
Animality: Animal imagery, Characterization, and the Articulation of Difference in Victor Yankah's *Dear Blood*

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Abstract

Drawing on the literature on animality, this paper examines animal imagery or animality as a strategy of characterization and the articulation of difference in Victor Yankah's *Dear Blood* (2014). Specifically, the paper focuses on metaphors and similes that are embedded in proverbs as locations of animal imagery. It argues that animal imagery or animality is integral to how Yankah frames characterization, agency, voice, and the quest for an inclusive postcolonial society. Through the use of animal imagery or animality, Yankah recreates Sophocles' Ismene and Antigone within a Ghanaian sociocultural context as Panyin and Kakra. Seen from this vantage point, *Dear Blood* emerges as not just an adaptation, but a play with its own thoughts and modes of becoming. Overall, the paper seeks to answer two key questions: what is the dominant imagery in Yankah's *Dear Blood*? What are the ethico-aesthetic entailments of this imagery? The paper shows that animal imageries of domestication and the wild constitute the dominant means by which Yankah frames not only the different approaches of Panyin and Kakra to power, but more importantly, the possibility of woman's voice in the public space.

Keywords: animality; animal imagery; characterization; *Dear Blood*; domestication; wild.

Introduction

The adaptation of classical Greek plays constitutes a crucial fragment of the African literary imagination. Nonetheless, adaptation carries its own pitfalls. No wonder it has been the subject of criticism. As McKinnon (2011) points out “contemporary criticism often considers adaptation derivative, parasitic, uncreative and uncritical” (p. 56). According to Hutcheon (2013), this dismissive attitude can be traced to a “misunderstood assumption that the goal of adaptation [...] is simply one of replication, rather than other motivations such as interrogation, reinvention or exploration” (p. 6-7). At the heart of the hostility to translation is a romantic/idealist notion of “originality” that views adaptation as an intrusion into the creative vision, effort and output of others (Sawyer 2006; Nutsukpo 2019). However, as various scholars have shown, adaptation has been integral to the transhistorical and transcultural circulation of ideas, motifs, and stories (McKinnon 2011). Adaptation has also been influential in the emergence and consolidation of forms of cosmopolitan sensibilities; the interrogation and articulation of alternative views and knowledge. In the postcolonial world, adaptation of classical plays is a site for the dramatization of the conundrums of postcolonial existence and a commentary on the postcolonial nation-state as an arena of contending forces of tradition and change (Barbara Goff & Michael Simpson 2007; Lorna Hardwick & Carol Gillespie, eds. 2007).

Victor Yankah's *Dear Blood* (2014) adds to the growing list of African adaptations of classical Greek plays for contemporary African political and socio-cultural realities. Specifically, *Dear Blood* is an adaptation of Sophocles' tragic play *Antigone*. Set in the fictional Ghanaian village of Emukura, *Dear Blood* is the tragic tale of two sisters', (Penyin and Kakra), confrontation with a sovereign power that is manifestly patriarchal and uncompromising in its application of the law. Against the decree of King Asem, the oldest sister, Penyin, sets out to perform ceremonial duties of burial for their late brother, lost in an accursed war. The play explores the ramifications of this disavowal of the king's edict. As an adaptation, *Dear Blood* is rooted within a pretextual background: King Adinka (Oedipus), the predecessor of Asem (Creon), fulfils a gloomy accursed prophecy by unwittingly killing his father and marrying his mother. This incestuous act produces four children: Ansah and Owusu (representing Polyneices and Eteocles) and Penyin and Kakra (representing Ismene and Antigone). The incestuous act is regarded as abominable and sacrilegious. Adinka is ultimately exiled from the land of his birth whereas his mother/wife commits suicide. His two sons, Ansah and Owusu, with hopes of ascending to their father's throne, fought each other. Ansah raised an army

against Emukura where Asem, his uncle, reigned. Owusu, led Asem's army against his brother, Ansa. The two brothers died in the war. *Dear Blood* foregrounds the dynamics between gender, voice, spatiality and postcolonial futurity in ways that Sophocles' *Antigone* does not, which is why Yankah's play can aptly be described as speaking truth to postcolonial power. It explores the dangers and potentialities of unsettling the order of things, especially hegemonic cultural construction of women, agency and the differential allocation of intelligibility and recognition. In other words, *Dear Blood* attempts to redefine what constitutes cultural intelligibility, agency and recognition, especially as it relates to women and the public space. It is within this context that Panyin's becoming-animal emerges at once as a scandalous and audacious agential act.

It is significant to note that *Antigone's* presence in Ghanaian theatre predates Yankah's *Dear Blood*. Tracing the adaptations of *Antigone* in Ghana, Gibbs (2007) argues that *Antigone* has played a "significant role in the cultural, theatrical, and political dialogue between Europe and Africa" (p. 55). More importantly, Gibbs points out that Ghanaian playwrights have used *Antigone* "as a means of communication, self-examination, and helpful self-expression" (p. 55). Unfortunately, while adaptations by other Ghanaians and especially by Nigerian and South African playwrights now constitute canonical sites for critical reflection on the ethico-aesthetic entailments of Afro-Greek plays, Yankah's *Dear Blood* has suffered the fate of belatedness. The result is that Yankah's distinctive contribution to the transhistorical and transcultural translation of *Antigone* has not been fully explored. What is more, Yankah's distinctive use of animality or animal imagery has yet to be analyzed.

Following Wetmore's (2003) assertion that "plays do not mean, they generate meaning" (p. 4), this paper examines animal imagery as a technique for generating meaning in *Dear Blood*. Specifically, the paper draws on the literature on animality and Posthumanism in order to examine Yankah's use of animal imagery in *Dear Blood* (2014). Methodologically, the paper focuses on selected metaphors and similes that are embedded in proverbs as locations of animal imagery. It argues that animal imagery or animality is integral to how Yankah frames voice, agency, and the quest for an inclusive and egalitarian postcolonial society. By focusing on animal imagery, the paper shows that Yankah draws on indigenous cultural aesthetics and the rhetoric of communication. Seen from this vantage point, *Dear Blood* emerges as not just an adaptation but as a play with its own thoughts and modes of becoming. Through the use of animal imagery or animality, Yankah recreates Ismene and *Antigone* within a Ghanaian sociocultural context as Panyin and Kakra. Overall, the paper seeks to answer the two key questions: what is the dominant imagery in Yankah's *Dear Blood*? What are the ethico-aesthetic entailments of

this imagery? The paper concludes that animal imagery or animality constitutes the dominant means by which Yankah frames not only the different approaches of Penyin and Kakra to power, but more importantly, the possibility of a woman's voice in the public space. By reading *Dear Blood* along the lines proposed here, the paper points to one significant way Yankah's *Dear Blood* rewrites Sophocles' *Antigone* in order to rethink how to reconstitute postcolonial public sphere and gender equality.

The paper firstly clarifies the difference between character and characterization, and then draws attention to conceptualizations of animal imagery in recent theories of Posthumanism. Secondly, it analyzes specific animal imageries in *Dear Blood* with an emphasis on how they frame issues of agency, voice, spatial location and law. It concludes with a reflection on the implications of the study for the emerging field of literary animal studies.

Conceptual clarification: character, characterization, and metaphor

Although the organizing idea in this paper is animal imagery or animality in *Dear Blood*, the analysis nonetheless encompasses character and characterization insofar as the focus is on Panyin, Kakra, and the law. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin by clarifying the distinction between character and characterization, not least because these concepts are crucial to the way literary works create imaginary worlds and generate meaning. It is also useful to place the paper within a broader discussion of animal imagery in literary studies and posthuman studies. From the onset, it is vital to state that there is a rich corpus of scholarship on characterization, especially on characters and their immense role in the development of plot, conflict, and theme (Abbas, 2018; Docherty 1983; Hochman 1985; James 1972; Margolin 1986; Oscar 1980; Stanzel 1981; Woloch 2003). Writing on the importance of characters in a narrative, Kort (1975) asserts that a "character in a narrative is an image of human possibilities; either for good and creativity or for evil and destruction, and the rise of [...] narrative is very much tied to explore or to render paradigms of those possibilities." Characters have therefore been studied as "models for human virtues and vices" (quoted in Malbon, p. 260). According to Abrams & Harpham (2009), "characters are the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from [...] the dialogue and [...] the action" (p. 42). Precisely because characters are fundamental to narrative, Culler (1975) argues that they are the "major tantalizing force" in any literary work (p. 230).

Characterization, on the other hand, refers to the process of "shaping characters" (Bin 2018, p. 284); it is the playwright's tool for differentiating one person from another. Therefore, according to Thrall and Hibbard (1936), characterization refers to the "depicting, in writing, of clear images of a person, his [his or her] actions and manners of thought [that] go to make the people what they are." (pp. 74-75; quoted in Bin 2018, p. 284). Characterization then designates the ways in which fictional characters are created, either through imagery or the systematic manner in which they are presented to the audience. This indicates that while characterization refers to the process of creating or depicting, character refers to the product of the process. In spite of this difference, character and characterization are mutually interdependent. As Lothe (2000) succinctly put it:

[T]he distinction between character (at the level of the story) and characterization (at the textual level) is not absolute [...]. Discussions of fictional characters become more convincing if they refer to and are based on characterization, for it is through such characterization that the characters are introduced, shaped, and developed. (p. 81).

There are various ways fictional characters are created or brought to life, depending on the artist or playwright. For example, novels that seek to project or echo a form of individuation or becoming that foregrounds awakening may be developed along the lines of the bildungsroman. In this instance, characters who are initially presented as naive undergo transformation through encounters that lead to enlightenment (Asempasah 2020). Novels like *Beyond the Horizon* (1992) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) follow this trend of characterization and character development. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, on the other hand, follows a developmental trajectory that revolves around what Aristotle in the *Poetics* calls anagnorisis (recognition) and peripeteia (reversal).

As representations, characters may take the form of a human being, an animal, an object, a hybrid of human and animal, or even a machine. There are two ways animals appear in literary works. First, as animals in the sense that these creatures act as real characters, like Napoleon in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). That animals have been central to tragedy and other literary forms and philosophical discourse is no longer debatable. Animals are the dominant characters in folk tales and fables. Furthermore, there is a growing body of scholarship on Greek tragedy and comedy that shows the multiple functions of animals and animal imagery (Heath 1999; Lonsdale 1990; Buxton 2013; Pütz 2014; Thumiger 2014; Kostuch 2017). Secondly, animals appear in literary works in the form of animality, i.e., using animal behaviors, attributes,

or imagery to describe or characterize human behavior. It is within this context that animal imagery becomes pertinent in *Dear Blood*.

Posthumanism and the changing conceptions of animal imagery

The dominant interpretation of the presence of animals and animal imagery is that they are essentially for rhetorical purposes (as symbols, metaphors, and allegorical figures that help define human qualities, feelings, or behaviors) (Gilhaus 2006). However, in the last few decades, this traditional understanding of animal imagery has been problematized with the emergence of animal studies and posthuman theories and discourse. Braidotti (2009); Derrida (2008); Lippit (1998; 2000); and Wolfe (2010) among others, have variously contested the traditional notions of the animal and, in the process, redefined our relationship to the animal. One result of this evolution has been a radical rethinking of animals and animal imagery in literary works and philosophical discourse. In his zooanthropological theories, Marchesini shows that the development of human knowledge, imagination, and culture is the result of our interaction with animals and other species (see Gilebbi 2014, p. 94). For Marchesini, human interaction with animals is nowhere more evident than in the animal images or imageries that pervade human language. From this perspective, animal images are used, among other things, to store, communicate, and expand knowledge.

Furthermore, Derrida (2008) and Lippit (1998) have also shown that animal metaphors can be used to raise animal questions rather than merely for rhetorical purposes. In that sense, animal metaphors constitute a special type of metaphor. For Derrida, as Gilebbi (2014) points out, an animal image embedded in a metaphor "carries an alien element, an element that does not belong to the human linguistic system. The animal we embed in our language is an animot... that marks the invasion of animality with the word "(Gilebbi 94). Glossing Derrida, Gilebbi argues that "Entering human language, the animal "animates" it, shows its potentialities and limits in describing and interpreting reality, and marks the otherness that the animal represents from a human standpoint" (p. 94). Building on Derrida's work, Lippit (1998) coins the word "animetaphor" to describe how animal metaphor "transports to or breathes into language the vitality of another life, another expression" (p. 1113). According to Lippit, the animal functions not only as "an exemplary metaphor but, within the scope of rhetorical language, as a kind of originary metaphor" (p. 1113). We raise these contemporary thoughts on animal imagery within a metaphor not because the current paper claims that the animal imagery in *Dear Blood* raises the animal question, but to emphasize the centrality of animal imagery and animality in philosophical and literary

discussions. As we shall show, the animal imagery inside proverbs, similes, and metaphors animates or breathes into the language of *Dear Blood* another way of looking at the characters and the law. Beyond grounding the play in African rhetorical and communicative acts, the proverbs are crucial to the way *Dear Blood* generates meaning. Throughout this paper, animal imagery refers to images that are embedded in words or proverbs and make explicit reference to animals. In Yankah's *Dear Blood*, animal imagery is crucial to understanding how Yankah frames Penyin, Kakra Asem, and the law. The next section examines animal imagery as a representation of spatial location and agency.

Of animal imagery, agency and space in *Dear Blood*

The spatial location of characters and their awareness of the implications of transgressing socio-politically defined boundaries is crucial to appreciating the contrasting agential and ethical choices of Penyin and Kakra, and the tragic essence of the play. Panyin's defiance of Asem's edict is at the core of Yankah's interrogation of the established modalities of constituting subjectivities (voice and agency) that revolve around gender and spatial location. And it is here that animal imagery becomes paramount in grasping Yankah's strategy of characterization and the violence of law. Yankah draws attention to these through the use of animal imagery expressed through proverbs. Proverbs in *Dear Blood* are sites for the generation of metaphors, similes, or animal imagery and are an essential part of the process of characterization rather than merely indicating the African context of the play. The importance of animal imagery or animality to Yankah's dramaturgy is heralded early in the encounter between Appiah, the stranger to Emukura, and Kwamena, an elder of Emukura. In the opening dialogue between the two, during which Kwamena informs Appiah about the monstrous happenings in Emukura, Kwamena describes King Adinka's children in zoological terms. The family is presented as belonging to the feline family:

Kwamena: "Prepare to dance to the end. The fertile heat of their bed yielded four fruits: *two tiger-limbed boys*, and *a pair of female felines* born on the same day—one *a soft purring domestic cat*, and the other, *a stubborn panther*." (Act One, Scene Two; our emphasis).

This animalization of King Adinka's progeny gives us the first hint that the tragedy that surrounds this mythical family is framed around animal attributes. The tiger-limbed nature of the boys explains their war-like or aggressive nature which eventually leads to their tragic deaths. More important for our purpose,

however, is Kwamena's distinction between the twin sisters in ways that highlight differences in character and ideological thinking that border on animality and spatial location: Kakra (Ismene) is a "soft-spurring domestic cat," while Penyin (Antigone) is "a stubborn panther." Also, it is important to note that these animal images are inside metaphors. This shows, very early in the play, that Yankah is beginning to foreground "domesticity" and "wildness" as contrasting modes of subject location. In the above quotation, the animal imagery regarding Penyin and Kakra operates in a dual, contrasting sense. First, it marks an intimate connection between animality and spatial location. Kakra is the domesticated animal (a compliant or subjugated subject), while Penyin is framed as the radical other, a wild, unrestrained panther, and therefore outside the boundaries of civility or law. Secondly, this framing of Kakra as a domesticated or compliant subject, which by extension is the fate or condition of the women of Emukura, is embedded in African traditional patriarchal forms of governmentality. Therefore, to understand Kwamena's feline imagery, it is vital to pay attention to the traditional African conceptualization of domestic space in relation to gender.

African traditional society, like the Athenian society, is patriarchal in nature; it is a society dominated and ruled by men and therefore characterized by unequal power relations. As a result, women are assigned specific roles owing to their gender. According to Ifechelobi (2019) women are "systematically disadvantaged, subdued, and oppressed" (p.18). Domestication of women, therefore, is founded on gender roles that restrict women within the boundaries of the home and house. This implies, according to Chukukere (1995), that:

the woman's major function revolves around the family. These include her responsibility as a mother, wife and home administrator. The role of the mother is considered vital as it is through her that the lineage is perpetuated...In her role as wife and administrator, she undertakes all domestic duties... (p. 2).

To veer off this well-cut out path, then, is to defy the existing norms and structures of patriarchal dominance and subservience. To leap out of one's domestic space and to attempt to engage in other activities assigned to the superior gender or space is usually regarded as an act of defiance. In some societies, it is unheard of for a woman to venture into politics, which is considered the prerogative of men. This marginalization of women makes them passive and silent when it comes to political affairs and activities in the public sphere.

Kakra emerges as Yankah's representation of the passive woman in relation to the public sphere. Responding to her sister's request to help her bury Ansah, she replies, "It is a pity, sister. What can we do"? (Act One, Scene Two). Kakra's response demonstrates not only her unwillingness to assist but also her helplessness; a helplessness that stems from the realization that she is a subordinate, a lesser being in relation to the public sphere. The contrast between her and Penyin, is deeply rooted in her acceptance of her place, which is beneath a power that is above her. By telling Penyin that "this is beyond us" (Act One, Scene Two), she not only confirms Kwamena's imagery that locates her within the domestic sphere but also affirms her unwillingness to transgress or unsettle the normative spatial distinctions. Throughout the play, similar animal images are used in reference to Kakra, all pointing to her passivity in the face of Penyin's quest to fulfil a duty to their family. After watching her responses to the Executioner, Appiah describes Kakra as one who is "... like a heifer for the slaughter" (Act One, Scene Three). While this appears to show her innocence in the crime, it also reflects an important aspect of her personality, namely passivity and indifference. It's no surprise that the Executioner refers to her as a "little puppy," implying a weakling. Panyin puts Kakra's refusal to support her in the following ways:

I thought I could bend you, *green sapling*, little did I know there is *dry wood* behind the *green bark*. Stay, stay and wait for life. Wait for the rain....You won't help me. It is fear isn't it? Your face betrays a head full of unspeakable fears." (Act One, Scene Two; our emphasis).

Penyin's reference to her sister as a dry wood behind a green bark suggests that, contrary to her earlier view of her as her twin and therefore united in thought and action, Kakra proves otherwise. She recognizes that her sister's inactions emanate from fear; fear of going against established authority and the law. She is quick to notice that her sister's words lack agency, hence her use of the word "dry." Dry is Penyin's way of describing Kakra as a character who lacks possibility because, as a dry wood, she signifies the exhaustion of possibility or alternative way of being and action. Hence, not only do Kakra's words lack action, she also lacks courage in the struggle against totalitarian or hegemonic norms. In fact, the Executioner who is placed in charge of Ansah's body goes as far as to label Kakra "little puppy" (Act 1, Scene 3), echoing the notion of domestication. Kakra therefore emerges as Yankah's symbol of servitude, continuity of subjugation, and disavowal of agency within a hegemonic masculine socio-political and ethical context. Interestingly, this domestication in Yankah's play finds a parallel in the Athenian system of

governance. An exploration of domestication within the Athenian polis will therefore strengthen our argument.

Domestication within the Polis

The place of men and women in the Athenian political system has been highlighted by Saxonhouse (1980) According to Saxonhouse (1980), “in the life of classical Greece the *polites*, initially a member of the family, finds his fulfillment in the life of the community” (p. 65). This is because the community is male-dominated. The polis is therefore not only the means by which governance is established; it is also a way of recognition of the individual. It is the foundation of identity and an indirect [re]presentation of the individuals’ psychosocial and religious makeup. But to what extent is domestication embodied within the Athenian system of the polis? To raise this question is to further interrogate the structure of the polis itself because therein lies a system of education that creates its civic space. According to Davies (1977), the polis consists of “citizens”. However, the Athenian notion of citizen had a rather specific definition as it referred to “those who were male; were sons of a citizen father; were born from a woman who was pledged and had been accepted as part of the father’s phatry and deme” (p. 105). To be a citizen came with the privilege of owning property and assuming a State office (Davies, p. 105). Van de Vliet (2008) further categorizes the State in these words:

The [homologue] of ‘extended kinship relations’ in the polis is the *oikos*, the ‘house’ or ‘household’ of the citizen, the (landed) possessions on which he subsists, including his farm animals and slaves, and the others who belong to it, his relatives with whom he lives and who are dependent on him and his *oikos*—his wife and children, and occasionally a sibling or old father (p. 198)

The notion of domestication is broached in the above quotation. Within the polis, two broad categories of individuals emerge: the citizen and his ‘extended kinship relations’ (a categorization which creates a domestic empire within the state); the recognized and that which comes into recognition by reason of affiliation with the recognized. This separation of citizens into citizens, women, and slaves not only creates a class distinction, but also creates a society where women, children, and slaves become subservient to the citizens. Within the confines of the polis, therefore, there exist assigned roles that place

restrictions on the Other, those who must become signified by relating to the signifier.

To be located in the domestic sphere or *oikos* is not only to be within the confines of the polis, but to be subservient to the citizen; to accept this as the status quo and to relate as such. As Saxonhouse (1993) makes clear, the polis was "an arena for action among equals in a realm of freedom, transforming man from a laboring animal to a human being giving expression to his individuality" (p. 488). In other words, action and agency, properly understood, take place in the polis. Just as a domesticated kitten is at the master's beck and call, the woman and slave must submit to the citizen. By employing the domestic kitten metaphor, therefore, Kwamena not only describes Kakra's cowardice in submitting to the existing norm; he also portrays her as one who has no voice but can only "purr." In choosing not to defy King Asem's edict, Kakra has taken the path of inaction and forfeited the possibility of giving expression to her individuality. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ismene puts the situation in its proper context as follows:

If we violate the laws and override
The fixed decree of the throne, its power-
We must be sensible. Remember we are women,
We are not born to contend with men. Then too,
Were underlings, ruled by much stronger hands?
So we must submit in this, and things still worse (p. 70).

In *Dear Blood*, Kakra's response to Penyin's call to "Attempt what no one will dare" is simply: "But my sister, this is beyond us" (Act One, Scene Two). Kakra not only states her stance; she also shows herself as one who is but an insignificant in the organization of the polis and therefore not only must she submit, but also accept her fate as one born not, according to Ismene, "to contend with men". By telling her sister that "this is beyond us", she implies that they act within their respective roles as women and accept the status quo. In other words, Kakra is suggesting that one can be a law abiding citizen only by acting rationally, adhering to the existing codes of conduct within an established community or society. She paints a picture of her servitude in two ways; by showing that not only must she submit by virtue of her gender as a woman, but also by being an underling; a child who is supposed to be taught the differences between right and wrong. She rightfully justifies Kwamena's deployment of the purring kitten imagery, a state which worsens their plight and makes the situation quite pathetic. To her, not only is she governed, she is a subject; grounded in servitude to things even worse; a submission that comes with the recognition that she is but a woman; one without voice in the order

and nature of the public space. To go contrary to this norm is to override the laws; the laws that create the existing structure that upholds the Emukura and to unleash anarchy, thereby becoming a wild and uncivilized woman who is not fit to associate within the confines of Emukura. This description is similar to Apostle John's vision of the exiled or the condemned outside the gates of the New Jerusalem : "outside the city are the dogs - the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderer, the idol worshippers, and all who love to live a lie" (Revelation 22:15 N.L.V). Kakra therefore submits to the gendered roles assigned to her; "a social sphere which is private, particular and weak; dependent upon the protection which the polis dominated by the males can provide" (Saxonhouse 1980, p. 65). The next section analyzes Penyin's character within the context of animal imagery.

Penyin: A Quest for Voice and Agency

Penyin, the older of the twin sisters, presents a stark contrast to her sister Kakra. She is Yankah's revolutionary figure of women's emancipation. As a result, she is animalized as wild; a "panther" who disturbs the existing norm by contesting the silence that prevails in Emukura. She represents a line of flight or exit from bondage and, therefore, her defiance constitutes an act of decolonization; a decolonization that emerges from "engaging in epistemic disobedience" which in turn "results in civil disobedience and freedom" (Tonelli 2020; Asempasah 2020). Her most fitting description in *Dear Blood* is provided by the Executioner, who is placed in charge of Ansah's corpse. In the process of performing her brother's burial rites, she is caught by the Executioner, who moves stealthily towards Penyin like "a hunter stalking her prey". He describes her actions in the following proverbs:

Executioner: "The *green mamba* thinks its hiding in the grass. But it forgets, it's longer than the leaves. *The chicken* that tries to swallow *a mother earthworm* will end up with its victim in the soil. Is it not complicity that throws the river and the fish together against the rock" (Act 1, Scene 3)

Again, the animal imagery embedded in these metaphors is obvious. The executioner describes Penyin's actions as naive and an act of rebellion. He tries to justify this with proverbs implying that Penyin attempted to perform the burial rites in secret by pouring libation near the pile of leaves covering Ansah's mortal remains. By deploying this animal imagery, he claims that

nothing can be hidden from him, who has been placed to watch over the corpse.

The rhetorical function of the proverbs and animal imagery, however, goes beyond the simple framing of his vigilance and diligence. The proverbs foreground the impossibility of escaping the powerful arm of the law and, by extension, foreshadow Penyin's doomed fate. In other words, the proverbs and animal imagery describe the power of the law symbolized by Asem, a patriarchal figure of domination and oppression. By ascribing the images of the "mamba" and "a chicken that tries to swallow mother earthworm fish" to Penyin, not only does the Executioner recognize her actions as deadly [venomous] and therefore a threat to the law and society, but as one who thinks differently from her sister, a little puppy. His usage of these animal images again echoes Kwamena's "panther" imagery or metaphor. Both men describe the nature of the older daughter of their former king, Adinka, using animal imagery.

Despite these descriptions, the Executioner knows that Penyin's wild nature will be inevitably tamed by the law, since no citizen is above the decree set up by Asem. In so doing, not only does he acknowledge the power of the law but also acknowledges patriarchy's dominance over the women of Emukura. Just as the mamba cannot hide because it's longer than the leaves, and just as the chicken that attempts to devour the mother earthworm is doomed to be a victim, so will Penyin, despite her wild and uncouth behavior, be subdued by Asem in the long run. It is important to note that when King Asem makes his first appearance in Act Two, Scene One, the praise singer indirectly animalizes his power in the following way:

You never trace roaring to the antelope
The angry bull may hoof up sands
But can it stand the earth in a fight?
Let him ask the *pig* who thought
He could man the earth
With his curly snout; if he could,
Where would he stand to rule it?
Nana Asem, Namkese...breew...breew

In this quotation, it is clear that King Asem is unfazed by rebellion or transgressive behaviors from opponents like Penyin, who are characterized as weak. They are doomed to fail just like "the angry bull" and "the pig." In fact, like "the antelope," they are not biologically and socio-culturally capable of roaring.

All of this, then, creates pity and fear as it foreshadows the clash between Penyin and Asem, whose name, placed within the Akan epistemological context, signifies trouble. Asem means trouble, a diabolical challenge or even a conundrum. And as *Dear Blood* shows, it is the law itself that eventually emerges as a pathological challenge that must be confronted. Part of Penyin's initial naivety, therefore, is her failure to properly frame her defiance as a confrontation with the law. This is clarified in her dialogue with the Executioner at the site where she performs the burial rites for her brother:

Penyin: "What have I stolen?"

Executioner: The Law. You've stolen a march on the law".

(Act One Scene Three).

Penyin: What Law?

In her confrontation with the law, Penyin comes to the realization that the law is founded on violence; it authorizes what is acceptable, intelligible, visible, and invisible. More importantly, Penyin also realizes that beyond, to borrow Butler's (2004) felicitous phrase, the "differential allocation of grievability" (p. 37), the law also defines what is human and animal. This explains why the Executioner, an agent of the law, calls Penyin "a stubborn goat" (Act One, Scene Three). In her encounter with King Asem, who embodies the Law, the King describes Penyin as "a viper," "an insolent cow," "a crawling viper," and "a foolish cockroach" (Act Two, Scene One). The imagery of the "viper" signals rebellion and therefore a threat to what Derrida (1992), in a different context, calls the "mystical foundations of authority" (p.11–12). The snake appears in several cultural representations of evil or the devil as a symbol of stealth, deceit, treachery, betrayal, and backstabbing. For example, the devil is described in the Judeo-Christian religion as the "ancient serpent" in Revelation 12:15 and in Genesis 3:15 as the sly creature who induced Eve into disobedience. By referring to Penyin as a "viper", Asem frames her defiance as a repetition of the rebellion initiated in the Garden of Eden by the serpent. Only in the case of Emukura, the serpent's place has been taken over by Penyin. For Asem, just as the serpent introduced sin into the world by challenging the Divine edict, so does Penyin's transgression of his edict constitute a challenge to the social order of Emukura.

From the perspective of the law, all of the above animal images position Penyin as reckless, rebellious, and outside of the law. This in itself is not surprising because the analysis has shown that subjects in the domestic sphere always already occupy the category of "bare life", and are therefore excluded from the polis, or the political sphere. "Bare life, according to Agamben (1998), designates human life that is excluded from politics yet exposed to

sovereign". As we have shown in our analysis above, Penyin and Kakra represent "bare life" not because they are human but because they are women and occupy a sphere that is below the polis. The tragedy for Penyin is that by defying the law, she is transformed from the category of "bare life" into a dangerous or venomous animal that must be killed in order to guarantee social harmony. Penyin is fighting against the animalization of women as a result of their exclusion from politics. This is clearly illustrated in Penyin's dialogue with the three women of Emukura.

First Woman: I am sorry, Penyin. But why did you do it?

Penyin: You might as well ask the caged bird why it struggles to escape. Are you women blind? Can't you see the daily smear of shame? On your womanly dignity? Are you insensitive? Everything ends, life, food, drink everything...even dreams end; Must our nightmare continue even in our wakefulness? Tomorrow, Penyin must die; I go to the grave because I would not be anybody's doormat. Because I dare to be other than woman

First Woman: In that case you have been too bold. Penyin, too bold. It is not for us to fight against the canons.

Penyin: Canons! Who built them? Was is it not the same selfish grandfathers, fathers, husbands and big brothers? Would a leopard ever build a house to love an antelope in? (Act Two, Scene One).

The above exchange encapsulates the driving force behind Penyin's defiance of the law. Penyin positions herself as a radical figure of emancipation who views the normative position of women in Emukura as caged birds. For Penyin, freedom lies in seeing the law as fundamentally patriarchal and violent. Therefore, to reconfigure society, the leopard and the antelope must rethink the very structure of social organization in terms of dwelling. For Penyin, a new sociality should be founded on learning to build a house that is radically different from the existing differential allocation of recognition, agency, voice, and vulnerability. Asem recognizes the danger that Penyin's emancipatory actions and rhetoric pose to the existing order of things. Hence, his reference to Penyin as an "insolent cow," an animal imagery that not only signals disobedience but also Penyin's outright rejection of the domestication that traditional society confers on the women of Emukura. Through this animal imagery, Asem frames Penyin's defiance as an attempt to disrupt the hegemonic structure of society. Just as an insolent cow that runs riot must be

returned to domesticity, so Penyin's insolence must be forcibly curtailed by the law.

At this stage, we must wonder in what way Panyin's disobedient or untamed actions and rhetoric constitute a form of radical agency and voice. To answer this question, we must pay attention to Asem's attitude and behavior towards the women, and Penyin in particular. Ansah's attitude towards women of Emukura recalls characters like Eugene Achike in Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) and Osey and Akobi in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1992), who also display contempt and disregard for women as partners in the decision-making process. *Dear Blood* does not only show Ansah as a strict, legalistic ruler within a time-bound ethical space, but also as a patriarchal figure who will not tolerate any insolence from women. As he tells the women, "See what we do to her and learn not to play with gunpowder" (Act Two, Scene One). By his choice of the word "gunpowder" Asem is drawing on a notion of domestication popular in traditional Ghanaian society. Specifically, he is referencing a traditional proverb that admonishes women to conform to their assigned places and roles. Actually, the above warning is an indirect reference to the Akan proverb "obaa ton nyadowa na onton atuduro" which translates as a "woman sells garden eggs and not gunpowder" (Diabah and Ampofo, 2014). According to Diabah and Ampofo (2014), this proverb reveals that it is "traditionally unacceptable for a woman to sell gunpowder," which is an "image of war; a stereotypically masculine arena" (p. 20). The underlying message of this proverb, therefore, is for "women not to rub shoulders with men, but rather stick to their socio-culturally assigned roles and behaviors" (p. 20). In other words, the responsible woman is the one who knows her place. By turning to look at the women, Asem uses this gesture as a warning that women should not meddle in the affairs of the state. King Asem suggests that the socio-culturally intelligent woman is the one who knows her place.

By not just defying the edict but, more importantly, owning up to the crime, articulating an alternative perspective, and challenging the subservient position of women in open court, Penyin succeeds in enacting a radical agency and voice. That this has a revolutionary effect on the women of Emukura is indicated towards the end of the play, when the women who initially accused Penyin of being "too bold" are ready after her execution to challenge the patriarchal attempts to silence them.

Elder: Ha! Woman I believe you know whom you're talking to. You call me blind?

First Woman: I will call blind several times over, even if it costs me my neck. Can't you see the gods disapprove of the king's ruling against Penyin?

Elder: That is not for you to decide, woman. And I'd rather you shut up!

Second Woman: Shut up indeed! You keep going on "woman...woman". Yes. Women have no tongues ...no voices. Penyin found her voice, and what he do to her? Go on ... "woman" us. Only Asem rules. We have found our voices too, and we tend to use them. (Act Three, Scene Two).

This illustrates Penyin's radical agency manifested through the act of introducing her voice into the public sphere. Butler's (2000) insightful assertion that Antigone "speaks and speaks in public, precisely when she ought to be sequestered in the private domain" (p. 4) aptly applies to Penyin and describes her radical agency. It is this refusal to be sequestered in the private realm that eventually infects the women of Emukura. From the declaration by the women, it is obvious that Emukura will never be the same, especially if we remember that "Emukura" literally means "the village of the dumb or mute." Beyond the literal, however, as the activities of King Asem and the law show, "Emukura" refers to a city-state whose socio-political ideology is conformism. The transformation of the women is actually the most radical change in the play. They have progressed from fear, indifference, and acceptance of their oppression, for which Penyin describes them as "blind," to exhibiting Penyin's revolutionary quest for "womanly dignity"; they have refused to be "anybody's doormat" and daring "to be other than a woman" (Act Two, scene One). Herein lies the emancipatory effect of Penyin's agency, and herein also lies her portrayal by Yankah as a wild female. Although she is a woman (from a feline family in terms of the animal imagery), she refuses to be domesticated like her sister and the fellow women (kittens). She accepts her fate not because of death, but because she refuses to follow the beaten path of subservience, humiliation, and conformism. It is not a wonder then that Asem refers to her as a "stubborn louse" (Act Two, Scene One). In *Dear Blood*, Penyin emerges as the heroine who champions the cause of rebuttal through speaking for a gender that has no voice in the public arena and she does so in a bold, open manner.

So far analysis has focused on animal imagery in relation to Penyin and Kakra. However, it would be wrong to conclude that animal imagery in *Dear Blood* relates to only the twins. In fact, beyond referring to Penyin as a "foolish cockroach," an insect that is detested in homes because it is a carrier of pathogens that endanger human health, Asem also animalizes the law in order to reiterate the violence or ruthlessness of the law. As he tells Penyin, "Like the foolish cockroach, you have filliped the talons of the hen, and now *the sharp*

beak of the law must strike. You will be sent to the execution hut." (Act Two, Scene One; our emphasis). Here, Asem frames the law as an animal (a bird) too, but one with a "sharp beak" that can trample or kill lesser animals like Penyin who transgress the norm.

Conclusion

Yankah's greatest achievement in *Dear Blood* is that he makes animal imagery or animality integral to characterization, the articulation of difference, and the quest for an egalitarian community. Specifically, animal imagery is deployed in *Dear Blood* for three crucial purposes: to establish a contrast between Penyin and Kakra in terms of agency, voice, and spatial location; to indicate how the law defines its insolent or unruly subjects; and to describe the authority of the law. Animal imagery is generally embedded in proverbs through metaphors and similes. Precisely because the animal imageries are located in traditional African proverbs, the point can be made that Yankah deftly indigenizes *Dear Blood* by incorporating proverbs as traditional communicative and rhetorical acts. While this is true, it would be more rewarding, as we have shown, to focus on how the animal imagery inscribed in the proverbs generates meaning. If we take seriously Thumiger's (2014) contention that animality or the use of animal imagery in Greek tragedies "objectifies the human" and therefore functions as "an instrument that disregards inwardness and psychologism" (p. 85) seriously, then this paper has shown that Yankah's play departs from this Greek tradition by making animal imagery integral to the actions and ethical choices of human characters. In other words, in *Dear Blood*, animal imagery or animalization is the key to understanding the inwardness and psychologism of Penyin and Kakra. Nonetheless, our findings confirm Thumiger's assertion that animal imagery is commonly conveyed through metaphors and similes. Furthermore, the paper shows that animal imagery in *Dear Blood* draws on two distinct categories of animals: wild and domestic. Penyin, who defies the law and articulates an alternative world, is associated with wild animals, while Kakra, who subordinates herself to the norm, is associated with domesticated animals. *Dear Blood* seems to suggest that women who want to "dare to be other than woman" must become wild animals. Therein lies the road to reconfiguring society.

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