

Diaspora Theatre and the Yoruba Sacred Tradition: Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*

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Abstract

Poet and playwright, Aimé Césaire occupies a prominent place in the history of Caribbean literature generally, and postcolonial Shakespeare adaptation scholarship in particular. His adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, entitled *A Tempest*, described by Peter Dickinson as a "classic of postcolonial drama," has continually been examined by scholars in light of how the play engages, and consequently exposes, Shakespeare's text as a "foundational allegory of the experience of colonization and the expression of cultural imperialism" (Dickinson 2002: 194-5). Most commentators have however neglected to explore the play's cultural content, while those who did merely acknowledged without detailing how, and to what extent, Césaire has deployed African rituals both in characterisation and in the area of theatricality. This essays re-examines the text with particular attention on the ritual aesthetics under which the political metaphor is subsumed. The paper argues that the ritual aesthetics in question derives from the Yoruba epistemology, and then links diaspora theatre and Césaire's dramaturgy in the play to both *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963) and *A Season in the Congo* (1967), and to the same Yoruba ritual source.

Keywords: Césaire; òriṣà; sacred tradition; Shakespeare; Yoruba

Introduction

"When I claim Africa that means I am claiming African cultural values"
(Aimé Césaire in Jacqueline Leiner 1980: 149)

In her exploration and subsequent location of the origin of the cultural contexts of Caribbean theatre and performance in African rituals which predate colonialism and/or the horrors of the Middle Passage, Elaine

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Savory stresses the use of such paralinguistic forms including masking, music and/or dance and storytelling, possession, ritual symbolism among many others. Traces of these aesthetic forms are also to be found in neo-African and creolized cult practices such as Rastafarianism, Shango worship, vodoun, and in the liturgy of the African-centred Baptist church, as well as in Calypso and carnival music. According to Savory, while the theatrical utilisation of this folk tradition explores on the one hand “African identity in the Caribbean,” it “immediately brings together contemporary issues with a sense of African-Caribbean history and community” on the other hand (Savory 1995: 249-50). However, following Wole Soyinka who mentions the “capability of the drama (or ritual) of the gods to travel as aesthetically and passionately as the gods themselves have, across the Atlantic” (Soyinka 1976: 7), Joni L. Jones explicitly locates among the Yoruba the origins of such theatricality that Savory identifies. She contends that the Yoruba not only boast of a strong presence in the diaspora where their spirituality has been re-imagined to suit their new environments, diaspora theatre also demonstrates the recognition that spirituality is fundamental to Yoruba ritual and performance through which the people “connect the material world with cosmic forces on the spiritual plane,” and that diasporic aesthetics are grounded in “the power, sound, movement, and vibration of the *orisa* along with the twin forces of resistance and survival” (Jones 2005: 321-3). At the centre of Yoruba traditional religion and epistemology are the *Òrìsà* – the “*eni orí sà dá*” or preeminent beings – a pantheon of avatars and deities presided over in a transcendental manner by the One and Infinite Essence, *Olodumare* (God), from whom emanates, or is derived, *àṣe* (*ashe*), which represents the central organizing feature of the Yoruba worldview.¹ Yoruba belief is strong about the presence and continued influence of the *Òrìsà* over human actions and conducts, because the Yoruba universe is considered to be a shared relational and interactive space that is populated by human beings and their ancestry, an “integrated essentiality” due in part to the “animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness” (Soyinka 1976: 15, 145), that is represented in part by the pantheon. Either in Yoruba land of Nigeria or its diaspora, the same aforementioned religious knowledge/practices have influenced the literature that developed along with them although this body of works is mostly oral in nature. Abiola Irele has argued that

In no other area of Africa [as well as its diaspora] is the elaboration in literature of a continuous stream of the collective unconscious from the traditional to the modern so clearly evident, and as well marked out, as in Yoruba land...In Yoruba land we have the extraordinary situation where the vast folk literature, alive and vigorously contemporary, remains available to provide a constant support for new forms. (1981: 175)

In the Caribbean, Aimé Césaire was among the first set of dramatists to demonstrate how that particular Yoruba ritual aesthetics along with other meta-theatrical elements work in postcolonial Shakespeare adaptation through the introduction into *A Tempest*, of two deities from the Yoruba pantheon, Eshu and Shango. *A Tempest*, hailed by Eric Livingstone as “iconoclasm incorporated into a revisionary orthodoxy” (1995: 192), in its use of ritual symbolism and metaphors “to dramatize a theory of Black subjectivities” (Dickinson 2002: 195), shows how the Yoruba have successfully claimed for themselves a heritage that is noted throughout its diasporic history for “its quiet resilience and capacity for survival in foreign languages and cultures” and centrality in “artistic forms and theories” (Wright 1993: 6,11); and how either in Yoruba land of Nigeria or its diaspora, Yoruba ritual and its aesthetics are deployed to support new forms including Shakespeare adaptation. It is this ritual aesthetics that we term the “Sacred Tradition” in this essay.

Sacred tradition, then, means theatrical resources that are forged on the template of Yoruba religious rituals. Femi Osofisan mentions that such an artistic approach deploys dramaturgical techniques now often termed “total theatre” and is marked by the use of other paralinguistic elements of song, music, dance, as well as movement, magic and trance, together with dialogue, which shows that the sacred tradition “strives for entertainment and/or socio-political enlightenment [and] seeks for a more profound meaning in the realm of Yoruba metaphysics” (Osofisan 2007: 33). Which means that works of this nature rely on the African/Yoruba festival mode, identified by their complex invocation of “multiple artistic media orchestrated to a common purpose at once spiritual and serious, playful and entertaining. *It is in their nature to be meaningful on several levels...*” (Cole 2009: 12; emphasis added). What comes out strongly in the end from such plays, particularly in terms of being “meaningful on several levels” as Césaire’s example in *A Tempest* shows, is the “deep philosophical and

metaphysical exploration” of issues that concern the people, either in Africa or in the Caribbean.

Whereas a number of Western scholars, including Paul Sutton, have written that although the Caribbean shares a common contemporary predicament, it has largely remained a region of immense political, and perhaps cultural, diversity. Sutton contends that, although there are “common themes and shared experiences that bring the [Caribbean] countries together, much politically [also] pull them apart” (Sutton 2000: 5). He argues that the problem should be traced to colonial intrusion and the legacy that it left behind, for “two distinctive political characteristics are noticeable in the Caribbean: while the English-speaking Caribbean has emerged the most democratic although not entirely untroubled by divisive issues, the French-speaking Caribbean are dominated by authoritarian regimes which have contributed to the endemic poverty in the region” (Sutton 2000: 2). While this assertion may be true of politics in the Caribbean, there might be a need to re-examine Sutton’s assumptions in light of the cultural reality that we have already sketched above, and with what we aim to present in this essay of Césaire’s *A Tempest* and its deployment of some aspects of Yoruba ritual aesthetics. Such an assumption by Sutton also recalls the fact that the Yoruba ritual content of Césaire’s adaptation of Shakespeare has not received its deserved attention from scholars, despite the huge and vigorous attention that the play has been paid in postcolonial adaptation scholarship.

This essay aims to fill that gap by examining the Yoruba ritual imagination that we encounter in *A Tempest*, as we also re-assess Sutton’s submission about the Caribbean political and cultural landscape. First, we shall examine Césaire’s explicit expression of his connection to his African roots, the Yoruba tradition and its subsequent proliferation across the world due to the trans-Atlantic trade, including its aesthetic realisation in diaspora theatre, and, finally, Césaire’s use of the “Sacred Tradition” in *A Tempest*, including the political imperative that is subsumed therein.

Ogbè wèhìn wò: Césaire and his African ancestry

Césaire’s dramaturgy was influenced by his acute sense of awareness about his African origins, an awareness that he fully expresses through the négritude movement and in his oeuvre of works. In a comparative study of Nicolás Guillén and Aimé Césaire’s poetry, Josaphat Kubayanda points out

that “Africa is central to the Caribbean search for signification” (qtd. in Irele 2001: 154). It is a search that is anchored in the function that Africa performs for the diaspora as “a symbol of personal redemption and a source of new poetic and spiritual values” (Irele 2001: 154). Femi Ojo-Ade has also written that for Césaire “the most notable point is that both... are interwoven... Africa and her Diaspora, mother and child, twins, Siamese, with the cord cut but the same blood running through their veins”; Césaire himself acknowledges this claim and does not deny his awareness of the transformational and transcendental capability of such a vision that Ojo-Ade paints, “of and African/Caribbean mythology” by making his heroes “metamorphose into divine beings” (2010: 126,141). Césaire’s approach in his dramaturgy is at once mythopoeic and political, and founded on the tenets of négritude.

In an essay, Césaire articulates the central philosophy of négritude, that it was “founded upon an essential will to integration, to reconciliation, to harmony, that is to say, to a just insertion of man in society and in the cosmos through the operational virtue of justice, on the one hand, and of religion on the other” (1979: 185). From the perspective of the social relevance of art, Abiola Irele argues that Césaire’s négritude was born out of both a personal and collective vision of an African past, the social experience and awareness that cannot be separated from African mythology, and of the social commitment of a writer to the demoralizing conditions of her/his people (Irele 2001: 153). For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, it is an expression of a commitment to a new “ethic of being” that is founded on “the recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (1989: 8). It is such a crucial function that the Yoruba mythology performs in Césaire’s body of works.

Moreover, Césaire also construes aspects of his oeuvre as a critique of postcolonial African and diaspora leadership – a concern that runs through his other two well-known plays: *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, which chronologically follows the post-revolution period in Haiti from 1806-1820 and dramatises how African/Caribbean leaders transform democracies into dictatorship; and *A Season in the Congo*, which deals with the extreme exploitation of an independent African country by colonial forces (Belgium and France in particular) with the assistance of some Black leaders. In a statement that he made in 1971, Césaire also articulates this same point:

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At present, I am particularly struck by the immense difficulties that Africa has to get started, to take off, to affirm herself. I suffer for the West Indies but I also suffer for Africa. But, nonetheless, I am not losing hope. It is important for me that Africa succeed. I believe that I would be more easily consoled by a failure of the West Indies than by a failure of Africa. Because, when Africa succeeds, I believe that implicitly, partially, the rest will also be resolved. (Kesteloot and Kotchy 1973: 233)

Together with *A Tempest*, Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* and *A Season in the Congo* form a "trptych of decolonization in the African [and diaspora] world, given the combative and dialectical energies of negritude itself" (Livingstone 1995: 182), and demonstrate how Yoruba mythology can effectively contribute to global discourse through Caribbean literature and theatre, and postcolonial Shakespeare adaptation scholarship in particular. Thus, as performative devices in the diaspora, the essentially ritually-based Yoruba forms that we shall be examining in *A Tempest*, while functioning effectively to address political concerns, are also utilised both to strengthen community identity, and to ensure the people's reconnection to the ancestral roots from which they were broken by the slave trade (Savory 1995: 249). For Césaire, then, négritude was the deployment of that Yoruba ritual matrix through the characters of Eshu and Shango that he has drawn from the Òrìṣà pantheon and introduced into *A Tempest*. It is, to summarise, an aesthetic choice that suggests the "dramatic exteriorization of a mental rite of passage," and of the use of spirituality to apprehend situations that otherwise would have remained elusive (Irele 1981: 136-7), a specific spirituality of the Yoruba provenance.

Although geographically the Yoruba occupy the south-western parts of Nigeria, a territory that extends to "the swamps and lagoons of the coast" down to the "woodland savannah and distant bend of the Niger" thus covering a distance that roughly equates the size of Great Britain (Robert Smith 1988: 7), culturally, the Yoruba world consists of "a seamless continuum and, more specifically, religious circuit of passage through a world of ancestor-worship" (Derek Wright 1993: 6). Before the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Yoruba practiced a very well-developed cultural and occupational practice in which they had the òrìṣà related to their professions as patron-gods. The ritual/occupational system ensured the evolvment of a thriving and sustained tradition, with elaborate

ceremonies at home in Yoruba land. These devotees and guilds of trade unions were specialists in their own right, and were among those brought as slaves to the New World (Aiyejina and Gibbons 1999: 35-6). This established system of god-human relationship through occupation assured the perpetuity of Yoruba culture and tradition in the New World in spite of the horrors of the slave trade and the harrowing experience of the Middle Passage. Not only did the transatlantic Slave Trade ultimately ensure the spread of the Yoruba to places like the Americas, Europe, Asia, Canada and the Caribbean, several religious practices also sprang up along with the establishment of a very strong diaspora in those places.

As Peter F. Cohen writes, although these rites are classified generally under the Yoruba term “Òrìṣà,” but spelt variously as Orisha in the British-Caribbean; Orixá in Brazil; and Oricha in Cuba, they include the body of pantheon in Yoruba land of Nigeria and the several traditions devotedly exclusively for their worship in the diaspora (2002: 17), including the well-known Santería (Regla de Ocha or La Regla de Lucumi) in the Caribbean areas of the Spanish Empire which emerged from the “dressing of the Orisa in Christian garb in order to circumvent the prohibition of their worship under Catholic strictures in place since colonial times”; Candomblé (Dance in honour of the gods) in Brazil and other Portuguese areas; Orixá/Orisha and Patakin in Cuba and many others such as the Umbanda and Obeah (Lima 1990: 33-42). Consequently, the Yoruba in the diaspora are known and called by the names of some of their òrìṣà or by their spoken language: Nago or Jeje in Brazil and Haiti; Şàńgó /Shango in Trinidad and Tobago, while in Cuba and in some other New World nations, they are called “Lucumi” from “Olukumi,” or “My friend” (Mason 2015: 2). This linkage to the Yoruba roots has remained intact, and is often exploited in both the literature and theatre of the diaspora.

In Caribbean rituals and theatre for example, we have the use of mask (we also encounter same in Césaire’s *A Tempest*) which conveys a sense of a fluid identity wherein the human personality in the Caribbean is presented as “connected to a cycle of change from the metaphysical to the physical and again, after death, to the metaphysical” and suggests as well “a complex perception of the relation of individual personality to communally understood symbol, as well as the possibility of the possession of the individual by the spirits” (Savory 1995: 247). The same applies to possession which is “the entry of a god into the living body of a celebrant

[and] witnessed by many in the Caribbean religious rituals” and which traces its origin to the Yoruba practice called “gùn,” that is, “to mount” in which an òriṣà possesses a devotee in a ritual ceremony. Karin Barber writes that both the devotee and the òriṣà engage in a defined mutually-involved relationship, “the òriṣà possesses the devotee; but the devotee also, in a different sense ‘possesses’ the òriṣà... especially at the climactic moments of festival or on other highly-charged ritual occasions” (1981: 734). This god-human relationship is often realised in the Yoruba diaspora whether or not there is a ritual ceremony such as in the theatre. While Césaire does not utilise possession in anyway in *A Tempest*, mask, òriṣà characters, symbolism and other ritual elements feature prominently in the play, and will be discussed presently.

Césaire’s *A Tempest*: Dramatizing the Sacred Tradition

Commentators on *A Tempest* have generally neglected to explore the Yoruba ritual aspect of Césaire’s aesthetics, but focused instead on the play’s postcolonial assumptions (See: Roberto Fernández Rematar 1974; Ruby Cohn 1976: 267-309; Trevor, R. Griffiths 1983: 159-80; Paul Brown 1985: 48-71; Francis Barker and Peter Hulme 1985: 191-205). In a much recent publication, *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriation on a Global Stage*, Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia claim that they bring together “global” transformations of Shakespeare that are drawn from “local traditions, values, and languages of various communities and cultures around the world”. Meanwhile the book, which includes twelve essays on diverse adaptation/appropriation drawn from different authors and cultures and which claims to have “situated Shakespeare in a range of social (and cultural) practices” (Dionne and Kapadia 2008: 6), fails to feature the Yoruba culture. In “Shakespeare and Transculturation: Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest*”, Pier Paolo Frassineli merely acknowledges Césaire’s awareness and use of Yoruba myth, but concentrated on presenting what he calls the “multicultural” approach to the text and its claim to a theory of transculturation (2008: 173-86), without engaging how Césaire deploys the cultural and political content of Yoruba myth and ritual in the text. Few scholars who have identified Césaire with the Yoruba have merely mentioned in passing that important fact.

Whereas for the most part in *A Tempest* Césaire draws from Shakespeare’s play in the areas of characters that are similar and a plot that

follows Shakespeare's closely, he also diverges significantly by deploying Yoruba ritual tradition and its aesthetic in order to effect key changes that include storytelling, characterisation, symbolism and other theatrical elements. Along with Ariel and Caliban, Césaire adds to his cast from the Yoruba mythology and Òrìsà pantheon both Eshu and Shango. Both mythical characters also have their symbolic relevance that we explore below; whereas Ariel is now a mulatto slave and not a sprite, and Caliban is a black slave, who displays a high level of awareness and cultural consciousness. Césaire also links this particular character to another one in Yoruba mythology whose story predates that of Eshu and Shango on the pantheon. Finally, Césaire also changes the setting of the conflict that he dramatises to an island somewhere in the Caribbean. The setting also has its own symbolic relevance in Yoruba ritual thought. The rest of this essay addresses itself to these significant changes.

Césaire generally construes his play to be a story by adopting the oral narrative style (storytelling), and presents his characters as masked characters. Césaire utilises similar technique of narration in *A Season in the Congo* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*: the Sanza Player is the storyteller in the former, while the Masters of Ceremonies are the storytellers in both *The Tragedy of King Christophe* and *A Tempest*. Christopher Balme writes that orality of this kind uses "culturally defined texts and signs" and is derived from "a mythological and oral historical base" (1996: 186). Moreover, Irele argues that such an approach that draws from oral tradition underlines the assumption that certain narrations are much "more than the adoption of [a foreign] language and narrative technique in the realities of the new environment; it also [suggests] a total appropriation [of the Yoruba tradition] in order to bring African expression into a living relationship with the tradition of literature in English" (2001: 175) in a foreign environment.

Césaire uses the mask to replace Shakespeare's characters. Although this change in "characterisation" suggests a departure from Shakespeare's dramaturgy, we should also consider how Césaire merges Western theatrical tradition with Yoruba traditional form. He writes that the masks are created, and expected to perform their role in the play, in "an atmosphere of psychodrama"; hence, through the masks his characters undergo a "process of recoding," and the "syncretism of culturally heterogeneous signs and code" with a foreign one (Balme 1996: 66).

Moreover, while these characters are now Césaire's, "Come, gentlemen, help yourselves. To each his character, to each character his mask... It takes all kinds to make a world" (Césaire 2002: 7), he uses them to articulate the essentiality of the mask to existence and continuity. And, when an understanding of the masks' significance is approached from the religious point of view, we come to realise how they are used to draw attention to and strengthen the belief by the Yoruba people in diaspora in the relationship between the visible present and a perceived past that they hold sacred.

Césaire's characterisation of Ariel and Caliban are influenced by historical contingencies. He explains that, "My text, and that is normal, was greatly influenced by the preoccupations I had at that particular time. As I was thinking very much about a play concerning the United States, inevitably, the points of reference became American... [T]here is the violent and the nonviolent attitude. There is Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and the Black Panthers" (Smith and Hudson 1992: 394). Elsewhere, Césaire explains that the dramaturgical choice is informed by the ideological standpoint that considers the Caribbean region as a part of global politics, "Yes, North America, the West Indies, both" (Kesteloot and Kotchy 1973: 242), while many commentators have continued to exploit this historical metaphors of the play.

Of the two characters however, it is Caliban that has remained crucial to understanding Césaire's political metaphor in the play, and one most scholars have paid devoted attention to. According to Alden Vaughan and Virginia Vaughan, "each age has appropriated and reshaped him to suit its needs and aspiration, for Caliban's unique image has been incredibly flexible, ranging from an aquatic beast to a noble savage, with innumerable manifestations" (1991: ix). Writing further, Vaughan and Vaughan articulate several assumptions that could have inspired the Caliban character. They explain that Caliban is the anagram for "cannibal"; that the source of his name could also be "Calibia" - a town on a nearby African coast which likely inspired Shakespeare's invention of the Algerian witch; or even "kalebon" an Arabic word for "vile dog" and "cauliban" - meaning "black", but that, of certainty, is the fact that Shakespeare's Caliban was created based on 16th and early 17th century documents relating to Europe's discovery of the Western Hemisphere, which ultimately suggests "connections between *The Tempest* and the unfolding

drama of England's overseas empire" (1991: 23-37). Besides, Dryden and Davenant's version of the Shakespeare text influenced Restoration and 18th century interpretations of Caliban's character. In their play which they also titled *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island: A Comedy*, Sycorax is cast as Caliban's sister although both are "half-fish" and "Two monsters of the Isle" (qtd in Valdivieso 1996: 294). In David Daniell's opinion however, Dryden and Davenant "try to restore what they think of as classical balance by giving Caliban a sister called Sycorax, Miranda a sister called Dorinda, and Ariel a fiancée" (1989: 31); whereas Coleridge's assumption is that Caliban is a monster who lacks both intellectual and moral capabilities of a human being, instead, Hazlitt insists that rather than spite and bestial attributes accorded him, Caliban may actually be a victim of oppression and "the focus of pity and understanding" (Valdivieso 1996: 269-72). Nonetheless, the popular conception of Caliban as a figure of resistance and self-determination in postcolonial discourse was informed by the French social scientist, Octave Mannoni's reassessment and mobilisation of the Shakespeare text in discussing his experience of colonialism in Africa. Mannoni considers Prospero and Caliban as prototypes of the colonizer and the colonized: the Prospero/inferiority complex, and Caliban/dependency complex respectively.

In his influential essay, "Caribbean and African Appropriation of *The Tempest*," Rob Nixon observes that "Mannoni values *The Tempest* most highly for what he takes to be Shakespeare's dramatization of two cultures' mutual sense of a trust betrayed: Prospero is a fickle dissembler, Caliban an ingrate". Further, Nixon contends that Mannoni considers Caliban incapable of surviving without Prospero thereby inspiring "adversarial interpretations of the play which rehabilitated Caliban into a heroic figure, inspired by noble rage to oust the interloper Prospero from his island" (1987: 563-4). But, Césaire changes both the image and mentality of Caliban that both Shakespeare and Mannoni present to their respective audiences. Significantly, Césaire uses Caliban to show his own awareness regarding Yoruba belief in the spiritual and social significance of a name including how it influences people's actions. Caliban contests with Prospero both the spiritual and psychological imperative of his name, as well as the question of identity and personhood that he believes Prospero tramples by calling him 'Caliban', "Caliban *isn't* my name... it's the name given me by your hatred, and every time it's spoken it's an insult" (2002: 20; emphasis in the

original). When Prospero also suggests that he should be called Cannibal, or even Hannibal because, “that fits. And why not...they all seem to like historical names,” Caliban insists, “Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen... Every time you summon me it reminds me of a basic fact, the fact that you’ve stolen everything, even my identity! Uhuru!” (20). Césaire also utilises the strategy of naming but in another context with regard to the title of his play, *A Tempest*, subtitled, “adaptation for a black theatre,” to emphasise both the African/postcolonial imperative of the adaptation and to draw attention to the Yoruba cultural/spiritual resource that developed it; that is, *A Tempest* signifies both an allusion to and divergence from Shakespeare’s original title, *The Tempest*, in cultural and political context and dramaturgy. He adopts a similar strategy in *A Season in the Congo*, in which the use of the definite article “a” suggests that the experiences of violence and social disillusionment which plague postcolonial Africa are not only unique, but also a tragically recurring experience.

Of symbols and the dramatic: meaning other than what is seen

Symbolism is central to Césaire’s approach in the play both in terms of structure and characterisation. The two points are also connected through the Yoruba ritual aesthetics that they foreground, especially the highly-important *oríta-méta* (crossroads) that we discuss further below. In terms of the structure, Césaire condenses Shakespeare’s original five-act into three acts. His approach here is actually deliberate since he adopts the same Three-act structure in both *The Tragedy of King Christophe* and *A Season in the Congo* which he wrote before *A Tempest*. But this approach in *A Tempest* is unique in at least three ways. First, it is unique in terms of the story that is told in Three Acts instead of the Five Acts of Shakespeare’s play. According to Babatunde Lawal, the number “three” features prominently in all aspects of Yoruba ritual because it is associated with *àṣe/àṣhe* (the power to make things happen) controlled by *Èṣù*, a principal *òriṣà* in the aforementioned Yoruba pantheon.² It is also the sign of “*agbára*” that is, dynamic power in its physical and metaphysical dimensions; where the phrase “*Fi ééjì kún ééta*” that is, to put two and three together, is the Yoruba idiom for making up one’s mind, *ééjì* (two) is a sign of balance and equilibrium which the “threeness” of *èèta/èta* foregrounds (1995: 44). In *A Tempest*, however, although three is “*méta*” in Yoruba language and the structure of the play, it

is èta motif in terms of its ritual aesthetic relevance. Second, the Yoruba conception of èta/méta as the sign of completeness connects explicitly to Césaire's division of his play into three acts: three acts which tell one story. Interestingly, it is also in Act Three, scene three, that Césaire brings in "the rebel," Eshu, who threatens the three ancient Egyptian/Greco-Roman deities: Iris, Juno and Ceres, whom he throws into confusion with his song. Third, Césaire's introduction in Act Three of Eshu (Èṣù) who oversees àṣe that is identified with èta/méta is also ritually and aesthetically strategic. This is coming as it were during the pastoral masque and celebration of Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage, as well as during the introduction of the three Egyptian/Greco-Roman deities.

Teresa Washington's extensive, informed analysis throws light on the connection between Yoruba ritual, and Èṣù in particular, with the three ancient Egyptian/Greco-Roman deities. Although Èṣù appears to us as Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Michael, and Santo Nino de Atocha in Christian /Catholic idioms in New World syncretic religions, the same Èṣù personality is as well mirrored in the three aforementioned ancient gods through the sexual metaphor of Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage which we describe below. Following Henry Louis Gates, Washington explains how Èṣù embraces dichotomy, frowns at division through gender ambiguity because of the possession of "both a penis and a vagina" as well as the "interconnectedness of binary oppositions" that s/he unifies (Gates 1988: 29); the phallic object in turn connects Èṣù with Ausar, the Lord of Perfect Blackness in Kemet (Ancient Egypt), who was hacked into pieces by his jealous brother Set but revived and pieced together by Aset who was able to recover thirteen pieces of her husband's body that she encased in a phallic structure to represent the only piece she was unable to find. "*Tekhen* is the Kemetic name of the structure that represents Ausar's penis," writes Washington, and it also symbolises "everlasting life, and also the rays of the sun" even as the *tekhen*s of Kemet were priceless monuments and dynastic objects that were treasured during centuries of Persian, Greek, Roman, and Arab occupation of Africa (Washington 2013: 316). What comes out strongly from Washington's analysis, and by extension Césaire's utilisation of Yoruba ritual from which the aesthetics of Èṣù is sourced, is that Èṣù is one and all of these histories combined for "the deeper history of Èṣù, foregrounded in the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Yoruba thought...has been enhanced and put to the service of modern forms of indigenous

religion as well as the politics of identity” (Falola 2013: 16). As the symbol of the past that is used to project into the future, Èṣù bestrides both the physical and metaphysical worlds as her/his oríkì suggests, “Eshu can throw a stone yesterday and kill a bird today” (Cesaire 2002: 49), s/he is also a symbol that is required in order to explore the lost past and to forge a new meaning for the future.

Eṣhu’s appearance at Ferdinand and Miranda’s party is also culturally significant since s/he is identified with the phallic object in Yoruba mythology. As Washington reminds us, the phallic object identified with Èṣù suggests the òrìṣà’s “ability to self-proliferate and regenerate” since like “all African Gods, [Èṣù] understands that the penis and vagina are the gateways to and storehouses of existence” hence it is fitting that Èṣù’s “vagina is fecund, and his penis is gargantuan and always erect” (2013: 316). It is also logical, then, for Eshu to enter the scene of the wedding singing what seems to be an obscene/vulgar song. Eshu “instigates rebellion and uses sexual codes for humour and songs of protest” (Falola 2013: 21). Although the song suggests sexual union, there is also the symbolic and metaphysical sensibility that is associated with the sexual organs, “Eshu has no head for carrying burden/he’s a gay one with a pointy head. When he dances/he doesn’t move his shoulders/Ah, Eshu is a jolly fellow/ Eshu is a jolly fellow/with his penis, he will beat, beat, beat/with his penis” (Cesaire 2002: 70); while Èṣù can instruct with calmness and peaceful behaviour, he can as well use rebellion.

Of another significant mythological exploration is how Césaire creates an Eshu that shares a kinship with Àtúndá whose existence predates the Òrìṣà pantheon, and whose action, in fact, brought the pantheon into existence. This should be understood from the way Césaire frames the conflict between Prospero and Caliban as a reflection of Àtúndá’s challenge of Òrìṣà Nlá and the subsequent creation of the Òrìṣà pantheon. In Niyi Osundare’s opinion, the Àtúndá/Òrìṣà Nlá relationship “operates in a political economy in which slavery is the source of labour” (1994: 189). In that primeval story of rebellion, Àtúndá used tact and deadly stratagem to dismantle Òrìṣà Nlá, the Absolute god-head, into countless pieces. That “separation of ‘essence’ from ‘self,’” was followed by years of drought, pestilence and longing for reunion with the Whole essence by deities and their human counterparts. The bridging of that “gulf of transition” eventually results in the formation of the Òrìṣà pantheon, including Èṣù

who came into being as a result (Adeeko 1998: 15-6; Soyinka 1976: 130-60). While Àtúndá is in that sense “the first guerrilla, the first liberation fighter, the first revolutionary, the first postcolonial subject and revolutionary per-excellence from whom postcolonial subjects and freedom fighters draw their inspirations” (Aiyejina 2010: 2), Caliban reflects that primeval contest in the way he challenged the orthodoxy and imperialism of Prospero, and Césaire himself demonstrates the spark of òrìṣà in him since the òrìṣà are manifestations of the same divine energy source, “shards of the original godhead... all human beings carry a fragment of an original orisha that determines their own essence and makes them responsive to that particular god” (Wright 1993: 7). In his careful study of Césaire’s dramaturgy, his extensive riffing on the African, and especially Yoruba òrìṣà, tradition, Rodney Harris writes that “Among the Francophone black writers of his generation, Aimé Césaire is the one that seems to have best realised the difficult synthesis between the African ancestors and a solid knowledge of classical culture” (1973: 13), that he demonstrates in his body of works and especially *A Tempest*.

Èṣù shares a mutual relationship with Sango as with the individual òrìṣà on the pantheon over whom s/he “enforces the divine sanction of the Supreme Being” (Falola 2013: 10), hence Césaire’s introduction of Shango in his own play is also in order.³ Césaire draws inspiration for this character from the mythology about Sango both in Yoruba land in Nigeria and the diaspora: at home in Yoruba land, Sango is considered to be the òrìṣà that enforces social justice, a warrior who derives his power from Nature (ilè/earth), where he aligns favourably with Èṣù, the controller of the oríta-méta (crossroads). Many Yoruba diaspora writers have used the oríta-méta as an aesthetic system to articulate “the complexity of their location in a cultural twilight zone” and to resolve the crises of separation from their roots. Aiyejina identifies this sort of dramaturgy and approach to literary conception of place and self as “bacchanal aesthetics” which is at once the “artistic practice that appropriates and radicalises the underground cultural practices fashioned by ordinary New World Africans to deal with the realities of enslavement, colonisation, deracination and exploitation” and a process through “the crucible of history and culture” (2010: 16). Meaning that Èṣù is not just conceived as “devil, Satan, demon, fiend” and as “a person of outstanding quality” (*A Dictionary* 1991: 72, 77), but across the Atlantic where s/he has become part of the transatlantic history, of the

tension between relocation and history, “between the violence that led to the forced migrations of people and the long healing process of reconciliation with living in strange lands that later became new homelands,” Èṣù is also the deity who assumes “the role of a signifier that is used to talk about memory, loss, suffering, remembering, resistance, merging of ideas with time and space, and of using the memory of the past to speak to the present” (Falola 2013: 3). Across the Atlantic, a new identity has to be created against the background of displacement and Èṣù plays a significant role in the creation of that identity. Falola writes that

People use [*Esu*] to recreate new meanings, to resist power, to seek vengeance, to reinvent traditions, and to talk about the lost past and the meaning of the new future. *Esu*, the master of crossroads, enters the center in the marketplace of ideas and culture, to become the confluence between the Yoruba in Africa and the Yoruba elsewhere, and between the Yoruba of old and the Yoruba of new. *Esu* moves from what may be characterized as a local Yoruba setting to the global network of cultures...from the transatlantic slave trade, through the abolition of slavery, colonization, post-colonization, and now globalization. (16-7)

Like Èṣù, Sango is also relevant to creating that new identity in the Yoruba diaspora as reflected in rites that are devoted to òrìṣà worship. In the diaspora, rites observed in honour of Sango are done in order to draw power and self-control. Césaire’s Caliban is able to triumph over Prospero, by aligning his own energy with that of Eshu and Shango who represents nature. Césaire’s dramaturgical device here shows the example of “where society lives in a close inter-relation with Nature [and] regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity” (Soyinka 1976: 52). Caliban invites Shango because he needs Shango’s support to dislodge Prospero who he believes is anti-Nature, “I am setting forth to conquer Prospero! Prospero is Anti-Nature!” (Césaire 2002: 52). He summons Shango through a chant that reveals the affinity of the deity to nature: Caliban’s chant is accompanied by a loud roar of the sea as the stage direction states. Stephano is frightened by the noise and he asks, “Tell me, brave savage, what is that noise?” to which Caliban responds, “Come on! It’s that howling impatient thing that suddenly appears in a clap of thunder like some god and hits you in the face; that rises up out of the very depths of the abyss and smites you with its fury!” (Césaire 2002: 53), to which Stephano shudders with fright.

In fact, in *A Tempest*, Nature itself is regarded as a living entity, represented by the wind, storm and the flora and fauna of the contested island. Césaire emphasises this point through Caliban's unblemished belief in Nature and everything that is related to it, starting with his mother, Sycorax. "Mother and earth coalesce into a harmonious whole" writes Ojo-Ade, "based upon the unity and continuity of being and survival through struggle" which is also suggestive of "Nature in its quintessential linkage of human to earth" (2010: 267). Unlike Prospero who believes Sycorax is dead, Caliban insists that his mother, who assumes the role of Mother Earth and sacred Nature, is still very much alive, "You only think she's dead because you think the earth itself is dead...I respect the earth, because I know that Sycorax is alive" (Césaire 2002: 18). Thereafter, Caliban chants Sycorax's oríkí which elaborates on her relationship to Nature (the island) and every other elemental forces related to it:

Sycorax. Mother.

Serpent, rain, lightning.

And I see thee everywhere!

In the eye of the stagnant pool which stares back at me/ through the
rushes, in the gesture made by twisted root and its awaiting thrust.

In the night, the all-seeing blinded night/the nostril-less all-
smelling night! (Césaire 2002: 18)

Through Caliban's belief in Sycorax's eternal presence, Césaire also uses the island to show how the Yoruba conceive of the earth as Sacred Mother. As Lawal contends, the femaleness of the earth is stressed by its invocation "Ilè, Ògéré, a f'okó yerí... Ìyà mi, aránbalè karara", that is, Earth, Ogere, who combs her hair with a hoe; My Mother, the Extensive One (1995: 41). Besides, the ritual connotation of the earth that Césaire utilises finds further meaning in Yoruba belief about the immortality of the earth, as captured by the saying "Kàkà k'ìlè é kú, ilè á şáá" (Rather than die, the earth will endure through its transformation), which suggests that ilè/earth is not only sacred but also given to longevity. Césaire further draws from the ilè (earth) symbolism by stressing its connection to the environment: the trees, seas, and the things in nature, as opposed to Prospero who abhors them. For instance, when Ariel appreciates the trees and birds around and particularly praises the tranquillity that pervades the surrounding, "The ceiba tree—spread out beneath the proud sun. O bird, O green mansions

set in the living earth," Prospero expresses his displeasure instead, "Stuff it! I don't like talking trees" (2002: 16), however, the wind and storm which begin the play and animate the environment also end it. Césaire uses them to suggest that Nature is very much alive, as much as *ilè* (earth) remains a living and immortal being in Yoruba consciousness. Essentially, Césaire's approach in *A Tempest*, corresponds to how Caribbean writers adapt and/or appropriate existing materials, and especially Shakespeare, to "mediate the distance between [Yoruba] belief systems and western hemispheric realities (represented by Shakespeare) by employing symbolic, temporal and narrative codes reflective of [Yoruba] traditional religions and indigenous epistemes, which cohere to [their] notions of time with its accompanying concepts of causality, unity, and origins" (Kokahvah 2007: 40), even as they use the same to address growing socio-political concerns.

Conclusion

While the political and postcolonial assumptions of Césaire's re-imagination of Shakespeare's supposed last play, *The Tempest*, has gained the attention of scholars over the years, there is also the need to explore and understand the significance of the Yoruba ritual imagination that informs the play's narrative style and other aesthetic elements. Hence, we have argued thus far that Césaire not only links himself to Africa through the *négritude* movement, but he also utilises knowledge of Yoruba ritual and its aesthetics against the background of the atmosphere of *Òriṣà* syncretic religious rites in the Caribbean in particular and the global Yoruba diaspora in general to adapt Shakespeare. We also address the relevance of Yoruba metaphysics to some of the literature that developed in the diaspora. We contend that in this play in particular, Césaire has deployed such an inherited tradition, the "Sacred Tradition" that traces its roots to Yoruba land of Nigeria in order to address his own French and other Caribbean diaspora political realities.

Notes

1. By *orisa*, we should have in mind the individual deities on the pantheon which is *Òriṣà*.
2. *Èsù* is the more appropriate writing of the name or "traditional" Yoruba lexical form while *Eshu* that Césaire uses should be seen in light of the deity's diaspora (Western) equivalent, hence we shall use *Èsù* where appropriate but retain *Eshu* when quoting directly from Césaire's play.

3. Sango is the more appropriate lexical construct, but we shall retain Shango when referring to the play.

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