

ASEMKA

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OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS
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ASEMKA: EDITORIAL

The Number 11(1) June 2021 Edition of *ASEMKA, The Bilingual Literary Journal of the University of Cape Coast* contains seven (7) papers centred on diverse areas of teaching and research in the Humanities, spanning between themes in Literature and Religion. This Edition contains only one (1) manuscript in French. The remaining six (6) are in English. The papers span between thematic areas in Literature and Religious Studies. The contributors are from Ghana and Nigeria. These papers were taken through rigorous blind peer-review processes and painstaking editorial work.

First Section

Britwum, A. G.'s paper titled, "Mariama Bâ/Ramatoulaye en un combat douteux dans Une si longue lettre », ...

Second Section

*Nyatuame, P. N.'s paper titled "An ecocritical reading of Victor Yankah's **The Pretty Trees of Gakwana and Sikaman**" examines two plays of Victor Yankah concepts within analytical framework of ecocriticism. It is a critical assessment of Yankah's ecodrama in the light of ecocriticism, a field of literary theory and criticism. It draws on the broader concepts and discourses of ecocriticism and demonstrates how the playwright shares a symbiotic relationship which has become a significant feature of the selected plays. This is to emphasise Yankah's view and preoccupations about the mutual relationship between the human other and nature - the natural world of environment with the view to prove the playwright's concern about the interference of human beings into the world of nature. A situation which adversely results in the disruption of the symbiotic (human-nature) relationship. The significance of the paper lends credence to ways in which Yankah provokes environmental debate and a rethinking in African playwrights concerning environmental issues to raise awareness and inspire environmental consciousness and ecological sustainability among people in Africa, Ghana in particular. The findings reveal both the epistemic and retributive forces of nature as well as raising concerns about the environment, ecological consciousness in advocating for ecological sustainability in modern African theatre and dramatic literature scholarship. The paper offers insight into and expand the frontiers of the discourse of ecocriticism in the global south and adds to the relatively new and developing interest in environmental*

discourses on the African continent and what they reveal about African environmental consciousness and ecological dimensions.

Amissab-Arthur, H. W.'s paper, "**Examining mothering: Race and abjection in Wilson's *Our Nig* and Walker's *The Color Purple***" analyses the concept race and abjection in African-American women's writings. It specifically emphasizes the idea of mothering during the freedom epoch of the African Americans after slavery. The focus is on mother characters in the novels of Wilson and Walker. The paper borders on some thematic components which come together in unravelling the identities of both the mother characters and their children when faced with issues of race and abjection.

Awojobi, P. O.'s paper, "**The Ministry of Moses Orimolade and the prophetic tradition of Israel: An ecclesio-historical study**", examines the ministry of Moses Orimolade and the prophetic tradition of Israel from an ecclesio-historical perspective. The thrust of his paper is to investigate the origin, and the place of ecstatic prophecy in ancient Israel and its reflections in Moses Orimolade's prophetic ministry in Nigeria. Historical method was used for the research. It uses historicity and ecclesiology as conceptual framework to contend that Israel's prophetic tradition started before Israel settled in Canaan where she interacted with other nations. While it cannot be disputed that Israel must have been influenced by the culture of its neighbours, there were some elements in the religion that were peculiar to Israel. The study concludes that Israelite prophetic heritage cannot be compared with the divination in ancient Near East. There exist a parallel between ecstatic prophetic ministry in ancient Israel and Moses Orimolade prophetic ministry in Nigeria. The paper recommends that contemporary Prophets in Nigeria and beyond must strive to fulfil divine mandate received by them at all cost.

Ofei, D. & Oppong Adjei, D.'s paper titled, "**Sexual Identities in Africa: A Queer Reading of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees***" analyses queer sexual identities in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*. It draws on the broader concept of queer analysis and demonstrates how *Under the Udala Trees* uses its narrative to conceive space and language whose midpoint encompasses literary innovations and the significance of some experiences of queer individuals within an African setting. Ultimately, instead of simply emphasizing these sexualities as alternative solutions in adverse conditions to some individuals who cannot help being the way they are, the paper unravels the literary merits such as shock, characterization and thematic values of queer sexualities in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*.

Sam, C. A. & Nkansah, S. K's paper, "**Evidences of our Inhumanity: Representations of Evil and the Quest for Postcolonial Healing in Tadjó's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda***", explores the literary representations of evil in relation to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda while simultaneously looking at therapeutic strategies in healing the wounds of the past as depicted in Veronique Tadjó's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the heart of Rwanda* using Kant's conceptions of evil and postcolonial literary theory. The results of the analysis is that hatred, otherness, genocide and remembrance constitute conversations for understanding travel writings and historical violence.

Inusah, A-R.'s paper, "**Lundaa as speech surrogate of Dagbamba**" examines surrogate language in Dagbani, a Mabia language spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana. The paper pays attention to its functions and its transformation from traditional to the contemporary sociocultural issues. Premised on participant-observation, the paper supports the multi-toned language represented on a pressure drum capable of many pitches. It attests that the *lundaa* 'pressure drum' is a speech surrogate used among Dagbani speakers. The *lundaa* has a wide distribution of functions but this paper is focused on the core functions of drum language that include *molo* 'announcement', *salima* 'Panegyric', *ginguani* 'invocation' and *naha* 'proverbs' as examples of drum literature and transformation. The paper suggests that the communication potential of the *lundaa* rhythms and its interpretation leads to an understanding of the sociocultural life of the people.

An ecocritical reading of Victor Yankah's *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana and Sikaman*

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Abstract

The increasing environmental concerns of the 20th and 21st centuries have given rise to the term ecocriticism, a field of literary theory and criticism. In this paper, we examined two plays of Victor Yankah using some concepts from ecocriticism as an analytical framework. The paper is premised on the basis that the playwright shares a symbiotic relationship which has become a significant feature of the selected plays. Drawing from the eco-critical theory of ecocriticism and using two of his nature plays: *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman*, we intend to demonstrate Yankah's view and preoccupations about the mutual relationship between the human other and nature (the non-human other)-the natural world of environment with the view to prove the playwright's concern about the interference of human beings into the world of nature. This situation adversely results in the disruption of the symbiotic (human-nature) relationship. Yankah has presented both the epistemic and retributive forces of nature as well as raised concerns about the environment, ecological consciousness in advocating for ecological sustainability in modern African theatre and dramatic literature scholarship. Thus, the reading of Victor Yankah's selected plays adds to the relatively new and developing interest in environmental discourses on the African continent. To the extent that intrinsic features of nature are exhibited in his selected plays, we argue that Yankah provokes environmental debate and a rethinking in African playwrights concerning environmental issues to raise awareness and inspire environmental consciousness and ecological sustainability among people in Africa, and Ghana in particular.

Keywords: ecocriticism; ecodrama; environment; human other; nature.

Introduction

The increasing environmental concerns of the 20th and 21st centuries have given rise to the term ecocriticism, a field of literary theory and criticism. In this paper, we examined two plays of Victor Yankah using some concepts from ecocriticism as an analytical lens. The paper is premised on the basis that the playwright shares a symbiotic relationship which has become a significant feature of the selected plays. Drawing from the eco-critical theory of ecocriticism and using 2 of his nature plays: *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman*, we intend to demonstrate Yankah's view and preoccupations about the mutual relationship between the human other and nature (the non-human other)-the natural world of environment with the view to prove the playwright's concern about the interference of human beings into the world of nature. A situation which adversely results in the disruption of the symbiotic (human-nature) relationship.

Therefore, in this paper, we glean a wider scope to situate the current study in both theoretical and empirical contexts to demonstrate evidence of the awareness of existing literature on the subject. However, in the current state of the literature in Ghana, there is almost no study devoted to ecodrama, particularly on the Ghanaian experiences of human-nature relationship. The paper is thus an attempt to broaden the scope of ecocriticism and relate it the Ghanaian text and its context. It is relevant to the ongoing discussion on the depletion of the environment and its effect on human life. Similar to the Romantics, the paper illustrates and draws attention to environmental concerns and issues to potently reflect on the human-nature synergy to expand the frontiers of the literature on this new and developing area of ecocriticism and environmental sustainability.

The rest of the paper is structured into various segments. Firstly, we present the background and summarise the conceptual and empirical review to contextualise the study. In the second section, we introduce the methodological procedures to justify the relevance of using interpretivism to explore literary criticism through the lens of the theory of ecocriticism on a Ghanaian text – ecodrama in the light of human-nature synergy and the effects on humans. In this section, we also justify my reasons for selecting two of Victor Yankah's plays, ecodrama, for interpretation in an ecocritical context. Though we admit the limitations of this review in relying heavily on unpublished play texts which are not easily accessible, the paper, still, provides insight into contemporary drama practices and Ghanaian texts in the global south, particularly ecodrama and their criticism in a developing nation such as Ghana. In the final segment, we present the discussions from the literary analysis to inform conclusions derived.

Therefore, we sought to explore the nonhuman presence in the plays of Victor Yankah in line with Jane Bennett's theory on nonhuman agency to defend the thesis that Victor Yankah (like a few other African playwrights) represents nature in ways that call for a broader theorisation on nonhuman agency in African theatre and literature in general and Ghanaian plays in particular. I also examined the implications of anthropocentrism for the Ghanaian society, of this abdication of ecocriticism in contemporary Ghanaian theatre plays. This, we did through exploitation of positive cultural forms like ecodrama to underscore the epistemic and retributive voices or manifestations of nature. To achieve this, the paper sought answers to the following questions:

- a) How is the nonhuman agency (nature) scripted in Yankah's plays?
- b) In what ways and to what effect is ecosecurity seeping into contemporary Ghanaian theatre and literary culture?

Art and the natural environment symbiosis

The discourse on art and the natural environment relationship cannot be overemphasised in research and scholarship since the concepts are symbiotic in nature; hence, the need to recognise the realistic interface between them, particularly the impact of one over the other.

As a socio-cultural product, art has a connection with the natural environment. Suffice it to say that the burgeoning interest of researchers in the domain of ecocriticism offers provision to the emerging perspectives on such assessments of the human and the non-human "others" on each other.

Slymaker (2001), in his observation about African literary practice and Ecocriticism, notes that: "The African echo of global green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint... [even though there] is no lack of writing in Africa that might fall under the rubric of nature writing" (p.132). He further observes that literary discourse on "the rubrics of nature writing" in the African context is still "faint", especially in relation to critical paradigms on nonhuman representation. It goes without saying that African ecocriticism is mainly Anthropocentric. Caminero-Santangelo (2014) in his *Different Shades of Green*, notes that: "In terms of environmental representation, [African] writers are concerned with lived environments, the social implications of environmental change... [African] writers do not focus on nature in a supposedly pure state and its preservation" (p. 17). Consequently, African ecocriticism is preoccupied with "the impact of the environment on the human rather than the other way around" (Hugan & Tiffin, 2010, p.16). This anthropocentric critical focus raises questions regarding the impact of human

activities on the African environment which is evident in the works of some African (Ghanaian) playwrights such as Victor Yankah. Ecocriticism is thus “concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how the relationships between humans and their physical world are reflected in literature” (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014, p. 1). This is to provoke the growing awareness of environmental issues (Habeeb & Habeeb, 2012).

As, perhaps, one of the most recent works on African ecocriticism, Iheka (2017) equally notes the anthropocentrism in African ecocriticism. He observes that, “the exciting work being done in African environmental scholarship ... brilliantly articulates the impacts of ecological degradation on humans in the narratives they examine. However, their socio-environmental perspective does not take sufficient cognizance of the nonhumans in these environments...” (p. 2).

Globally, the earth’s natural environments have been converted, perhaps, mainly because of ignorance of what is being lost and a desire for short-term financial gain. Regardless of the plethora of international fora held to address concerns of, say, sustainable development goals, no clear solutions appear forthcoming to resolve the global dilemma on the security of the planet’s natural ecosystems. Little wonder contemporary Ghana is currently under the affliction of environmental insecurity largely due to water related economic activities for survival and development (Owusu-Boateng & Kumi-Aboagye, 2013). This has culminated in ecosystem (water related and climate change) hazards; water insecurity (pollution), perennial flooding, and poor sanitation, among others (Boadi & Kuitunen, 2002; Danquah, 2010; Gyau-Boakye & Biney, 2002; Owusu-Boateng & Kumi-Aboagye, 2013). Illegal small scale mining (*galamsey*), in particular, has resulted in heavy pollution of rivers and ponds which have been the main sources of drinking water for inhabitants over the years. Although the dangers of *galamsey*, particularly, have been explicitly communicated in extant literature (Owusu-Boateng & Kumi-Aboagye, 2013) and strict policies have been put in place by the government to prosecute offenders in Ghana, the practice still persists (Owusu-Boateng & Kumi-Aboagye, 2013). As noted earlier, Hukan and Tiffin (2010) reveal the largely anthropocentric focus of African ecocriticism, veering attention from the impact of human activities on the environment. However, Glotfelty (1996) observes that since the current environmental problems are largely of human interference - our own making and thus a by-product of culture, there is the need to combat emerging cultural problems – ecological insecurity with positive culture. Since nature can be conceptualised as a narrative construct, it can equally be constructed through scientific methods and indigenous (cultural) forms like the performing arts in general, and theatre (plays), in particular.

Ecocriticism, ‘Ecodrama’ and Ghanaian literature

Ecocriticism as a literary theory is relatively new and a developing area of research. It has been developing rapidly since the 1990s, focusing mainly on the study of the relationship between humans and the natural world (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014). It has evolved out of many traditional approaches to literature and it is interdisciplinary in nature. The plays in question are thus viewed in terms of place or the environment. The concept of ecocriticism as used in this study have been adapted from other fields such as ecology and eco-philosophy, which are directly linked to literature under the umbrella term of ecocriticism. These concepts are ecosystem, interrelationship and ecological consciousness (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014). Interrelationship thus is among the most basic of ecocriticism tenets as ecocriticism takes as its subject the interrelationship between humans and nature.

The terminology ‘ecodrama’ as used by Victor Yankah to describe some of his plays could be explained as relating to dramatic literature, particularly play texts with ecocritical intent. In other words, ecodrama describes ecological or environmental play texts to illustrate literary and artistic concerns for environmental or ecological issues and sustainability. In the context of literary theatre, ‘ecodrama’ may be synonymously and or interchangeably used with ‘ecotheatre’ to reflect dramatic literature (play texts) primarily concerned with environmental issues and themes.

Yet, ironically, a survey of the current ubiquitous stage plays in Ghana reveals the ecocritical deficit, paucity of plays on ecological/environmental themes. Concerns of most theatre productions are domestic dramas, social themes, and spiritualism. A look at Ghanaian classical theatre tradition reveals quasi-ecological/environmental Ghanaian theatre forms in the likes of two of Victor Yankah’s unpublished plays: *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman*, albeit on experimental ecodrama/theatre basis.

It would appear that the superabundant artistic energy that characterises Ghanaian theatre practice and many a theatre performance in Ghana do not find equal expression in ecocriticism. Playwrights appear to be more interested in social, domestic and romantic dramas, and the few plays that appear to announce any ecocritical intent quickly slip into the social mode. So, the paper problematises the anthropocentric approach to African (Ghanaian) ecocriticism and proceeds from a couple of premises. One, much remains to be said about the “environmental representation” of playwrights like Victor Yankah whose deployment of the nonhuman biota manifests biocentric preoccupation. Also, in some texts that carry human concerns through nature metaphors and allegories, we can find a subtext of biocentric concerns that warrants ecocritical enquiry that privileges the nonhuman. The

intent is to argue for the need of an alternative paradigm – ‘ecodrama’, to chart a unified solution to articulate the nonhuman agency and how it could be represented in creative performances and dramatic literature to support the course of an enabling environment towards the repositioning of the value of our natural environment for the benefit of mankind.

Yankah could basically be described as a theatre scholar and playwright who finds expression in African treasures of Ghanaian culture to write plays which reflect his concerns about the African world and this is proven in the characters and themes of his plays. His appreciation of nature from an aesthetic and ecological perspectives is illustrative of his emotional connection with the African landscape. Two of his experimental unpublished plays: *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman* appear eco-critically inclined and so have been sampled for analysis in this article. In the selected corpus, Yankah draws attention to nature and the natural environment and also emphasizes the mutual bond shared by the human and non-human “others”, a key element in the discourse of ecocriticism.

Methodology

Drawing on the qualitative method of inquiry, and theories of ecocriticism, the paper situates in literary paradigm, assuming the dimension of literary criticism on the dramatic literature of African (Ghanaian) theatre. Particularly, two of Victor Yankah’s plays are purposively sampled for analysis due to their ecocritical intent. Qualitative content and literary analytical methods are subsequently applied to the selected play texts in the analysis and interpretation for the discussion of the primary texts to inform the conclusions and recommendations derived.

Analysis and Discussion of *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman*

In this section, the selected plays *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* (2017) and *Sikaman* (n.d.) are analysed and discussed based on the principles of literary criticism; play analysis and interpretation guidelines framed by the concepts and theory of ecocriticism. Topical subheadings relating to emerging themes are used to guide the discussion and summary of the plays are also provided. As indicated earlier, the discussion will be guided by following questions:

- a) How is the nonhuman agency (nature) scripted in Yankah’s plays?
- b) In what ways and to what effect is ecosecurity seeping into contemporary Ghanaian theatre and literary culture?

Summary of *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana*

The Pretty Trees of Gakwana is an ecodrama since it basically focuses on environmental issues. The play is structured into 2 movements (acts), with movement 1 sub-divided into 4 steps (scenes), and movement 2 sub-divided into 5 steps (scenes). The plot of movement 1 revolves around Naa Atchoi, the first lady of Gakwana, who goes on a trip with her personal assistant, Esi. In making a stopover, Atchoi inspects the environment along the way and suddenly comes to the realization that the one-time beautiful natural environment and its benefits of eco-friendliness have been lost. As she laments the degradation of the natural green vegetation, mostly due to modern activities of humans in terms of illicit mining, the rest of the actions in Movement 1 raise the following questions: Is the situation out of control? Are we losing the battle, and are politicians committed to the call to duty to confront the situation head on? Thus, the incumbent and opposition political figures are called to debate the way forward, led by a moderator and in the course of an intermission, the plot of the story transitions to pave way for movement 2 which introduces anasesem and or anansegoro, led by the character of Ananse. On one of his usual hunting expeditions, Ananse accidentally steps on two beautiful trees which miraculously later transforms into two pretty ladies, Voice 1, Voice 2, Tree 1 and Tree 2, and subsequently, Mamayi and Mamadze, representative of the natural environment (trees). Before being transformed and personified as human figures and wives of Ananse, Tree 1 and Tree 2 blame mankind for the woes of the natural environment and so negotiate with Ananse to treat them with care and affection, a condition upon which they accept to become Ananse's pretty wives. However, Okyeame, Nana's linguist and spokesperson, out of envy and jealousy, lures Mamayi and Mamadze to become Nana's wives. This awkward situation forces Ananse to challenge Nana for his pretty 2 wives in an open competition at the palace. This leads to a climatic effect which ends on a note of suspense, where 3 alternative endings are offered by Ananse for audiences to choose from in determining the way forward towards ecological sustainability. The play advocates for environmental sustainability by calling for a rethinking, especially behavioural and attitudinal change towards the treatment of our natural environment.

Man (human society) and the environment in *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana*

This play portrays environmental issues ranging from causes of environmental degradation to advocacy for ecological or environmental sustainability.

Evidently, Movement 2, Step 1 portrays nature (trees) personified by two pretty women: Mamadze and Mamayi who happen to be 2 wives of Ananse, the hunter who luckily finds them in the forest during a hunting expedition. The introduction of Voice 1 and Voice 2 (p. 15) (initially trees) representative of nature, the non-human other (agency), who are later gets personified as women characters to engage in affectionate conversations with the lonely and curious hunter, Ananse, the human other (agency) suggests the playwright's attempt to blame woes of nature (the trees), the non-human other on the activities of the human other (mankind). The following conversation extracts between Ananse and Voice 1 and Voice 2 and subsequently Tree 1 and Tree 2 portrays the inflictions of the Anthropocene (the human agency) on the non-human agency (the natural environment):

Voice 1: You spoke to us and made a wish.

Voice 2: Your wish can come true.

Ananse: Really? You can become women?

Voice 2: On one condition only. One condition.

Ananse: Any condition. I'm ready to grant it even before you say it.

Voice 2: Mankind is so destructive and so uncaring. You depend on us for your survival, yet you abuse us and do us harm.

Ananse: Never! I have never done you any harm.

Voice 1: We know that. We know all about you. After all, you come here every day. That's why we are giving you this opportunity to get us into your world.

Ananse: Our world?

Voice 1: Yes, your world. The world of man. We are ready to become your wives on condition that you don't abuse us.

Ananse: Not me. I have never been married before, but I do respect women a lot. I swear by my father's coffin that I will never abuse you if you become my wives.

Voice 2: That you will never call us mere trees? Do you swear?

Tree 1: Now you must give us names.

Ananse: Must I? Okay. You are from trees, and trees give us life. So, I shall call you my mothers. Mama. You are the dark skinned mother, so you are Mamayi. And you are light skinned, so you are Mamadze. (p.16)

Clearly, Ananse's statement above, that "...trees give us life..." (p. 16) signifies Yankah's admission of how guilty the human agency is with regard to

the depletion of the natural environment. Hence the deliberate plea and advocacy for paradigm shift, so humans can embrace acts of ecological sustainability by treating the natural environment with affection as though they are humans in the form of the 2 pretty women (wives) Ananse finds in the forest. In this respect, Voice1, Voice 2, Tree 1 and Tree 2 represent voices of advocacy for environmental sustainability, specifically as they put the blame at the door steps of human. In Movement 2, Step 2, Mamedze and Mamayi (symbolic of the natural environment) unequivocally blames humans (man) for the woes of nature (the earth and natural environment). The conversation extract between Okyeame and Mamayi and Mamadze gives credence to this:

Okyeame:Where do you come from?

Mamadze: We come from nature and everywhere.

Mamayi: We sprung from the soil.

Mamadze: We are children of nature.

Okyeame: Enough! You aren't making sense to me...

Mamayi: We belong with this land, that land and every land.

Okyeame: You are still not making sense. This is our land and I know everyone in it.

Mamayi: your land? We know only one land: the Earth, our land.

Mamayi: Human wisdom partitioned it.

Mamadze: And you fight over it.

Mamayi: And you murder each other for it.

Mamadze: And you destroy it and destroy nature. (p. 18)

From the above extract, it stands to reason that ecocriticism unifies humanity and nature (Kandemiri, 2018). Hence, Yankah's attempt to portray the remarkable relationship between human beings and nature as presented in his plays: *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman*. The paper observes that by reading *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* (2017) as a modern and or contemporary ecodrama, there is ample evidence in terms of the play's accounts at providing a realistic reflection of operations and activities of humans, which deplete the natural environment and by extension adversely affect humans in turn.

The use of the dramatic effect of suspense on a climatic note at the latter stage in Movement 2, Step 5 to offer 3 alternatives by Ananse for audiences to choose from in determining the way forward (solution/remedy) at the end of the play, reveals the playwright's conscious effort to heighten and sustain attention and interest of readers and audiences in order to have a catalytic effect which is necessary to arouse conscientisation and probably trigger processes of behavioural and attitudinal (social) change through

critically thinking and dispassionate reflections. This feature of providing alternative endings to plays is similar to some of the dramatic techniques usually used in the activities of applied theatre, particularly in theatre for development (TfD) communication processes. This is one way Yankah aims to enhance audience participation to provoke open debate among readers and audiences to chart a unified solution together on the emerging environmental issues, particularly environmental degradation and or depletion of the natural environment by people in their efforts to eke out a living. Thus, audiences at a live performance of the play would be challenged to proffer practical and or pragmatic solutions for the way forward as the verdict is theirs to determine.

Also, characters like Atchoi, Dzifa and Yawa represent voices of environmental advocacy. Yankah's way of deliberately crafting feminine characters for purposes of environmental advocacy in the play suggests that the author prefers females to take the lead in the campaign for environmental sustainability in that females tend to be more emotive and vulnerable, requesting affection, love, and sympathy from their male counterparts as to feel loved and secured. This is consistent with the intentions of Voices 1, Voices 1, Tree 1, and Tree 2. Little wonder Voice 1 and Voice 2 demand from Ananse never to abuse them. Like Tree 1 and Tree 2 in the case of Ananse in the play, Yankah is entreating the human agency to have the needed attitudinal and behavioural change towards the natural environment by desisting from abusing it. Ananse's plea to Nana in Step 5 of Movement 2: "Nana, with all respect, they are so delicate and deserve respect and care" (p. 22), suggests a practical and valuable alternative for the way forward in terms of human-nature relationship. This is a strong statement to all humans to treat the natural environment like women, delicately with affection, care and respect. In this sense, it is suggested that feminine characters take the lead as they are more likely to draw attention to and affection for nature.

Summary of *Sikaman*

Sikaman is structured into 3 acts; act 1 with 4 scenes, act 2 with 5 scenes, and act 3 also with 5 scenes. The play recounts the environmental predicament of a traditional Ghanaian society that is only just learning non-traditional values. Sikaman, a traditional village, once blessed with the wealth of natural resources of gold, suddenly suffers from persistent drought and famine resulting in hunger and starvation. The play opens with a prologue from the Narrator, who laments the unbearable plight of famine, drought, hunger and starvation in the land of Sikaman. Stricken with severe drought, famine, hunger and starvation, Arobote, King of Sikaman, must seek remedies to the sudden pathetic predicament of his kingdom and people. Amidst their frustrations, Kubi, son

of Goka, a dignified elder of Sikaman, equally laments the hopeless predicament of his village but lays the blame at the door steps of King Arobote for selling the land to “the strange man to bring his machines to dig into the baked earth for gold”. To deepen the dramatic conflict, the play pitches the younger generation and voices of change, represented by the bravery, courage and innovation of Kubi, against the older unscrupulous generation, symbolical of King Arobote. Determined to find the cause, or the solutions to their predicament, Kubi, gets support from two of his loyal friends, Ali and Anane as they journey to farther lands in the forest in search for solutions to the never ending harmattan, from the Great Shrine of Okuntungbaga. Eventually, the solving of the riddle of the seven palm fruits offers practical and innovative solutions for Kubi to lead in mobilizing the people to dig a canal to link river *Memor* to provide soothing water.

Man (human society) and the environment in *Sikaman*

This section also reflects on the non-human other agency (nature) in Yankah’s *Sikaman*. The hero character, Kubi, is representative of voices of change and or symbolic of the progressive, proactive, pragmatic, and innovative younger generation, with real determination and commitment toward the common/shared/greater good. The play also explores post-colonialism, with focus on humanity pertaining to issues of power, religion, and culture in the traditional community of Sikaman, particularly drawing attention to environmental issues of degradation or depletion of the natural environment for modern industrialized purposes like mining and the aftermath effects of global warming resulting in climate change, drought, famine, hunger and starvation in Sikaman, representative of modern communities suffering from similar environmental crisis, partly due to colonialism and modernity and their associated foreign values and the effects on everyday or ordinary people in most African settings.

In *Sikaman*, Yankah laments the adverse effects of global warming and climate change on the landscape of his once treasured heritage. In act 1, scene 1, the Narrator, in a prologue, relates the following:

There was a time people added sand to their flour to
Give weight to the brown kokonte.
The staple food of our ancestors;
That was in the days of Ananse, you who plough your farms
with
Roaring hoes that carry the farmer. Who would believe
That in spite of these monstrous machines we would

Cry and die of hunger. Oh! Sikaman, land of gold, land of our fathers!
Our greatest heritage! What has become of you?
What is the cause of – that the earth roasts the cassava in its bowels?
What is the cause – that the baked earth dents the digging hoes
That bounce back to hit the bony foreheads. (pp. 2-3)

In the above lines, images illustrative of drought and famine, dry land, hunger, and starvation are portrayed to reflect the plight of the society which is plagued by eco-insecurity, resulting in “the snore of no satisfaction” (p. 3) as “he’ll sell the land to the strange man to bring his machines to dig into the baked hearth for gold.” (p. 4). Clearly, the narrator laments over the effects of global warming and the effects of drought, famine, hunger and starvation since there is shortage of food supplies due the persistence of the dry vegetation caused by the sophisticated machinery used in these modern times of illicit mining which adversely affect the natural environment in the longer period.

The images created in the Narrator’s statement, “the earth roasts the cassava in its bowels” (p. 3), is illustrative of the severe effects of global warming due to human activities which result in global warming and climate changes and conditions. The following extract of conversations shed light on these:

Kubi: Yes, mother, the land is dead.

Ayele: What makes you say so?

Kubi: (*shouting*) Can’t you see it mother, the land is dead! Dead! Dead! (p. 3)

So Kubi’s frustrations and lamentations as expressed in the above extract attest to the issues of land degradation by some unscrupulous inhabitants of Sikaman leading to environmental insecurity and its associated negative effects in the form of drought, famine, hunger and starvation of the people. The land being described as “dead” simply suggests that the natural green vegetation cover and its benefits for farming and cropping have been depleted and lost, denying the people of Sikaman the benefits of environmental friendliness and fertile lands for crops to yield as desired to provide food supplies in abundance for the consumption and sustenance of human lives. Instead, “deaths, losses, weeping” (p. 4), and “...the trees – bare...” (p. 4) have become the predicament of the people of Sikaman as they continue to bear the brunt of the outcomes of ecological insecurity which are cultural products of human activities on the natural environment. In the

process, perhaps, readers and audiences could discern the relevance of Yankah's life in northern Ghana in his familiarity with scarcity in the environment, particularly depicting life in the Sahel in the following lines:

Men, turned skeletons, living skeletons with sunken eyes,
With ribcages bare – cages that can hardly contain
The turbulence within; these are the men of Sikaman...

Unlike in the past, today, we are not oblivious of the causes of global warming. Unequivocally, the causes are known and attributable to human activities that negatively affect our natural environment. The digging of canals from the river *Memor* which flows close to Sikaman to support the making of farms along the river, and also “bring the river to our farms” (p. 13) as suggested by Ali and Kubi, respectively suggest the clear case of human dependence on the natural environment for survival and sustenance. Hence, it is of the essence for humans to have a healthy relationship with nature. Little wonder that Kubi's words in the following extract provides the way forward for the people of Sikaman:

Goka: And what solution did you have?

Kubi: ...We realised we had crossed seven rivers, and that water is an important source of life. Since it is the drought that has caused the famine, irrigating our land with the river *Memor* would solve our problems. (p. 19)

In the above, Kubi's dialogue with the father points to one of the pragmatic benefits humans gain from the natural environment (the non-human agency) - the river, the source of water which is an important source of life.

Thus far, the review has shed light on Yankah's view of nature. Reading Yankah's *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* and *Sikaman* reveals a repeated reference to the world of nature in which the various aspects of nature are fully connected to the human world. The selected plays of this article are fine illustrations in which one can trace the kind of relationship the playwright has developed between the world of human beings and the world of nature. References to the various phenomena of nature abound in his plays such as forest, trees, fruits flowers, and cassava. By such words, insightful aspects of human connection with their environment is established.

The non-human other (nature) has seen visibility in literary circles in recent times. This has been a conscious attempt and strategy to sensitise thoughts and thoughts of playwrights and dramatists. As Shende (2012, p. 22) notes, the epistemic, creative, retributive, destructive, healing and smoothing

dimensions of nature are explicitly brought out by different playwrights to highlight different aspects of their views of the world and its people (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014). Increasingly, literary works devoted to global environmental concerns and issues have found expression in ecocritical contexts. This appears to be reflective of playwright's strategies and techniques to express their thoughts and feelings to sensitise humans about nature.

Furthermore, Yankah's plays provide suitable examples through which we can imbue environmental awareness and inspire ecological consciousness among Ghanaian people. The playwright has succeeded in highlighting the visible and invisible relationship between human world and the world natural environment. Indeed, he has a direct appeal to the core of the field of ecocriticism (Ahmed & Hashim, 2014).

Yankah has presented both the epistemic and retributive forces of nature as well as raising concerns about the environment, ecological consciousness in advocating for ecological sustainability in modern African theatre and dramatic literature scholarship. Thus, the reading of Victor Yankah's selected plays adds to the relatively new and developing interest in environmental discourses on the African continent. To the extent that intrinsic features of nature are exhibited in his selected plays, I argue that Yankah provokes environmental debate and a rethinking in African playwrights concerning environmental issues to raise awareness and inspire environmental consciousness and ecological sustainability in Ghana and Africa.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to analyse the ecocritical insights in the plays of Victor Yankah, by specifically engaging some selected plays rooted in nature and the natural environment of Ghana. Since the paper situates in literary paradigm, it is refreshing to note that the selected play texts reflect the literary ecocritical language of the author, Victor Yankah. Yankah's ecodrama is representative of the reality concerning prevailing environmental issues and ongoing global and national discourses on the depletion of the environment and its effect on human life. Hence the language is literary to augment the ecocritical intent and this gives significance to the primary play texts selected.

Like the Romantics, Yankah's ecodrama illustrates and draws attention to the common maxim that when the last tree dies, the last man dies. Its reflections on the human-nature synergy are potent. Thus, Yankah's ecodrama is a ground breaking literary theatre (play texts) to some extent, bordering on interesting and topical issues of environmental sustainability and adds to a new and developing area and thus has the potential to become a significant contribution to the African (Ghanaian) ecocritical literature in this regard.

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