these celebrations, with his own connection to the traditions and functions of the Anancy trickster, is the brazen, linguistically agile

⁵⁵⁴ Dwight Conquerwood, 'Of Caravans and Carnivals: Performance Studies in Motion', *TDR/The Drama Review* (1995), 39.4: 137 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1146488>.

⁵⁵⁵ Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

⁵⁵⁶ Wilson Harris, The Limbo Gateway, from: 'History, Fable and Myth,' in *The Caribbean and the Guianas*, reproduced in *The Post-Colonial Reader* (edited Ashcroft; Griffiths and Tiffin, 2nd edition (2006)), p. 337.

figure of the Midnight Robber. A wordsmith, his bold dress and hat reminiscent of typical constructions of a 'highwayman', Emily Zobel Marshall has defined the figure as a 'man of words',⁵⁵⁷ suggesting him as: 'the twentieth- and twenty-first-century carnival manifestation of the traditional West African-rooted Caribbean trickster figure; a post-emancipation performance of phenomenal power and skilful oratory played out on the streets rather than in the storytellers' circle.'⁵⁵⁸ The Midnight Robber is intended to be fearsome, but he is also humorous and combative, drawing on the traditions of the Anancy tales in which language and its possibilities are explored alongside other themes including dualities and hybridity. As with many of the metaphors that have emerged from the Caribbean, the Midnight Robber is also more complex and symbolically resonant than being a mere 'man of words' might suggest. Crucially, the Midnight Robber is not only flamboyant, but a visually confusing and elaborately dressed figure and it is notable that some of the most persuasive evidence for the similarities between him and Anancy are offered by his physical appearance. Daniel Crowley describes the essentials of the costume as: 'a whistle to attract the victim's attention, a costume of baggy pants, embroidered shirt, long cape, and huge brimmed hat, a gun or dagger with which to menace the victim and a sack to hold the swag, which is Carnival "pounds" or pennies.'⁵⁵⁹ It is also significant that many of the available images of the Midnight Robber also reference duality, the typical costume contrasting its black and white decoration. Perhaps more notable, some costumes encompass a skeleton, the allusion to death establishing a further connection with the trickster and serving to reinforce his role as a liminal figure positioned between worlds. In several striking costumes, there are specific

⁵⁵⁷ Roger D. Abrahams, *Man of Words in the West Indies*.

⁵⁵⁸ Marshall, 'Resistance through 'Robber-Talk'.

⁵⁵⁹ Daniel J. Crowley, "The Midnight Robbers." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 4. 3/4 (1956), pp. 263–74. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40652640>. Accessed 30 June 2023.

references to the spider. In one, an outer garment has been created from what can be perceived as spider's limbs, illuminating the fact that in many creative imaginations a notional stage is shared by Anancy and the Midnight Robber, both of whom are flamboyant, audacious, and liminal; both of whom serve as a provocation.

Despite the enthusiasm to embrace the Notting Hill and Leeds Carnivals as British 'traditions' their profound connections to the Caribbean are not only indisputable but are constantly reinforced by music and visual references. In a sense, therefore, Anancy's appearance in this forum is predictable, and at only a small remove from his Caribbean origins. More interesting, perhaps, is that Anancy seems capable of disassembling and reconstructing himself within other, more overtly revolutionary, forms. Although it is a connection which might at first glance seem ambitious, many of the peculiar functions and manifestation of the Anancy trickster can be found within Grime music, particularly in their lyrics and performance elements.

Substantially founded on Caribbean traditions and cultivated within the swathe of rundown flats of Bow, a period which followed the grand designs of Canary Wharf of 1980s and 1990s and before its further 'sculpting' in the lead up and wake of the London 2012 Olympics, Grime has both been claimed and asserted as a distinctly London, and British, 'sound'. While many Grime artists have African heritage, its musical influences were predominantly Caribbean and, within the music of many of the key Grime artists, particularly the originators of the distinctive sound, something of a 'successor' to the audacious, attention seeking, wordsmith can often be glimpsed.

A prominent feature of Grime, which connects it to the Anancy stories, is its focus on place. Despite its unique situation between the sybaritic icons of Canary Wharf and the labyrinthine buildings of the housing estates of Bow, it suggested an ‘imagined space’, offering a multicultural community which, Grime Artist, DJ Target, who grew up with Wiley and Dizzee Rascal, ‘loved’ partly because it supported creativity.⁵⁶⁰ Rooted in a particular time and place, the influences for Grime represented a unique and complex combination of sounds, many of which significantly evolved from music forms that originated in the Caribbean. D J Target recalls being particularly struck by Jungle music, a medium enhanced for him by the fact that the MC would ‘drop in with his own lyrics and chats.’⁵⁶¹ It helped to consolidate an idea of music being capable of reflecting his experience, asserting that: ‘it sounded like London. It sounded like us.’⁵⁶² Hak Baker displays a similar attitude to his concept of the unique ‘community’ within the East End when he contends: ‘When I was a kid though, it was still strong. I’m an islander, which means I grew up on the Isle of Dogs [in East London]. Our family – my three siblings and our mum – has been there for 29 years. We’re like part of the furniture really. And even though I recently moved to Hackney, I’m still on the island all the time. When I was a kid, it was all about the daily hustle and bustle – people trying to work as hard as they could to survive[...]everyone [was] in each other’s business, wanting to help out and look after one another.’⁵⁶³ It is a theme that Hak Baker explores within his music. In ‘*Tom*’ Hak Baker conjures this sense of nostalgia and community in the lyrics: ‘Spending all our time chilling in the shed/Back then, everybody was friends then, everybody was blessed/Everybody

⁵⁶⁰ DJ Target, *Grime Kids: The Inside Story of the Global Grime Takeover* (London: Trapeze, 2019), p. 19.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.,

⁵⁶³ ‘Hak Baker: “Budget Cuts and Middle-Class Elites Are Killing London’s Working-Class Culture”’ 20.20, *NME* <<https://www.nme.com/features/hak-baker-budget-cuts-middle-class-elites-2712234>>.

was breathens then, every lad there was a legde/Nowadays there's so much beef, might come over and ref.'⁵⁶⁴ Grime suggests a particular aesthetic, therefore, that is both 'local' and rooted in place and, while it does not directly build upon the stories of Anancy, something of the successor to the tales can be perceived in the style of performance and prominence of themes. These centralise social commentary and a sense of place with Dizzee Rascal standing out as an astute, liminal figure when he describes being an 'observer', his lyrics reflecting the lives of many of the dispossessed.

These modern 'Anancy' figures also replicate prominent themes of the earlier tales in songs which are a collaboration of music and sounds, both modern and traditional within a multisensory theatre. In Dizzee Rascal's '*Sittin Here*',⁵⁶⁵ he declares that he 'is watching all around, watching every detail.' The energy of the background beat and multiple voices interacting with each other create a sense of urgency, heightened by the ominous sirens and screeching cars. The early Grime artists developed a way to acknowledge and utilise something of the revolutionary wordsmith in their art and, as Dizzee Rascal says in '*Brand New Day*': 'Yo. MCs better start chattin' about what's really happening/Because if you ain't chatting about what's happenin'/Where you living? What you talking about?' Centre stage, at times it is possible to identify the distinct shape of an Anancy who has been reinvented for a new generation, carving out space, controversial and ambiguous, but with a determined sense of self that demands to be heard.

⁵⁶⁴ Hak Baker, 'Tom' (2017).

⁵⁶⁵ Dizzee Rascal, 'Sittin' Here.'

Other features more directly reference an oral, Anancy tradition, including a sense of humour that emerges in Dizzee Rascal's lyrics and persona and in Wiley's: '*Wot Do U Call It*'.⁵⁶⁶ or in the simplicity of Hak Baker's combination of anti-establishment rhetoric and his nostalgia for the prevailing inclusiveness of his multicultural 'island' home which emerge in '*Conundrum*'⁵⁶⁷ and '*Bricks in the Wall*'.⁵⁶⁸ Although the Anancy of the earlier stories may no longer offer the symbolism he did to previous generations Grime offers a contemporary alternative by positioning the lyrically agile advocate at the centre of a notional circle and finding new ways to be heard. It is evident in the words of the Grime Artists, and in their confidence and swagger as they entreat their audiences to 'listen'; and in the intermix of Jamaican dialect words with an 'English' sound. Brazen and determined their trenchant, rhythmic words against a background of rapid beats, it is difficult not to recognise features of the wordsmith Anancy in many of these performances, his own stories often accompanied by similarly urgent, tapping foot, loud against the brutality of the plantations.

In this thesis, I have attempted to follow Anancy's path in an effort to quantify something of his impact upon Britain and its culture. To what is now a Third Generation the clever rascal trickster of the plantations no longer seems to offer the cultural significance that bolstered those who were forced to navigate a place within the hostile conditions of both the Caribbean and Britain. Whether that means that there is no prevailing, lingering, 'Anancy aesthetic' remains a slightly different question. While Anancy does not as unequivocally stand centre stage as the hero of

⁵⁶⁶ Wiley, 'Wot Do You Call It?', *Treddin' on Thin Ice* (2004)

⁵⁶⁷ Hak Baker, 'Conundrum', 'Bricks in the Wall', *Worlds End FM (2023)*

⁵⁶⁸ Hak Baker, 'Bricks in the Wall', *Worlds End FM (2023)*

the piece, he still exists, not only in a diverse array of art forms but through a narrative style and a choice of themes. The fact that writers of a Third Generation are not always aware of the debt that they owe the definitive storyteller, who survived a meandering path across thousands of miles and centuries, may be missing something of the point. While Anancy might lurk, hidden deep in the shadows, his influence can still be detected within a style of storytelling which, despite the distance from the Caribbean, even for writers of a Third Generation, still offers a way of navigating a 'problem space'.

Perhaps Anancy now poses a more urgent question. In his brazen determination to force Britain to re-evaluate its complex history and the stories it relies upon to convey itself, part of Anancy's legacy is not only in his insistence on a different type of story but on a different way of *telling* the story. Musician, linguist, orator, and negotiator, Anancy represents many of the numerous vibrant features which Caribbean culture has brought to Britain and, in contrast with the singularity of voice traditionally asserted in British literature, signifies the potential richness of hybridity, or multiplicity of 'voices.' Just as Linton Kwesi Johnson does, or Dizzee Rascal, or Andrew Salkey or Louise Bennett, Anancy also invites questions through his ever-changing shape and form. He forces a confrontation with the nature of truth, inviting multiple perspectives to examine its many angles and facets. Ultimately Anancy suggests that nothing is fixed or solid, and that everything can change.

In this thesis I have often referred to Anancy's path being 'meandering', but it also resembles waves of movement, pertinently recalling seas and oceans in metaphorical mini ripples of memory, its series of echoes occasionally uniting in a

powerful chorus. It suggests a shift in perception, away from Eurocentricity and towards a different version of a past. Perhaps Anancy's final legacy is in offering a way of navigating a particular path, or thread, towards a sense of wholeness and completeness. After all, it allowed him to travel securely preserved within memories, from West Africa, and to the Caribbean, and to its diaspora, where Anancy could provide a valuable resource, albeit for those with the inspiration and creative flair to recognise it as such.

*And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my grandmother
who told me to carry it always
on my person, concealed, so
no one else would know but me.
That way they can't steal it, she'd say.'*

(Roger Robinson, A Portable Paradise)

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