

Essay

Complexity and Politics of Naming in Yoruba Tradition: A Dramatic Exploration of *Once Upon an Elephant*

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Abstract: This paper examines the connection between naming and oral tradition, specifically *àlò* and *itàn*, by discussing Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan's *Once Upon an Elephant* (2015), and demonstrates the ways in which contemporary Nigerian playwrights appropriate the same to engage their political realities. The Yoruba are aware that names are not mere signs but the material nodes of the social network, hence the rites associated with naming underscore the people's belief in birth, life, and living, as well as the totality of existence. The paper is in three parts: a background to the analysis, a discussion of Yoruba belief about naming that is linked with a discussion of oral tradition, and an analysis of the play with materials that are drawn from the previous discussion in order to show how the playwright has used the strategy of naming to engage a broader socio-political reality of her society.

Keywords: alias; autogenesis; culture; naming; oral genre; socio-politics; tragedy

In a conversation that we had with Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan following the news report on the 21 January 2017, of the forceful removal from office of former Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh, she mentioned that although her play, *Once Upon an Elephant*, was mainly inspired by Adeboye Babalola's poem, "Salute to the Elephant", which was itself based on Yoruba folk narrative about the haughty elephant, her central characters in the play were modelled after past African political leaders and tyrants, including the disgraced Jammeh.¹ She recalled that while writing the play, one peculiar feature or characteristic lifestyle of these African tyrants that she kept remembering was their penchant for superfluous titles and high-sounding names. She compared the "mightiness" of those names with the perplexing state of squalor that the citizenry of these countries live in, and lamented their impoverishment by those leaders.

In particular, Ademilua-Afolayan recalled a statement that was released from the State House in Banjul, the capital of Gambia, on 16 June 2015, stating that Yahya Jammeh wished henceforth to be addressed as "His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh", which, as [Moussa Ba \(2015\)](#) explains, was in addition to the earlier titles, "His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya Abdul-Aziz Awal Jemus Junkung Jammeh Naasiru Deen Babili Mansa"; the last two being a Mandinka phrase that means "Chief Bridge Builder" or "Conqueror of the Rivers", which he later dropped. Although Jammeh also dropped from his "names" Nasirul Deen, "Defender of the Faith", that was

¹ Ademilua-Afolayan previously demonstrated the relevance to contemporary Nigerian drama of oral tradition, especially *àlò/itàn*, by using the same for social realistic themes in her first play, *Look Back in Gratitude*, an appropriation of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, in which she echoes Osborne's theme of disenchantment and youth rebellion. However, she situates the conflict of her own play in a Nigerian setting that speaks directly to her own experience (See "Margins . . ." [\(Balogun 2018a\)](#)).

conferred on him by the Gambia Supreme Islamic Council, he nonetheless was known by the Gambian populace as “Papa Don’t Take No Mess” (Sawyer 2014), a title which echoed that of Idi Amin of Uganda and his Zairean counterpart, Mobutu Sese Seko. Regarding the duo, Ademilua-Afolayan recalled how, on breaking all diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom in 1977, Idi Amin added to his numerous names the title, CBE (Conqueror of the British Empire). In addition to his self-proclaimed title of the “uncrowned King of Scotland”, Idi Amin also bestowed upon himself, “His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshall Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Seas and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular” (Appiah and Gates 2003). Joseph-Désiré Mobutu was more daring in his own interaction with, and the flaunting of, names. He renamed his country, Zaire (formerly Democratic Republic of Congo), and then changed his own name, Joseph Mobutu, to Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, which means “The warrior who leaves a trail of fire in its path” or “The warrior who knows no defeat because of his endurance and inflexible will and is all powerful, leaving fire in his wake as he goes from conquest to conquest” (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 2012). Aside from such intimidating titles, these political figures are also notorious for self-perpetuation in office, human rights abuse, extra-judicial killings, corruption, political repression, and the likes, which she sums up as “issue(s) of dictatorship, ‘sit-tightism’ and the self-perpetuating syndrome of African leaders at every level of governance” (Ademilua-Afolayan 2015, p. 7), and which are, indeed, concerns that transcend the immediate milieu of her play’s context. Those concerns, according to Ademilua-Afolayan, informed her choice of Babalola’s poem about an arrogant, power-drunk, and foolish elephant who is led to its death by a cunning tortoise; a story which, in turn, informed how she came to explore the connection between naming, in particular the concept of autogenesis, and oral tradition.

But how can we fully understand this relationship between naming and oral tradition, or more specifically, folktale (*àlò* and *itàn*), and in what specific ways was this dramatized in *Once Upon an Elephant*? The remainder of this paper shows how this is done, hence, it proceeds as follows: a general discussion of Yoruba naming rites, including the socio-cultural and epistemological significations; a discussion of oral literature with an emphasis on its aesthetic and political assumptions; and then an exploration of *Once Upon an Elephant*, with a focus on how both the naming and adopted titles of the central characters help us to articulate this relationship between naming and politics, and the tragedy that the play dramatizes.

Naming of a new-born among the Yoruba is an important rite that follows a well-defined process: on the seventh day if it is female, on the ninth day if it is male, and on the eighth day if it is a twin of both sexes (Johnson 1923), although now, generally speaking, the naming occurs on the eighth day after the birth of the child. “Yoruba personal names”, observes Niyi Akinnaso, “serve as an open diary by providing a system in which information is symbolically stored” (Akinnaso 1995). Indeed, naming, as Geetha Ganapathy-Doré also observes, functions as “a christening that endows an individual with an identity and inserts her/him in the social fabric”; it forms part of “the anthropological rite of passage in birth in a family, as well as the incorporation of the new born into a clan or religious or national community” (Ganapathy-Doré 2013, p. 15). Naming among the Yoruba follows a pattern that is peculiar to such ‘anthropological rites’, including those whose origins are found in myth and rituals.²

In her extensive research into Yoruba ritual, Margaret Thompson Drewal (1992) explains that naming is characterized by motion and transformation that leads to the incorporation into the society and material world of a new-born that has passed through the liminal state in its metaphysical journey between two realms, the “betwixt and between the otherworld and earth” (p. 51). Consequently,

² By “anthropological rites”, we mean practices that are sanctioned by a people’s tradition, similar to how we suppose Ganapathy-Doré conceives it.

Drewal identifies two significant rites in Ifá divination practice that are often observed as part of this metaphysical process of the ontological journey of the new born: the “Ìkosè w’áyé” (“Stepping into the World”), a subdued, private affair marked by a brief, relatively simple ritual that is conducted in a thoughtful and contemplative manner; and the “Ìmòrí” (“Knowing the Head”) that is performed during the third month of birth, at the end of which the diviners propose certain powerful and significant tasks for the parents to perform or simply observe, as part of the ways to support the child’s earthly sojourn, among other necessary requirements (pp. 52–62). Moreover, Drewal et al. (1989) are of the opinion that rites such as “Ìkosè w’áyé” and “Ìmòrí” are integral parts of the fundamental concepts distinctive to the Yoruba worldview because they provide a foundation for comprehending the Yoruba culture through time and space, while functioning as a mode of expression that contributes to the shaping of Yoruba culture and our understanding of it. According to these authors, while both rites underline the Yoruba belief in the interactive relationship shared by the living, the dead, and the unborn, in a universe that also accommodates “two distinct yet inseparable realms—*aye* (the visible, tangible world of the living) and *orun* (the invisible, spiritual realm of the ancestors, gods, and spirits)—they also remind us of the symbolism of the opón Ifá (divination tray), that is used by the Babaláwo (diviner) for the divination process that forms a crucial part of the rites” (p. 14). As Margaret Drewal also affirms, the divination tray “symbolizes the universe, the entire field of human action and experience, as do the mat that [the diviner] and the mother [of the new born] sat on with the baby” (p. 53) during the performance of the rites.

Ultimately, “Ìkosè w’áyé” and “Ìmòrí”, Drewal, Pemberton, and Abiodun argue, function as the required knowledge that will guide the individual through life, more so because Ifá, always central to the rites, symbolizes the revealable and “offers human [beings and the Yoruba] the possibility of knowing the forces at work in specific situations in their lives and of influencing the course of actions through prayers and sacrifice” (p. 14). This is especially so because Èsù, who is also present at such rites, is “the agent of effective action, who also reminds one of the unpredictable nature of human experience” (p. 15), in the universe that is populated by contending forces (On Èsù, see (Falola 2013)).

Essentially, the type of name(s) that is/are given to a new-born child is often determined by the circumstance(s) into which that child is born. These may include the situation/condition of the parents, events surrounding the birth, historical/cultural reality of the time, the *òrìṣà* being worshipped by the parents and/or the lineage to which the child’s name is prefixed with its totem, family occupation, the cognomen (*oríkì*), etc., while these names can generally be classified into three main groups for ease of reference: *àmútòrunwá*, which deals with the nature of birth; *àbìso*, which is the christening or social name; and *oríkì*, which encompasses cognomen/attributive name(s) (Johnson 1923, pp. 78–79). At the observance of the naming rites, a number of items are used, including “honey (*oyin*), kolanut (*obi*), salt (*iyó*), alligator pepper (*atare*), bitter kola (*orogbo*), fish (*eja*), and water (*omi*), etc”, all of which are symbolic in their own ways (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979, p. 174), where “honey signifies sweetness of life, kola nut is to dispel evil, alligator pepper represents many children, bitter kola is for longevity, and fish is for resilience, whereas water signifies coolness and good human relations” (Olajubu 2003, p. 98). Although the process and rites associated with naming underscore the Yoruba people’s belief in existence and its continuation, they also underline the fact that names are not mere signs, but the material nodes of the social network; hence, the saying, “*Ilé làá wò, ka tó s’omo l’óríkò*” (Circumstance determines the name a child bears), by which the people sum up happenings around the birth of a child; how these influence the names that the child(ren) is/are eventually given irrespective of the gender; and the assumed role(s) played by such names in the newborn’s earthly journeys, social transactions, and the like.

Related to the aforementioned institutionalized practice of naming is the adoption of nicknames, praise names in particular, which sometimes replace the ones pronounced during the naming rites, as earlier mentioned, as is noticeable in certain *oríkì* (praise poetry), which constitutes one form of/or the process of inventing names. Writing about how some prominent individuals among the people got their praise names in her research into Yoruba naming practice, Oyeronke Oyewumi (2015) notes that

“the wives of the lineage of such men must have had ample opportunity to spotlight their prowess and invent nicknames to express the fact” (p. 188). Similarly, she observes that “another naming practice that came out of Yoruba Muslim communities is the use of nicknames, especially as last names” (p. 205), and the fact that, one prevalent social practice in primordial Yoruba societies was the giving of nicknames to members of the groom’s family by new brides. According to Oyewumi, the “in-marrying bride is regarded as junior to all members of the groom’s lineage no matter their biological age” (p. 9), a practice that was observed as part of primordial Yoruba form of a social relationship that was based, essentially, on what she rightly describes as an aspect of the society’s “seniority-based system.”³ What this means, or rather what Oyewumi neglects to mention, is the fact that the practice of brides inventing names was merely a mark of respect for their groom’s family members, and such names are often ‘beautiful’ and ‘enchanting’, but they never replace the real or given names of the bearers, unlike what this paper is concerned with.

However, in this essay, we are interested in autogenesis following Ganapathy-Doré’s use of the term, which is taken to mean the adoption of an alias, or a new name for that matter, in order to be different from one’s already familiar identity, an act which ultimately constitutes a form of (re)naming (p. 15).⁴ While the aforementioned ways of adopting/inventing (nick)names as Oyewumi recalls can be considered desirable social practice, we are interested in this paper with those (nick)names which, as aliases, totally replace the names that were given to the individuals during their naming, and the same are seen to influence behaviour, especially behaviour that is undesirable; more so because these names not only totally replace the given names, but are also perceived to encourage undesirable social conduct from the bearer(s).⁵ Whereas naming follows birth as an identity or label that ensures that the individual is inserted [properly] into the social fabric, autogenesis endows the individual with a new identity while serving as a protective mechanism. Although in some situations autogenesis functions as a strong and, indeed, effective tool of deception, such as in the case of Salman Rushdie and the events following the publication of his highly-controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*,⁶ it still has its limitations. As Ganapathy-Doré notes, autogenesis has its own problems: the individual has to undergo another process of transformation, a phase between “unknown” and being a “non-person”, where s/he is condemned to live “a life-in-death”; that is, living but dead at the same time (p. 15).⁷ By the logic of reflective consciousness, therefore, by which we mean the recommendation of thought and care

³ See also her book, *The Invention of Women* (Oyewumi 1997), where she fully explores in relation to gender and sexuality the seniority-based structure of the Yoruba society prior to colonialism.

⁴ In “Mythological Recuperation”, Balogun (2018b) discusses the African-Canadian playwright, Djanet Sears, and her deployment of Yoruba performative resources in her play, *Afrika Solo*, and emphasizes the relevance of autogenesis to her change of name from Janet to Djanet, after her return home journey to Africa, especially how such an act of renaming helps to foreground her one-woman show, as well as her Governor-General award-winning play, *Harlem Duet* and *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*, in the context of an “epistemological verbal performance” and “text” in the Yoruba epistemic sense.

⁵ Although we are aware of post-colonial transitions, such as in the case of Yoruba Muslims and Christians who give their new-born names that reflect their new faith or even invent for themselves new names in some circumstances, we are interested in the burden associated with nicknames and the ways in which society is threatened by it, an example of which is dramatized in *Once Upon an Elephant*.

⁶ Ganapathy-Doré explores this kind of situation in the life of Salman Rushdie following the passing of the fatwa on him by the Iranian government as a result of the publication of his highly controversial work, *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie is forced to adopt many fictitious names, including Anton Joseph (the subject of another of his works), in order to escape assassination.

⁷ The notion of “a life-in-death” or “living but [being] dead at the same time” could also describe the *àbíkú*, a certain set of children, whom the Yoruba believe have the powers to come into the world and go back at their own will. Said to belong to a cult and/or fraternity with abodes in several places, including under huge iroko trees, thick forests/bushes, and/or in mid-heaven, *àbíkú* are given different names at birth in order to explain the Yoruba attitude towards them: *Malomo* (Don’t go again), *Durosinmi* (Stay and bury me), *Ikudaisi* (Death, please spare this one) etc. Igbo belief about the *ogbanje* is similar to the Yorubas’, as this short narrative shows: “Ekwefi had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children and nine of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three [. . .]. Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko ‘Death I implore you’. But, Death took no notice; Onwumbiko died in his fifteenth month. The next child was a girl, Ozoemena, ‘May it not happen again’. She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma ‘Death may please himself’. And he did” (Achebe 1958, p. 61). But the context that this paper proposes does not consider *abiku/ogbanje* as autogenesis or even renaming/nicknaming of any sort.

when adopting such aliases as well as paying attention to how they might influence socially-desirable attitude and behaviour at the expense of society itself, the Yoruba also warn against the bearing of an alias, as encapsulated by the saying, “*Orúko ñro ni, àpèjá a máa ròd yàn*” (Names do influence; so does an alias).⁸ What this means is that, while the Yoruba do not always believe in chance, but causation, they are also conscious of the roles that (nick)names play in shaping attitude and behaviour, including their ultimate social reality. While this knowledge underscores the central place of “*Ìkosè w’áyé*” and “*Ìmòrí*”, the private and elaborately public rites that Margaret Drewal explores as part of the cornerstone of Yoruba ritual, myth, and other traditional observances, allow us to also glimpse other aspects of the people’s worldview. Oral narratives, specifically *àlò* and *itàn*, the example of which inspired *Once Upon an Elephant*, also function as part of the myriad of ways of disseminating the knowledge about such rites and practices, including how they are intimately linked to the destiny of the people.

According to Olatunde Olatunji (1993), Yoruba oral literature can be categorized into poetry, narratives, and theatre, although there are occasions when the three categories merge or overlap (p. 10), as in the case of *Once Upon an Elephant*, which combines all three categories.⁹ In the opinion of Dierdre La Pin (1980), Yoruba narrative has four distinct, but often related, modal types: “*àlò* for nontrue; *itàn* for true accounts; *òwe* for a parable or proverb; and *àróbá* for a narrative” in which a conflation of character and literary mode also presents to the audience a sense of the “‘comic’, the ‘tragic’, the ‘epic’ and the ‘picaresque’” (p. 328). These four modal types are also found in *Once Upon an Elephant*: it is *àlò* because it is fiction; it is *itàn* because it presents an account that is similar to a real-life situation; it is *òwe* because both the story and characters are metaphors for the human condition; and it is *àróbá* due to the fact that it is a narrative.

In some Yoruba speech areas, *àlò* is ascribed to riddles, which presents a conflict (in the context of logic) that must be solved, and it has two forms: *àlò àpagbè*, “to which we sing a chorus,” and *àlò àpamò*, that is, “*àlò* which we tell and solve” (Babalola 1973, p. vii).¹⁰ As Olatunji also explains, while *itàn* are considered “historical and factual”, *àlò* are, on the other hand, “fictional constructs in which (wo)man and her/his foibles are the object of imaginative examination”; although *àlò* usually presents a coherent “fictional world in which the standards of normal reality may not operate”, it is nonetheless a sub-group of narratives (generally classified as *itàn*) where the “hero’s innate qualities conform to the design and the ethos of the tales in which s/he appears” (p. 20), and in which such narrative postures as “fantasy, truthfulness, cool observation in the narrative materials [that are] largely metaphorical” (La Pin 1980, p. 327); *Once Upon an Elephant* is clearly one such instance of both *àlò* and *itàn*.

The play tells the story of Olaniyonu, self-proclaimed mighty Ajanaku (Elephant), who is single-handedly enthroned with the veneration of the *Olubori* rites by Serubawon, who manipulates the kinship process, in spite of the open disagreement between some of the prominent kingmakers because the reigning king, Oba Akinjobi, lives though ailing. As soon as Ajanaku is enthroned, he begins to display some of the irrational attitude that the chiefs decried and warned against. At his coronation, he boasts of his might: “[we] will not follow in the footsteps of our predecessors, and their weak approach to resolving matters” but rather, “trample on creepers, and thorns, and bushes, and thickets,

⁸ Whereas Ganapathy-Doré uses autogenesis to describe a “survival mechanism” that authors employ in the time of distress, we use the term differently.

⁹ The fact that Yoruba oral literature is often fully realized in performance is demonstrated with a recent performance of the play at the National Arts Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, as directed by Lekan Balogun.

¹⁰ Several forms of keying and framing devices are often employed in *àlò*, in order to distinguish everyday narrative experiences from the events that it relates to. As Olatunji mentions, the narrator could say “*À àlò o*” (Here is a story), to which her/his audience responds, “*À àlò*” (Let’s have the story), a preamble to demarcate normal reality from the coherent fictional world of the tale where a different kind of imagination is required. After telling the story, s/he ends with “*Ìdí àlò mi rẹ́c gbàngbaláká* etc” (This is the end of my story), as a “way of returning her/his audience to the world of waking reality” (pp. 20–21). Several Yoruba sub-groups have their various framing devices in the *àlò* (La Pin 1980, pp. 331–34). This is not peculiar to the Yoruba *àlò*; however, we have examples in other African oral genres, such as the *telapnaave* of the Zuni, which uses “mirror image structure of the opening and closing frames” (Tedlock 1983, p. 162).

and a whole forest of trees standing in [our] way” (pp. 25–26). Predictably, his reign is marked by terror and abuse of office. He quickly draws a line between those he considers to be his friends and enemies whom he describes as locusts which “draw strength from [their] number to strike down a branch from the farm” (p. 26). For example, instead of amicably settling the dispute between Man and Woman I (as well as her daughter, Woman II) over a piece of rich farmland, he confiscates the farmland and turns it into land for his own personal use (pp. 31–32); he disrespects the elders of Oguno, a vassal community under his protection. He refuses to come to their aid against their perennial enemies, unless they pay him tributes, which the people of Oguno cannot afford due to the poor harvest and unfavourable economic circumstance. He orders the arrest and detention of the leader of the embattled entourage, Gbeleyi, who commits suicide rather than submitting himself to further humiliation.

At the height of his tyranny, and wanting to become immortal, Ajanaku decides, through the encouragement of his architect-in-chief, Serubawon, to perform the *Ijedodo* rites, a dangerous and highly efficacious ritual that feeds on the blood of a virgin whom he must rape. Incidentally, Serubawon’s daughter, Desola, happens to be the unlucky victim and, in fact, the sixth virgin to be used for the rites by Ajanaku. As she slowly dies, Iyale and Demoke (Serubawon’s wife and Desola’s mother) seek the help of Iya Agba, who finds out from the helpless Serubawon that the final act of Ajanaku’s “consecration into immortality” (pp. 73–77) is to occur during the annual *Jobele* festival, three days from then, after Desola’s death. However, Iya Agba truncates the process and neutralizes the effect of the rites on Desola. Ajanaku dies while Desola is cured. Serubawon, who sets in motion the whole dastard act, is exposed as the cause of Oba Akinjobi’s strange ailment and Olaniyonu’s real father. He also orchestrated the humiliation, banishment from the palace, and subsequent ostracism from the land, of Iya Agba. Having been exposed and disgraced accordingly, he commits suicide.

Ganapathy-Doré mentions that narrative “primarily deals with naming of people, literary works and characters, the invention of new names and the act of renaming” (p. 15). In *Once Upon an Elephant*, naming of the central characters can be viewed in this light: “Ajanaku” that Olaniyonu adopts at his coronation; Serubawon (which means “Scare and/or threaten them”); and Iya Agba, a name that comes with social derision. Although these names are aliases, they “infuse cultural depth into the characters they designate” (p. 20). Essentially, we shall examine the cultural depth of these names, their significance to the tragedy that the play dramatizes, and the ways in which the playwright has used them to develop the play’s thematic concerns.¹¹

Our analysis begins with Serubawon, the first character to be introduced in the play and the one whose actions tie together those of Ajanaku and Iya Agba with the rest of the characters. In the story of the Elephant of Yoruba folktale as well, the Tortoise is also a central figure; and in the universe of *Once Upon an Elephant*, without the Tortoise-figure in the person of Serubawon, there would not have been the elephant, that is, Ajanaku. In fact, the song that Iya Agba (in her supposed state of insanity) sings, “*Erin ka re’le o wa jo’oba, erin yeeye; erin yeeye*” [“All hail, Elephant, come home to honor and be crowned!” our interpretation] (pp. 34, 37–40), is taken from the Yoruba narrative in which the small but clever tortoise (Alábahun), using his wit and intelligence, lures the elephant (Àjànàkú) to his death on the pretext that the other animals plan to crown him. The haughty elephant that meets a swift and predictable death is also the moral of Ademilua-Afolayan’s story, which ridicules vainglory and the abuse of power by both Serubawon and Olaniyonu, as a metaphor for brutish leadership and tyranny in Africa that is exemplified by the aforementioned African leaders and their compatriots.

Although the type of story that features the tortoise (Alábahun) and its antics in Yoruba folklore is referred to as *àlò àpagbè* (recall here that *Once Upon an Elephant* was inspired by the story of the haughty elephant [Alábahun] of Yoruba folktale), of importance to us at the moment is the narrative category

¹¹ In her previous play, *Look Back in Gratitude* (Ademilua-Afolayan 2013), Ademilua-Afolayan also used the strategy of naming to foreground her characters in their spatial and temporal realities, and to relate them to her thematic concerns. According to Chris Anyokwu (2013), “unlike in Osborne’s play, in Ademilua-Afolayan’s adaptation, the playwright deliberately and brilliantly gives her characters meaningful theme-related names” (p. 247).

where Olatunji identifies *àlò* (as Babalola) and *itàn*, namely, story, narrative, history etc., which are three of the myriad ways of conceptualizing experience, as done by *Once Upon an Elephant*. Moreover, *àlò* often presents a picture of “the society at its very worst, an image of the world turned upside down by self-interest, passion and contempt for social convention”; according to La Pin, it is a world that the “Tortoise presides over . . . as a figure who is the pure incarnation of chaos and disruption, the supreme agent who upsets the social order by fault of his personal excess” (p. 329), and by working against the boundaries of social restraint.

The supreme architect of confusion role that is played by the tortoise in *àlò* as sketched above is suggested by its numerous names, which show the significance of the strategy of naming as a narrative device. Tortoise is also Alábahun (Miser), the Ológbón Wéwé (One Endowed with Piecemeal Wisdom), Olófofó (Scandalmonger), and Olófofó Méta (Owner of Three Tricks) etc. These names reflect the relation he has with other people, or more specifically, how he manipulates them, and succeeds in “turning the society askew” (pp. 334–36).¹² Serubawon resembles a tortoise of this description through his actions in the play: he is self-centered, wily, and arrogant. Instead of being the “Afogbólólógbónsogbón” (He Who Is Open to Good Advice), Serubawon is “Anìkandógbón” (He Who Meets Problems Alone). Serubawon as “Anìkandógbón” clearly shows the moment we encounter him in the opening scene when he lures Ogundele and Odejimi to a secret grove in order to perform the initial rites towards enthroning Olaniyonu. When both men realize what he plans to do and question him as to the reason for his action, he evades the question and reminds them instead of the people’s belief about continuity: “Our culture knows no stagnation. It is senseless creating one” (p. 16). However, when Odejimi reminds him that “Our world which knows no stagnation, also rests on order and structure” and Ogundele adds that “Unless a king dies, another is never enthroned” (pp. 16, 19), he strives to outwit them because, as the tortoise, he is “clever, power-seeking and intent on satisfying his personal appetites” (La Pin 1980, p. 338). As such, he maintains that since the ailing king is no longer responding to treatment, it is logical that another person is prepared in readiness for the former’s demise: “. . . Akinjobi’s sun up there in the sky is about to set and another one is preparing to emerge in its full glory. That is the way of the world. If a door closes, another one opens, so that people can come in and go out at will” (pp. 13–19). Further pressed by the two men, who are obviously not satisfied with the answer that he gives them, Serubawon resorts to trickery again in order to evade them. He tries to psyche them: “We are the kingmakers. What is the tradition without the three of us here?” (p. 17). “Tortoise tricks his unsuspecting victims by reversing ‘is’ and ‘is not’” writes La Pin, “feigning a toothache to escape punishment. Often these transformations result in disaster” (p. 336). Serubawon finally has his way and soon after, Olaniyonu is enthroned, while he becomes the undisputed sole kingmaker.

According to La Pin, the “tortoise and alo have personalities that are not only parallel, but that must obviously interact in the unfolding of the story drama”; and the Yoruba storytellers are of the opinion that such a relationship should be traced to the etymology of *àlò*, which evolved from the verb “*lò*”, that is, ‘to weave together’ or ‘to twist’ and which dwell on the tortoise [who] will “self-destruct for the single reason that he is wholly incapable of seeing beyond his own person into a community of fellows [for] he lacks wisdom (Ogbón) in the true Yoruba sense” (p. 332). This means that the tortoise (Alábahun) and *àlò* are intertwined since “both share the same perspective on life, one by distorting its picture of (wo)man, the other by turning society askew” (pp. 335–37). Essentially, the meaning (*itumò*) of the story is revealed “by separating (*tú*) the conflicting strands of positive and negative that *àlò* twists together and finding (*mò*) a solution or compromise that sets things right again”, a resolution which the Yoruba refer to as ‘untying the knot of the problem’ (*tú kókó òrò*), that is, “a denouement in the literal sense. [As such] the alo conclusion is always one in which wrong is put right, confusion is

¹² While “Ologbon Ewe”, a cunning and beguiling character, shares some attributes with “Ologbon Wewe”, one with little tricks, they are not necessarily the same person as La Pin presents it here, but in the context of our paper, Serubawon combines the attributes of both type of characters.

brought to order, and crimes are punished” (p. 338).¹³ As we shall see, the story that is dramatized in *Once Upon an Elephant*, as well as both the role of Serubawon in its realization and the way conflicts are resolved, follows such a pattern or sequence.

From the foregoing, this means that Serubawon begins the “twisting” of his own *àlò* and orchestrates his devious plans the moment we encounter him, and throughout the play, he stands by the arrogant king and his chaotic reign, defending him whenever necessary, as in the case of the embattled people of Oguno, who have come for help. Serubawon makes their appeal for help from Olaniyonu impossible with his argument by insisting that the king will only assist Oguno after they have presented the tributes that he demanded from them. He also promptly scolds the obviously aggrieved Gbeleyi, leader of the delegation, for disrespecting the king, while the old man stresses the nature of the relation between the two villages, insisting that they are more than neighbors, and are family. That history notwithstanding, Serubawon has no qualms about Olaniyonu’s refusal to help the people of Oguno, nor does he consider it immoral that he confiscates for himself the disputed land that belongs to his subjects. Rather, he is only interested in Olaniyonu’s continued relevance as the monarch and undisputed humbler of the wild, as he often describes himself, so long as his own position as the paramount kingmaker is assured.

However, the antics of the tortoise never last. As La Pin writes, “Tortoise will self-destruct for the single reason that he is wholly incapable of seeing beyond his own person into a community of fellows. He lacks wisdom (Ogbon) in the true Yoruba sense, and as Ológbón Wéwé, he suffers from an abridged logic that fosters brilliant short-term strategies that bring about his ruin” (pp. 337–38). This is true about Serubawon at the end of the play, for as Iya Agba also tells him, “You can only fool yourself when you claim to have done the impossible” (p. 34). To be clear, the discovery of the *Ijedodo rites* as the cause of Desola’s strange illness changes the nature of the relationship between Serubawon and Olaniyonu, and marks the beginning of the sly kingmaker’s own gradual descent into shame and total disgrace, although the seed of such a time was sown long before he realized it. Iya Agba is correct in saying to both of them “They deceive themselves greatly; whoever collects rain water with a sieve. Do you know what fate awaits a treacherous arrangement? Whoever incites a terrible force to fight will rue his folly” (p. 34). Serubawon’s machinations begin to crumble shortly after the unexpected visits of Iya Agba to the palace where she first ridicules the tyrant king and then sets in motion Omoyeni’s quest for redemption.

Before this time, however, Serubawon and Olaniyonu have effectively isolated themselves from the society; one for self-deceit and the other for his tyranny. Iya Agba tells both of them, “Because a child committed the first act and was not caught; he was happy. He forgot that misfortune does not kill; it is indulgent happiness that kills” (p. 34). Desola’s slow but impending death establishes this reality for Serubawon and forces words out of him. We are able to see that, after all, he is not as smart as he thinks, and that he is also as vulnerable in the hands of Olaniyonu as everybody else, when he cries out in pain, “I made you king to be useful to me. I didn’t ask you to ruin me” (p. 66). As earlier mentioned, Serubawon’s ruin did not just start with Olaniyonu’s misapplication of the *Ijedodo rites*, or what he describes as “recklessness” on the part of the tyrant and arrogant king, and its roots must be located in the moment he started an illicit affair with Adebisi, the youngest wife of his bosom friend, Oba Akinjobi, who covered up her infidelity, and his own betrayal of his friend and king, the same as Olaniyonu’s true paternity, the poisoning of Akinjobi, and the manipulation of the succession rites in order to have his illegitimate son ascend the throne. The discovery of the misfiring of *Ijedodo* is only a prelude to other dirty secrets being exposed.

¹³ We could extend the meaning of *itumo* further: “*tu*” as in ‘to unravel,’ ‘de-riddle,’ ‘disentangle,’ ‘decode’; and “*mo*” is ‘to know,’ ‘to discern,’ ‘to apprehend,’ or ‘to comprehend’ etc. Olabiyi Yai (1993) explores the connection between *itumo* and *àlò/itàn* in an interesting way that further illuminates our own perception in this paper. According to him, “*àlò*” acts as a parable and riddle, and “*itàn*” acts to de-riddle history, “to shed light on human existence through space and time” (p. 33).

Serubawon also demonstrates the nature of the tortoise as the trickster figure who often manifests a disequilibrium of nature that is common to his type, namely, the urge to survive by any means necessary, when he forces Olaniyonu as king on the community in spite of the young man's bad record of social relations, and against the morality of human conduct since he is an illegitimate son of the late king in whose name he lays claim to the throne. According to La Pin, for the tortoise, "survival is merely the by-product of a set of selected traits that make him incapable of clear judgement or self-restraint. When he acts, he plays out a program of instinctual human drives, embodying them, machine-like, without being able to switch them off" (p. 338). For people like Serubawon, the end always justifies the means, except that the tears he sheds when he realizes the futility of his antics are all for nothing. Indeed, Olaniyonu considers those painful tears to be a waste of time: "What is wrong with you, Serubawon? What is the meaning of this you are doing, whimpering like a child desperately in need of its mother's breasts?" (p. 64). From that moment, when he discovers that his daughter was the one caught by the trap that he set for others, that he will have to watch as she dies a slow and painful death in the same way as five other virgins before her own, and that it means ultimately clearly that he has no one to survive him since he cannot publicly claim paternity over Olaniyonu without exposing himself, we are sure that Serubawon is finished. "From humiliation comes the message of the tale" (p. 338), writes La Pin, and this is true of the story involving the tortoise, and the final fate of Serubawon, whose machination eventually backfires. He does not fulfil the essence of his name. He does not scare anyone in the real sense, but is himself scared, undone by his own antics, and he remains an anathema to the society.

Olaniyonu, the self-proclaimed Ajanaku, is a vintage example of those who place themselves at the mercy of their own self-conceit, who seek power and fame without any qualms for whose lives are destroyed in the process, and whose dreams are truncated (we have ample evidence in our society today of politicians and businessmen/women) for theirs to be fulfilled. Similar to Serubawon, then, he represents for us a timeless lesson in human foibles. As the elephant of the Yoruba narrative never bothered to ask the tortoise how he can become king of the animals in the same jungle where the lion lives with the other more agile, stronger animals and jungle dwellers, Olaniyonu also does not bother to address how Serubawon hopes to manipulate such a long process of kinship, and how he wants to deal with his father, who is still very much alive as at that time. He is simply satisfied with Serubawon's simple explanation after the first rite: "Do not see your father until after you have had the last bath" (p. 13). All he cares about is the acquisition of power: "We have been given power to rule; and rule we shall" (p. 26). Indeed, he has no regards for his council of chiefs or their rich advice. He also does not care about the feelings of his subjects whose rich farmland he confiscates, or about the possibility of Oguno people being completely wiped out by their perennial enemies, so long as he is in charge. In short, he does not care about anything else, not even the baby that he thinks his pregnant wife, Omoyeni, is going to have for him, nor does he feel any remorse for being responsible for Gbeleyi's suicide after publicly humiliating the old man. Iya Agba's strong words of warning make no sense either: "The king who buried coral beads; and the king who digs them up for people's benefit, both will have their names remembered only differently" (p. 34); however, what does matter to him is his name: "You must call me by my rightful name. I am Ajanaku, conqueror of lands and forests!" (p. 36). At least while he asserts his own name, Serubawon does not.

Precisely, all Olaniyonu cares about is his name. He never tires of asserting who he is. He tells Iya Agba this in clear terms, hence, he takes exception to the retinue of names that she calls him, "a huge dirt on a white cloth; a black pigeon in a poultry of well-bred fowls . . . a dishonest goat and a shameless baboon . . . a goat in a horse's stable . . ." (p. 40). If anything ever bothered Olaniyonu, it was this combination of names. For someone that is unperturbed by her first visit to the palace, this time she calls him (nick)names that get him rattled, for each one of the names details the history that he lacks knowledge of, and exposes his illegal claim to the throne and the fact of his person as an epitome of aberration, ultimately forcing him to have self-doubt and to question his real identity. Therefore, it is no surprise that he does not take it lightly with Serubawon, who is just as rattled by

both Iya Agba's presence in the palace and the names which she calls the arrogant king. The more he struggles unconvincingly to persuade the embattled king to forget that encounter, the more the latter insists on knowing what she meant by such a retinue of names by which she addresses him.

By the time Serubawon returns to the palace much later to cry after he discovers that Desola is the victim of Olaniyonu's veneration of *Ijedodo*, all forms of pretense have gone. Olaniyonu is transformed and he no longer plays the willing king, a crowned fool in the hands of the clever and devious kingmaker. He tells Serubawon, "Don't worry, keep the position you have—the king's most loyal subject; his confidant and medicine man, everything you have except the throne. Who knows what plans you had initially?" (p. 62). The names that Iya Agba calls him also matter to him. While he may have thought initially that the nickname he adopts, Ajanaku, will endow him with some extraordinary power and aura, Iya Agba shatters that expectation upon her visit to the palace: "Perhaps Iya Agba was right after all. I am Ajanaku, the big and senseless elephant stalking the community in shame and foolishness. I sit on the throne. But it is you who hold the rope and the hook" (p. 63). Although he is correct when he proclaims the *Jobele* festival as "a time of renewal", he is wrong to imagine that it is for him "a time of ascension into immortality" (p. 78). This is because his effort is not backed by the essence of his true name that he has unfortunately dropped for an ineffective alias. In the final analysis, Iya Agba ensures the truth of this claim is established with her own example.

Of the three characters in focus, and in the entire play as a matter of fact, Iya Agba is the most unusual. According to Ganapathy-Doré, "narrative often times explores the inheritance and significance of names, the destinies they carry, as well as the burden of associating fame to such names" (p. 20). This is true of Iya Agba, whose name attracts a dubious fame and imposes a heavy burden upon her that she manages to bear with grace and dignity, but which she throws away to grab honor at the end of the play. Her life's journey is marked by changes in her name and, at each stage, she assumes a different personality, at least to different people and at different times.

She transitions from being Olori Agba, the respected queen and most senior wife of Oba Akinjobi, to an *òdóko*, the "adulteress" (no thanks to Serubawon) who becomes isolated and ostracized from the community, and who consequently degenerates due to emotional and psychological trauma into becoming *àjé*, a miserable witch and mad hag of playful children's imagination, a state of being where she is finally nicknamed, "Iya Agba", the mad witch. In the entire village, it is only Iyale, Odejimi's wife, who is able to see beyond the deceit and camouflage that Iya Agba's name confers on her person, and to know that the old woman is, in fact, a refined being that is disparaged by the public. As she tells whoever cares to listen, "Iya Agba understands" and "Iya Agba always speaks the truth" (pp. 28–30). While what Iya Agba understands and the truth that she speaks enthrall Omoyeni, the embattled pregnant young wife of Olaniyonu, but confuses the rest of the people, it is nothing but "the rantings of a mad woman" (p. 41) according to Serubawon.

At the turn of events, Iya Agba becomes the only voice that "speaks truth to power", unlike Odejimi's lonely and feeble protests. She becomes Desola's savior, and Demoke's saving grace, despite her shameless past, when she testified wrongly against her (Iya Agba) on the instance of her husband, Serubawon. She also becomes the abode of peace and refuge for Omoyeni, who was initially betrothed to the poor blacksmith, Delani, but forced from his hands by the tyrant king, and the only one who genuinely seeks to also know exactly what Iya Agba understands (p. 67). In the final analysis, Iya Agba is the rallying point for sanity in the insane and chaotic world created by Olaniyonu, with the orchestration and firm support of Serubawon, who thought he stood to gain the most before things turned awry. With her knowledge, she redirects the society toward bliss following its experience of torrid times occasioned by the damage wrecked on it by the duo of Serubawon and Olaniyonu, alias Ajanaku. In short, the trajectory of Iya Agba's life comes full circle toward the end of the play when, trapped by his own wiles, Serubawon crawls toward her in shame and total humiliation after realizing that he can no longer control Ajanaku and is equally completely at sea about how to cure Desola's ailment.

As a truly cultured and enlightened individual who fully understands both the spiritual and political significance of a name, it is not a surprise that the first thing Iya Agba demands from Serubawon is that he addresses her by her real name. Reluctantly, Serubawon tells the crowd of helpless youth, mostly made up of Desola's friends, who have come to her house in search of the near-elusive cure for the young lady's strange affliction, that in fact, Iya Agba's name is Fadeke Adunni. She thereafter narrates how Serubawon manipulates everything in order to cover up his illicit affair with Adebisi, Oba Akinjobi's young wife and Olaniyonu's mother. She also reveals to the astonishment of everybody present that Serubawon not only poisoned Oba Akinjobi, but that he is Olaniyonu's real father, which is the reason he manipulated the kinship process in order to enthrone his son. Importantly, Iya Agba retrieves her real identity and reclaims the true essence of her name when she insists that Serubawon should address her accordingly. Consequently, she comes fully into her own as the matriarch of the society and asserts her place therein, by demonstrating that names are not just a label of identity, but are also the material node and source of recovery and life; similar in many ways to *iwà* (a term which details socially-acceptable modes of behaviour and the individual(s) who demonstrate(s) such), which determines and structures both character and mode of action.

Still acting true to type, Iya Agba re-directs toward its real purpose the *Jobele* rites that both Serubawon and Olaniyonu plan to turn into a channel of perpetual tyranny and damnation for the society. There have been several examples in primeval Yoruba society where traditional cleansing rites are used for individual and collective purging of ills and the purification of (mis)deeds in order to effect renewal and usher in a new lease of life for the society. Gbemisola Adeoti (2003) has written about how, this is not only "anchored on the people's belief that such [rites] provide occasions for the return of metaphysical beings [and wellness] to the human society" that is ravaged (p. 90), and in the structuring of their plot and creation of characters, contemporary Nigerian dramatists, like their African counterparts, often appropriate such rites to resolve conflicts in their plays. Ademilua-Afolayan uses a similar technique of narration, even as she also deploys some aspects of the Yoruba belief about (nick)naming, that is aptly summarized by the concept of autogenesis. Instead of the utilization of *Jobele* for a selfish and dangerous end, Iya Agba uses it as cleansing rites, both to revive Desola and to finally cure the land itself of its ailment.

However, beyond the façade of social repugnance associated with the name, "Iya Agba" fits considering the actions of the character in the play. She echoes a personality trait that transcends her aesthetic purpose, for indeed, "Iya Agba" is the *Agbalagba obinrin*, the *ájé*. According to Teresa Washington (2005), this is "a stately and reserved, respected elder woman of control, composure, and reticence who is recognized as having reached a social, psychological, and spiritual pinnacle" (p. 16).¹⁴ These women are called many names which speak to society's fear, respect, and awe shown toward them (See Washington, *Manifestation of Aje*). Emerging from the initial social derision, Iya Agba outsmarts both Serubawon and Olaniyonu in an "unusual" way by using feminine energy to redirect the *Jobele* rites in the right and redeeming direction and also proves at the end that "her spirit [has indeed] become a force equal to or greater than her physical being" (p. 16).¹⁵ Moreover, the ending of this play with the death in a shameful manner of both Olaniyonu and Serubawon underscores the use of cleansing rites for political purposes alongside their social and therapeutic values. As Adeoti (2003) also notes, purification goes beyond ethical or religious rebirth, and also functions as a "political contract as it is used for the affirmation, or in some circumstances, subversion of a reigning hegemony" (p. 91). On the one hand, therefore, the last scene shows that Ademilua-Afolayan recognizes how the

¹⁴ In the particular case of Iya Agba in this play, we must turn attention to how she epitomises experience and wisdom, femininity, and reverence and how, as "Agbalagba Obinrin", she represents not just old age, but also the experience and reverence that go with it, not minding the initial derision that her name accrues by virtue of Serubawon's machination.

¹⁵ By "feminine energy", we mean the (super)natural power possessed by women which distinguishes them from men, or what Balogun refers to in the essay "'Òtún we òsì, òsì we òtún'", as "female agency beyond sexual properties" (p. 44) (See also: (Drewal and Drewal 1983; Ibitokun 1995; Opefeyitimi 2009)).

Yoruba demonstrate an awareness of their women (See also, (Balogun 2017), “Òtún we òsì, òsì we òtún”), similar to Olajubu, who explains that Yoruba women feature prominently in ritual, and that feminine principles which are usually coded in symbols are also prevalent among the people. While this may not be peculiar to the Yoruba, theirs is unique because of the way they perceive their women to effectively blend “between the obvious and hidden spaces of religion and [as] human mystical agents, occup[ying] this invisible plane of power” (p. 12). Considering this particular character in this light, one cannot but agree with Iyale that, indeed, Iya Agba understands. On the other hand, Ademilua-Afolayan also demonstrates that “a ritual can serve to affirm the status quo or be used to question it . . . a dramatist working as a free creating agent can . . . appropriate and use it to express her/his own dissentient vision” (Ogundele 1994, pp. 48–49), and that traditional praxes (*àlò/itàn*, purification rites etc) can be deployed creatively as models for the re-evaluation of Nigerian society.

Placing Serubawon and Iya Agba side-by-side for comparison in their roles in this play and both as products of Yoruba narrative, whether in the mode of *àlò* or *itàn*, what comes out strongly is how they “reflect everyday human action by shaping it and commenting upon it” and how, as typical characters from Yoruba narrative, one the tortoise and the other the snail, their actions and dramas “provide a foundation for teaching wisdom needed for social and physical survival” (La Pin 1980, p. 328). Although both animals are similar, small in size and possess shells, their social relevance is measured in terms of their efficacy in ritual: “the snail’s powers purify and enhance, while the tortoise embodies negative powers of the earth that religion must contain and ultimately destroy” (p. 341). Whereas the tortoise, even as shown by Serubawon’s actions in this play, is an aberrant creature that is undone by its tricks, the snail is “an image of harmony and reason” and although both animals serve as “an ideational unit in fiction where the embodiment of good pits itself permanently with the embodiment of evil” (p. 331),¹⁶ social relevance separates and marks them out from each other. Indigenous lore of this type, as we have demonstrated so far, has the capacity to provide hermeneutic codes for both the greater understanding of our literature and the social reality from which the same literature usually draws its materials.

Elsewhere, Adeoti (1998) contends that our knowledge of indigenous lore, especially the trickster narrative, can facilitate a more effective and critical interpretation of contemporary African literature. According to him, two paradigms are useful for this deepened knowledge of indigenous lore and its critical value for contemporary literature, namely: the Instrumentality paradigm, where the modern writer uses the trickster figure to expose the misdeeds of her/his target, as in the case of Ademilua-Afolayan, whose parable about African tyrants such as Jammeh and Mobutu and their penchant for superfluous titles and (nick)names are clear in this play; and the Intentionality paradigm based on the trickster tale in which the same trickster becomes the victim of his own ingenious design, as is also clear in the dubious alliance of Serubawon and Olaniyonu, and as is the central significance of *àlò*, whose conclusion is always one in which “wrong is put right, confusion is brought to order, and crimes are punished” (La Pin 1980, p. 338). At the end of each narrative experience among the Yoruba, it is the parable of the tale that the storyteller stresses for its significance to social relations and wellbeing. In Olatunji’s profound analysis, “it is in the evocation of the world of the tale . . . that continuity expresses itself most forcefully”; it is a world that is “peopled by essences”, the belief in which constitutes the Yoruba worldview (pp. 33–34), in addition to being part of a whole system and structure forming “the modes of perceiving and expressing knowledge and its dynamic connection to reality” (Jeyifo 1985), in this case, our contemporary reality. As such, indigenous lore such as *àlò/itàn*, which informed *Once Upon an Elephant*, becomes useful in terms of how it calls on society to prepare to avert future occurrence of the kind of situation, chaos, and disorder that has been presented in the tale. Additionally, the names that people bear, and the ones they choose for themselves, also play some

¹⁶ Though both possess a shell, the tortoise’s small tail is an aberration, exposes its weakness, and portrays its shortcoming (Abraham 1958, p. 290).

significant roles in their social circumstances and realities, irrespective of their spatial and temporal (dis)location, as the several names of the tortoise also show, for example.

As must have become clear in our analysis, naming plays significant roles in the life journey and Yoruba rites of naming in particular underline the people's spiritual belief and other ways of conceptualizing the world. In the play that we have analyzed, *Once Upon an Elephant*, the three central characters went through renaming, autogenesis, under different circumstances. Iya Agba, for instance, undergoes a sort of phase of renaming that suggests that she is a "non-person" at the beginning of the play, but, by the time the play ends, she has become the redeemer of the society, whereas the names that Serubawon and Olaniyonu adopt have negative consequences for them. However, despite the naming practice that we analyzed, the Yoruba are not oblivious to the fact that good behaviour and moral conduct play essential roles in life's successes and/or failures. This much they demonstrate in the traditional lore of the tortoise and the elephant, characters who are clearly metaphors for the human condition and the society. Similarly, a strong point of the Yoruba naming rite is to gather knowledge about the new born, which will serve as a guide throughout her/his earthly sojourn. Unlike high-sounding names and titles that African despots adopt, as the examples of Jammeh, Mobutu, and Idi Amin show, Yoruba narratives draw attention to the futility of some names that people adopt and cite the tortoise as a supreme example of its failure. The play posits a similar point of understanding through its engagement with a broader socio-political reality.

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