University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

THE DILEMMA TALE AND THE CONTINUITIES OF AFRICAN ORAL TRADITION IN AUGUST WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON* AND KWAW ANSAH'S *HERITAGE AFRICA*

BY

SAMUEL ATO BENTUM

Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Literature-in-English

2022

VERITAS LUMEN NOBIS

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: ………………………….. Date: …………………………

Name: Samuel Ato Bentum

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Supervisor's Signature:…………………............. Date:….…………………………

Name: Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur (PhD)

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

ABSTRACT

This study explores the dilemma tale as a narrative technique used in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) to examine the meaning of legacy or historical past to the African and the African American. This comparative exploration comes against the backdrop that there has been a search for an alternative narrative style in African-related poetics and the use of dilemma tale as an African oral literary element has been a resourceful option. This way of locating African tradition places it in transition which ultimately engenders a dialogic surrounding the continuities of African tradition. Tradition is explained in this work as the conventions and practices held communally among a particular group of people. Situated within the broader context of orality and dwelling on the dilemma tale as the analytical tool, this study therefore argues that August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah use the dilemma tale as a narrative style in *The Piano Lesson* and *Heritage Africa* respectively, and that this narrative style helps both writers to frame the dialogic surrounding what historical past or legacy means to the African and the African American. The conclusion is that in a complex society like the African and African American societies, historical past has a divergent interpretation. The dilemma tale therefore serves as the narrating tool to narrate this complexity which ultimately helps to redefine the alternative path for these societies to gesture into their future by suggesting a reconnection to the centre—Africa. This study has implications for the comparative study of the intersection between orality, and African and African American studies.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

KEYWORDS

Dilemma tale

Heritage Africa

Legacy

Narrative style

The Piano Lesson

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First gratitude to Atɛ Nyompo. You have done it again, and this time, it is even more glamorous! Like you said, the prophecy is for an appointed time and here, it seamlessly unfolds before me. I am still hopeful for what you have for me again.

My next gratitude goes to Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur (PhD)—my supervisor. *Medaase*, for your time, and contribution towards this work. Madam, I owe you a polished stone! To you, Rogers Asempasah (PhD), where it all began, thank you. When I stop at the crossroad of gratitude to thank God, I shall single you out and sing you a praise song in many languages.

Dr. Daniel Oppong-Adjei, and Dr. Samuel Kwesi Nkansah, Department of English, UCC, I appreciate every single opportunity you have been giving me to better myself. Professors Moussa Traore and Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, I will tell my kindred that our lines crossed. Emmanuel Saboro (PhD), *kobarika*! Mama and Papa Akyea, *Akpe*! Your home saved me from what nearly became a depression.

And to you who makes me live every single day—my Wednesday sheroes: Ekua Tetseba—The soul that housed me as a seed. Your prayers keep me moving; Ekua Essibu—The one we call Auntie Naana. For more than half a decade, you keep showing me love; Akua Boakye—The one we call Auntie Louisa. Thanks for the background support. And to you, Nana Akua Darkowaa—The one I call Onipa Nua. *Menua*, thank you for sharing laughter with me.

Dr. Paapa Otu Beecham. I punctuate this gratitude with you. You are the brother I never had. We are moving to the top to laugh louder!

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

DEDICATION

Menaye. Sesi. Tiyuuniba:

The futures.

I knew you before you were born!

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
KEYWORDS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Background	2
Thesis Statement	9
Research Objectives	10
Research Questions	11
Significance of the Study	11
Delimitation	12
Research Design	12
Data Source	13
Conceptualising Movie as a Literary Text	13
Structure of the Study	17
Conclusion	18
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	19
Introduction	19
Orality and the African American Imaginary	19

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Summary of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) 29

Tracking the Scholarship on August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* 31

The Prevalence of Oral Tradition in African Texts 48

Synopsis of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) Movie 53

Tracing the Critical Receptions on Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) 54

Comparative Discussion on African and African American Literary Texts 60

Theoretical Review 64

Conclusion 70

CHAPTER THREE: CONFRONTING THE AMBIGUOUS AFRICAN AMERICAN PAST: THE DILEMMA IN AUGUST WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON* 71

Introduction 71

"The Piano as a Piece of Wood": The Case of Boy Willie 72

"The Piano is the Soul of the People": The Choice of Berniece 89

Conclusion 101

CHAPTER FOUR: SITUATING NARRATIVE: DRAMATISING LEGACY AS A FIX IN KWAW ANSAH'S *HERITAGE AFRICA* 102

Introduction 102

"I Feel Like an Alien in an Ancestral Home": The Dilemma of Kwesi Atta Bosomefi 103

"This is the Soul and Pride of the Family": Maame Efua Atta's Comprehension of Heritage 119

Conclusion 127

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON* AND ANSAH'S *HERITAGE AFRICA* 128

Introduction 128

The Convergent Points in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* 128

Gender Roles 129

The Prevalence of Ghosts/Ancestors 133

The Points of Divergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* 135

The Piano 135

The Land 138

The 500 Years Old *Kuduo* 140

The Historical Contexts 142

(Post) slavery Period 143

Colonial Period/ Pre-independence Ghana 147

Conclusion 149

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION 150

Introduction 150

Summary of Research 150

Key Findings 153

Implications of the Study 157

Recommendations 158

References 159

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Amid the growing scholarship in the area of comparative literature—especially within the African and the African-American intersection—is the inherent call for and a postulation of the common trend that links these two cultures (Champion, 1995; Goyal, 2014; Jaji, 2014; Nwankwo, 2005; Okonkwo, 2008). Within the scholarship, a number of alternative links have been suggested including but not limited to concept continuities (Okonkwo, 2008), music (Jaji, 2014), and the dependence on what Maureen Lewis-Warner refers to as the "primordial scribal artistes" (Warner-Lewis, 2004, p.119). This thesis seeks to contribute to this ongoing discussion in the area of comparative literature.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to examine August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* as dilemma tales respectively. As this work shows in the next chapters, the dilemma tale is a unique narrative structure that both August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah use in their selected works to discuss the issue of pastness or legacy to both the African and the African American.

This chapter introduces and contextualises the study by first giving a background to the study. In what follows, the subsequent subsections specify the thesis statement, the research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, the methodology employed for this study, and a conceptualisation of movie as a literary text. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Background

The question of the usefulness of African oral tradition is at the center of works of writers who hail from Africa or have African descent and this is due to the multi-utilitarian functions of orality. Orality, an overarching term used within the context of African oral literature, is explained in this study as "the exercise of human verbal communication" (Warner-Lewis, 2004, p.117). By human verbal communication, Maureen Warner-Lewis contends that in the African (literary) context, communication—especially artistic communication—primarily hinges on the use of oral or verbal means. This same understanding of orality is hinted at in Finnegan (2012) where she explores, among other concerns, the artistic oral manifestations in various African cultures. Contributing to this theme but in the broader context of African oral tradition, Julien (1992) mentions that African oral tradition is the manifestation of unique literary tropes that are prevalent in African cultures. Consequently, it is realised—and as this study will demonstrate—that orality and its attending features are prevalent in African literary works or works that have African influences. It should be mentioned from the outset that this study recognises the various categorisations of Africans: the Arabian Africans located at the Northern part of the African continent as well as the white Africans located at the Southern part of the African continent. However, *African* is herein used to refer specifically to the Black Africans located at the South of the Saharan desert.

Based on the understanding gleaned from Julien's (1992) explication of oral tradition and corroborating it with Iyasere (1975), this study explains African oral tradition as the artistic folkloric practices that are based in African oral cultures and

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

examples include but are not limited to the dilemma tale. For Eileen Julien, oral tradition is not necessarily a preserve of the African and a case in point is Propp's (1968), *Morphology of the Folktale*, where he discusses folklore in the context of Russian fairytales. However, Eileen Julien contends that due to the late development of what Ong (2002) refers to as "the technology of writing" (p.80) in the African context, orality tends to resonate more with the African. Beyond this contestation of orality in the African setting, Iyasere (1975) maintains that oral tradition is prevalent as well as relevant in the criticism of African literature.

Orality, a subset of African folklore is therefore not separate from African oral tradition. This is because critics have shown that writers from orally based-cultures have made their works to respond to African oral tradition (Iyasere, 1975; Okpewho, 1983) partly to make their issues of concern unique. Contributing to this debate, Warner-Lewis (2004) mentions that these writers resort to oral elements or tropes in their works for two reasons; first, "out of cultural nationalism", and second, to "project and mine the resources of inherited poetics" (p.122). These ways of understanding the efficacy of orality, especially in contemporary creative works of Africans and African Americans, therefore place oral tradition in a sort of a chain of continuity of tradition. This is because it involves "the relocating of the ontology and pedagogy of oral cultures into chirographic space, thus engendering a dialogic process whose end can only be mutually beneficent" (Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006). This chirographic nature of orality makes it possible for the continuous usage of it most especially in recent times where literacy—the material documentation of information—is taking a center stage in the lives of previously

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

orally-based cultures. Although Amissah-Arthur (2013) explains *continuity* as "the wholesale adoption of tropes and artistic forms…" (p. 20), it would be understood in this context to mean the consistent usage of a literary trope across spaces, and genres. This understanding of the term—continuity—is grounded in the thought that an artistic literary trope could be consciously prevalent in works from both the African and African American space and in terms of a literary genre like drama, a particular literary trope could be realised to be used in it. Conversely, there is a continuity when a literary trope is realised in a particular piece of literary work irrespective of the locations of these works or the genre. Ultimately, it is demonstrated in this study that both the African and the African American writer dwell on the latter functionality of orality—the resources of inherited poetics as Maureen Warner-Lewis mentions—to engage with as well as articulate the possibilities of understanding the tradition, past and socio-cultural histories or the legacy of their communities.

Again, it is worth stating that inherent in the activation of the resources of inherited poetics is the subtle engagement with a narrative technique that provides the basis for articulating pressing issue(s) confronting a people. One such narrative technique is the dilemma tale. According to Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah (2006), the dilemma tale is "a simultaneous freeing of voices and the creation of multiple perspectives, out of which emerges a veritable marketplace of ideas, all jostling for space" (p.168). The primary understanding of the term—dilemma tale—is that its usage resonates with the presentation of alternatives among choices, out of which one has the liberty to choose from. Neither choice of preference is

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

wrong nor right and this is because the option that it presents, to borrow Edward Said's words "introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision" (1978, p.240). Inherent in what has been said so far is the idea of the relevance of the dilemma tale as a resourceful narrative technique. This is because the choice of a narrative technique for a particular work has been an important concern for the writer as the issues conveyed in the work. In the African setting, for instance, the oral art form as an inherited poetics has been one surest way for the African poet to convey his or her message and this African oral art form hinges largely on mnemonics and/ or "the technology of writing" (Ong, 2002, p.80). One's ability to recall and utilise the available narrative structures in the African oeuvre makes him or her to find the right channel to inform his or her audience. It as well comes with its inherent interpretative relevance.

Conversely, underneath this notion of orality and its utility is the broader idea of (oral) tradition, and this phenomenon is understood in its common usage as stated by Baker (2000) as "that which has linkage with the past and cultural continuity" (p.110). To corroborate this, Okpewho (1977) mentions that tradition resonates with the conventions, beliefs, practices, and social attitude of a community that shares a common root. Moreover, tradition is neither revived nor invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.8 as cited in Baker, 2000) and Baker discusses the invention of tradition to mean:

> a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (p.107).

The understanding, per Baker (2000), therefore is that tradition is transcendental for it lives with the people who uphold it and is subsequently internalised by the community to which it is borne into. It is neither invented nor created. It is the fundamental makeup of a people. Again, tradition, according to Baker (2000), has a utilitarian function. It carries with it, the community's cultural norms and values. So, as its adherents internalise it, it then serves to inculcate in them these community values, beliefs, history as well as its heritage. This is an understanding of the term—tradition—that is shared with T.S. Eliot when he discusses the notion of tradition and individual talent for, conversely, he posits that the poet is a mere channel through whom the collective experiences of the community are shared to the wider audience. According to Eliot (1982), tradition is not inherited but it is a completely organic experience that people share and these people—although Eliot bases his discussion on Europeans—can be extended to the African and African American community.

Chirographic space and orality intersect (Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006) and by this intersection, the idea is that people have developed—as Ong (2002) puts it, technologically in terms of writing their oral history—to include documenting their oral arts. This documentation of the art of a play comes in various genres including drama or play. Drama—or in its vague form, play—is an instance of a documented art with oral traditions in it (Ukadike, 1994). It has a liberational aura attached to it for it mirrors both the foibles and strengths of society

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

and as such, writers use this creative process to explore their conditions such as identity, tradition or legacy, and heritage. As a hybrid cultural community, African American culture for instance is binary; it is a fusion of African and American culture. African Americans, in this context, are understood as people who recognise and trace their ancestry to Africa. Like their African counterpart and as members of the larger African community, African American writers subtly adopt various oral narrative structures that have traces from the oral tradition of their African ancestry in their literary writings (Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006). The available scholarships demonstrate that a number of American African literary writers have used various African oral narrative structures in their creative works (cf. Boan, 19998; Fishman, 1994; Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006). This form of utilising the tradition of orality is, however, not limited to African Americans and their works. African creatives like Kwaw Ansah, this study demonstrates, also fall on inherited poetics to drive home the issues of pressing needs such as family bond, cultural consciousness, identity, and legacy to the African.

Using August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988), therefore, this study demonstrates that both August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah use the dilemma tale as the narrative architecture—an aspect of African oral tradition—to articulate the conception of pastness, tradition, or legacy by both Africans and African Americans. In *The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson uses the dilemma tale type to unlock the interaction between the past and the present which is understood, at the end of the play, to be the apprehension of the meaning

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

of the past, legacy, or tradition to the African American. It is understood from the play that Wilson's major focus is to problematise as well as to complicate the meaning of historical legacy by presenting the idea of choice as a complex moral and cultural interrogation of one's self and his or her history. In the narration, Berniece is the elder sister to Boy Willie, and their slave parents were exchanged for this piano in question but it appears in the narration that the piano represents two different ideas to each of these siblings. For Boy Willie, it is a money-making instrument, and for Berniece, it is the soul of her family's ancestry.

In Kwaw Ansah’s *Heritage Africa*, central to the narration is the 500 years *kuduo*—the casket which is understood as the spiritual embodiment of the customs as well as the soul of the Nsona clan–which Maame Afua Atta hands over to his son, Kwesi Ata Bosomefi née Mr. Quincy Arthur Bosomfield as the clan’s heirloom containing the spirit of the clan. The former hands over this heirloom to the Governor representing the British Monarch in the colony with pride as a token of appreciation although prior to receiving it, the mother had cautioned him to keep it well and safe. This willful giveaway becomes the apex of Bosomfield’s problems and a critical deconstruction of Bosomfield’s decision to hand over this heirloom will constitute, as this study will show, the dilemma of the African in conceiving what legacy or tradition means to him or her.

This study therefore seeks to use the dilemma tale type as an interpretative narrative framework to understand August Wilson's Pulitzer award-winning play, *The Piano Lesson,* and Kwaw Ansah’s 1988 FESPACO award-winning movie, *Heritage Africa*. By attending to the dilemma tale as the interpretive framework,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the study seeks to address three issues simultaneously. First is to examine what legacy means to the African; second, what legacy or the past means to the African American and, finally, determine the points of convergence and divergence in relation to the conception of the past by both Africans and African Americans. Most importantly, this work ultimately contests Allen's (2012) claim about the "strangeness" of reading two cultures comparatively. Contrarily, this work will demonstrate that it is rather an illuminating enterprise to read two distinctive cultures comparatively.

Thesis Statement

Despite the numerous works on the continuities of African folkloric tradition (Amissah-Arthur, 2013; Asempasah, 2006; Boan, 1998; Mwinlaaru & Nkansah, 2018), there appears to be no scholarly attention on the dilemma tale as a continuity of African folkloric tradition in August Wilson's (1990) *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's (1988) *Heritage Africa*. These works, however, frame their narratives around the efficacy of the dilemma tale and articulate what legacy means to both cultures through this same narrative style. These texts therefore become the symbolic microcosms of both the African American and the African communities since August Wilson reflects on the *lived* experiences of the African Americans in *The Piano Lesson* while Kwaw Ansah preoccupies himself with what legacy is to the African through the narrative surrounding the heirloom.

The reasons for the choice of these texts are twofold. First, the available scholarship on August Wilson's text shows that there has been an exploration of it

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

from different critical perspectives (cf. Fishman, 1994; Harry & Elam, 1994; Morales, 1994; Shannon, 1994; Singleton, 2009; Subedi, 2020). However, what appears to be missing is the focus on the dilemma tale as the narrative technique and how this helps to unravel what tradition, an important cultural makeup of the African American community, is to these African Americans in Wilson's text. Secondly, in the case of Kwaw Ansah's movie, despite its international recognition, less critical attention has been paid to it although it forms part of the classical flicks in Ghana and Africa in general. Critical works on the movie have looked at it as either an anticolonial or an emancipatory text (Anyidoho, 2000; Aryee, 2015; Meyer, 1999; Nanbigne, 2013; Ukadike, 1994). A re-look at the theme of legacy or pastness and how it is fashioned out through the usage of dilemma tale would therefore extend our understanding as well as the critical reception of the message of the movie.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

1. examine, through the dilemma tale, what the past means to the African American in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*.
2. discuss how the dilemma tale unravels the meaning of legacy to the African in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*.
3. determine the points of convergence and divergence in relation to the conceptualisation of legacy in both August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa.*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Research Questions

1. Through the dilemma tale, what does the past mean to the African American in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*?
2. How does the dilemma tale unravel the meaning of legacy to the African in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*?
3. What are the points of convergence and divergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* regarding the conceptualisation of legacy?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this work is multifold. To begin with, this work presents a new perspective—in terms of narrative style—on the reading of the intersection between African and African American literary works. Moreover, this work contributes to the ongoing works on the intercultural connection between Africans and African Americans. This work also suggests a meta-reconnection between (lost) Africans and their roots on one hand and African Americans and Africans on the other hand.

Furthermore, this work provides a critical alternative perspective to reading August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and interpreting Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* as literary texts that employ the use of the oral trope, the dilemma tale as the springboard to understanding the continuity of African oral tradition. Finally, particular attention will be drawn to the message in Kwaw Ansah's movie since the available texts on it are few despite the contemporary relevance of the issue of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

historical legacy explored in the movie. Beyond these, this study contributes to establishing African oral narrative techniques like the dilemma tale as a literary product.

Delimitation

This study is delimited to two primary texts; August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988). August Wilson's work is a play whereas Kwaw Ansah's work is a motion picture. Thus, this study focuses specifically on August Wilson's and Kwaw Ansah's texts to unravel how the narratives are framed around the dilemma tale. This notwithstanding, in the analysis of these texts, there shall be, where necessary, references to other works by August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah or other African and African American writers like Toni Morrison, and Efua Sutherland.

Research Design

This study adopts the descriptive qualitative method as the research design. Critical content analysis is specifically adopted for this study since the methodological focus of this study is to engage with the content of the selected primary data. The discussion is thematised based on the research questions. This method–qualitative approach–is essential for categorising the content of data into themes (Stemler, 2001) hence its relevance to this study.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Data Source

The primary texts for this study are August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988). These primary texts will be augmented by secondary texts that have a bearing on this study. These secondary materials will be sourced from both digital and manual libraries.

Conceptualising Movie as a Literary Text

The object of literary inquiry is a text and a text is understood as a body of knowledge that facilitates a study. This understanding of the term is echoed in Bakhtin's assertion that "where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 103). This understanding of a text implies that a text is any material—whether written, spoken, or audio-visual—that aids in making meaning of the world. It is open to both subjective or objective interpretations and as a result, it becomes the basis of reflection. A movie can therefore be considered as a (literary) text since it is an object of study which is open to interpretations.

A movie, otherwise known as a film, flick, or a motion picture, is a resourceful site for any information worthy of considering as a literary text, and by literary text, this means that there is an open interpretation to it. As an audio-visual artistic work (Nanbigne, 2013), a movie is an artwork that conveys ideas, beauty, and imaginative or otherwise everyday lives of a particular people via moving images (Severny, 2013). This artistic form records moving images in either low art

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

video frames or onto a celluloid film; the difference, as Meyer (1999) intimates, lies more in the financial status of the producer(s) than in their training for the art.

The understanding of what can be considered as literary texts, in recent scholarship, has shifted—or perhaps, keeps shifting—from the traditional categorisation of written works such as novels, poems, or dramas to a more non-traditional and fluid forms such as paintings and sculptural works, songs (Saboro, 2014), and movies (Ennin, 2014). The evidence lies in the fact that these seemingly *new forms* have markers to determine or categorise them as literary texts. From this perspective, constitutive in the overall nature of a movie are the representations of elements that are associated with the traditional notion of what can be considered as a literary text.

Elements of traditional written literature are present in movies. Aside from the modern technological twists that are added to the production of movie, this art form—movie—displays a number of conventional elements of literariness that have been known to be the defining features of written literature (Villaverde & Carter, 2020). Take for instance characters, they serve an essential role in unfolding the plot or the general message of any literary text. This notwithstanding, movies have complex layers that may go beyond the traditional description of a literary text. Theatrical maneuvers such as camera angle shots, graphics and any other cinematographical antics may be absent in the description of a literary text. Even that, these technical features of a movie could be interpreted as extra information-based sources that could reinforce or impose a specific interpretation on a particular theme in a movie.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Again, beyond these cinematographical features of movie lies the message of the movie. This is an aspect of the movie that often than not, specifically calls for an interpretation, an aspect which is the preoccupation of any literary analysis. Ennin (2014) intimates that the central message of a movie could be explored as a literary text. And as she demonstrates, the message of a movie constitutes an essential element that can be subjected to a literary interpretation. This similar idea is suggested in Saboro (2014) although he basis his explanation on the song text. Again, Saboro as well intimates that literary form of any art work is fluid hence the song text could be interpreted as a literary text. It is therefore not surprising to see that literary essays such as Aryee (2015), Ennin (2014), and Nanbigne (2013) are done based on various movies.

The other feature of movie that is of essence to literary analysis is the characters and their characterisations. Actors in a movie and their roles are synonymous to what is known in traditional literary texts such as novels and dramas as characters and their characterisations. They help with the development of the message in any movie. Traditional literary writers such as novelists and dramatists give voice to their characters (Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006) and this is similarly realised in movies. The only seemingly difference lies in the fact that with movies, the voices of the characters are accompanied by (audio)-visuals. Moreover, movies like any literary texts, are scripted based on a particular narrative technique. This technique ensures that the director is able to distinctively convey the message of the movie from a particular angle. As this study demonstrates in the discussion of the data in subsequent chapters, it will be realised that in the quest of Kwaw

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Ansah to portray the dilemma of his main character, he resorts to the dilemma tale as the appropriate narrative technique to convey this message. Similarly, but in different context, the African American movie producer, Tyler Perry is noted to have as well used the dilemma tale as his narrative technique in his 2018 psychological thriller titled *Acrimony*. This is an African American family drama movie that presents the case of a wife and that of her husband regarding whose fault it is for their marital disintegration. The movie ends with an inherent question of whose position is right in the context of the African American family setting. All these could be recognised as an adaption and adoption of traditional literary elements in contemporary arts such as movies.

Another literary defining feature of movies is that they evince oral literary characterisations. Like a drama, a movie can be said to be an art form parallel in form and content to any oral art. A movie evinces salient oral literary elements such as what Finnegan (2012) mentions as a performance, audience and occasion. In the production of a movie, the actors and actresses perform their scripted roles. However, in this performance, there is the tendency for them to improvise on their roles. This is often realised in their body gestures and movements. Other times, this element of improvisation could occur at the performance level where a character may artistically go off script. Ultimately, this goes further than spicing the aesthetic vision of the director to impose a meaning worthy of interpreting.

In this study, these defining features of a movie are conceptualised as an adaption of features that characterise literary texts. This sense of approaching a movie is relevant to this study because, in the case of Kwaw Ansah's movie,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Heritage Africa, this study conceives of it as a literary material worthy of literary interpretation. And as this subsection has tried to demonstrate, significant features of the movie that are in consonance with the understanding and interpretation of *a literary text* are extracted as the basis for the discussion and analysis. It should be mentioned at this latter end that the afore mentioned aspects of the movie are not exhaustive. This is because the paralinguistic elements available in a movie, as hinted on earlier, can be as well subjected to a literary interpretation. This means then that in the case of analysing Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, these paralinguistic elements, where necessary, will be mentioned to augment the discussion or the argument.

Structure of the Study

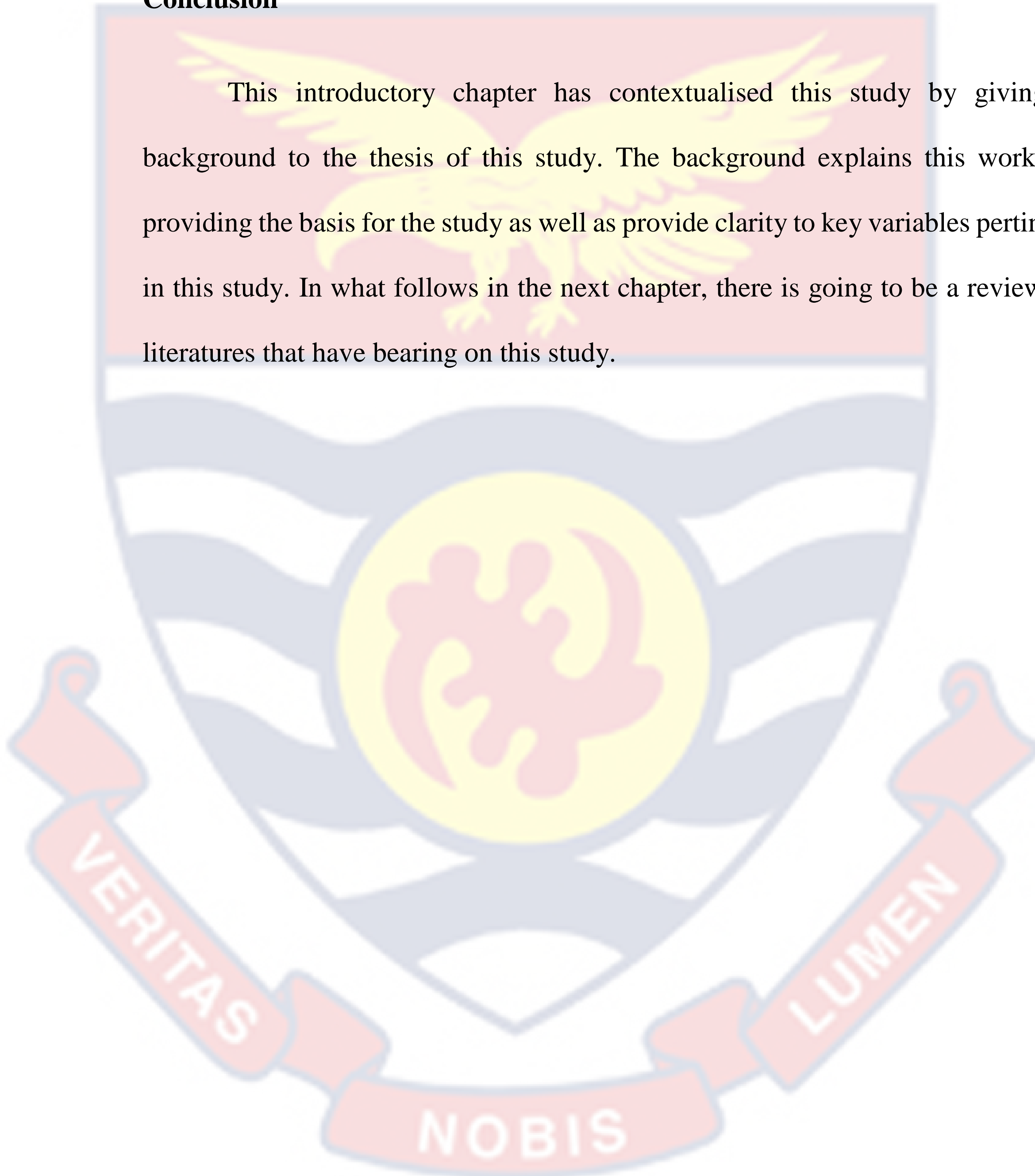
This study is structured in six chapters. The opening chapter is an introduction to the background of the entire study. It gives a detailed introduction to the research work by providing clarity to the research problem. The research objectives and research questions are outlined in this preliminary chapter. Moreover, the methodology for the study is detailed in this opening chapter. The chapter two is a review of empirical works related to this study plus the analytical/theoretical framework for the study. This is a critical review on the understanding of orality in the broader term, and the concept of dilemma tale as a subset of orality. The third chapter answers the first research question and the fourth chapter responds to the second research question. The penultimate chapter answers the third research question. The final chapter outlines the key findings and concludes the entire study. This final chapter also makes suggestions and

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

recommendations for further study. Afterward, an implication reflective of the study is stated in this final chapter.

Conclusion



This introductory chapter has contextualised this study by giving a background to the thesis of this study. The background explains this work by providing the basis for the study as well as provide clarity to key variables pertinent in this study. In what follows in the next chapter, there is going to be a review of literatures that have bearing on this study.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The previous chapter gave a general introduction to the entire thesis. This chapter reviews literatures that are related to the focus of this thesis. To achieve this, this chapter is structured thus: the first section reviews works that locate and discuss orality within the larger body of African American literature; the next section reviews empirical works on August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990). The subsequent sections review works on the use of orality in African literature, an empirical review on Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988); and an empirical review on comparative works on African and African American works. The final part discusses the theory to be used in this work. Specifically, the analytical framework is thoroughly reviewed in this section to serve as a discursive tool for the analysis of this thesis.

Orality and the African American Imaginary

African oral tropes abound in African American (literary) works. These oral tropes or traditions invariably function as a traditional vernacular or as a narrative technique. As a traditional vernacular, it is the vehicle that conveys the thoughts and everyday lives of the African American people (Gates, 1988). In this regard, Henry Louis Gates Jr. mentions that despite the traumatic experiences during the Middle Passage of the enslaved Africans to the New World—a people who would

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

later be known as African Americans—part of the things they carried along was their tradition. This tradition in question has within it a vernacular that carried "…their myths, their expressive institutional structures, their metaphysical systems of order, and their forms of performance" (Gates, 1988, p.4). The vernacular then became the voice with which these Africans in the New World spoke and performed their experiences. Moreover, the vernacular, as Gates (1988) intimates, became ultimately the voice of African American writers with which they told their kindreds' experiences. African oral tradition, as a vernacular, then becomes "a meta-discourse" (Gates 1988, p. xxi) of sorts for the issues that these African American writers talk about in their works.

As "a meta-discourse" (Gates 1988, p. xxi), thus a discourse that explains itself by commenting on and giving broader perspective to seemingly simpler ideas, this traditional vernacular is "...complete with a history, patterns of development and revision, and internal principles of patterning and organization" (p. xxi). To better understand this traditional vernacular and its pragmatic role in the lives of the African American people, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, in his 1995 critical essay titled, *The Logic of Escape in the Akan Trickster Tale Cycle,* suggests that the function of the Akan trickster tale character is suggestive of one of the numerous ways that the chattel slave broke free. In this tale, the idea is that some of the enslaved Africans ready to be shipped to the New World employed the vernacular—the rhetorical indirection—of the Akan trickster tale character to outwit their enslavers (Opoku-Agyemang, 1995). The trickster tale as a traditional language then functions as what Henry Louis Gates Jr. calls the "internal principles

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

of patterning and organization" (p. xxi). This is because the Akan trickster character, like the Yoruba Esu or any other trickster figure from the African continent, weaves his or her metaphor of survival or freedom in a vernacular that his or her kindred understand.

As a narrative technique, African oral tradition has been the approach through which the African American experiences have been told in the various available African American literary works (Bruneel, 2010). Many critical responses to these literary works have centred on the use and relevance of orality—in general or in various oral forms such as the trickster tale or dilemma tale—in these texts (cf. Dauterich, 2005; Jones, 2002; Lewis, 1960; Reagan, 1991). However, these deliberate attempts to use orally based tropes in these African American texts are not accidental as this deliberate act could be interpreted as the authors' way of presenting "a rainbow of the life cycle, incorporating the past and the present, the dead and the yet-to-be-born, offering images and inspirations intended to heal the community" (Fishman, 1994, p.147). This idea of communal imaginary and healing that Joan Fishman suggests through the usage of oral tropes in African American texts, specifically in the works of August Wilson and Romare Bearden, is in tandem with similar earlier arguments made by the likes of Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Ismael Reed, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and August Wilson who have invariably relied on the efficacy of oral tropes to tell the stories of the African American people. August Wilson, for instance, as this study will demonstrate, relies on the dilemma tale as an element of orality to present the multiple interpretations of legacy to the African American.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Most importantly, as Toni Morrison, for instance, suggests in her critical essay, *Memory, Creation, and Writing*, she mentions that her task as an African American writer is to use "recognised and verifiable principles of Black Art" (Morrison, 1984, p.389) in her works to tell the story and/or experiences of African Americans. Revealingly, by the use of the principles of Black Art, Toni Morrison is referring to the usage of oral tropes like the trickster tale and any other folklore elements. This black art consciousness is the very basis for the birth of the Black Arts movement, which was founded by the African American activist and writer, Amiri Baraka, in 1965. The Black Arts movement was a literary movement that was active in the 1960s and 1970s. Part of the reason for the formation of this literary movement was for the adherents, who were predominantly Africans by origin, to identify with their ancestry, and to literarily do this was for them to either write using various indigenous oral African tropes (Fishman, 1994) or invoke the African ancestral consciousness in their writings (Asante, 2020).

It is also worth mentioning that Morrison's covert literary agenda of crusading for the incorporation of or the usage of oral elements in African American literary works goes beyond just aesthetics. In her intimation, Morrison is suggesting an alternative way of writing about the African American experience that contravenes what Richard Wright terms as "the blueprint of negro writing" (Wright, 1937, p. 98). This alternative meaning is inherent in identifying with the African origin that these African American writers share ancestry with and it is in the usage of oral elements. It is therefore not surprising that in various works by Toni Morrison, she adopts the dilemma tale and the trickster tale as the narrative

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

techniques (cf. Amissah-Arthur, 2013; Opoku-Agyemang and Asempasah, 2006). This is to ultimately situate the African American experience within the efficacy of orality. Other African American writers, like Lorrain Hansberry, William W. Chesnutt, Lawrence Dunbar, William D. Howells, Ismael Reed, and August Wilson, are all credited for having used oral tropes in their works in one way or the other.

Beyond these writers and their works, the impact of African oral tropes as varying narrative techniques could as well be seen as demonstrated in African American-produced movies. This method of enslaved African survival based on the trickster tale is demonstrated and/or used in many other African American produced films. In demonstrating the efficacy of folklore as a narrative technique, for instance, there are a number of African American produced movies that employ different African oral traditions as the narrative form. For instance, Steven Spielberg's 1997 directed movie titled *Amistad*, uses the trickster tale as the narrative technique. The movie dramatises Sengbe Pieh's (also known as Joseph Cinque) effort to lead a bloody rebellion of enslaved Africans on board of a Spanish slave ship, La Amistad in July 1839. This resulted in the infamous US Supreme Court case, *United States vs. The Amistad,* in 1841, in which Cinque and his enslaved colleagues won on the premise that they were defending themselves against illegal slavery (https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/40/518/). The movie shows how Cinque's role, played by Djimon Hounsou, dramatises the former's effort to cause a mutiny of slave holders to free his kindred enroute to the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

New World. This is one of many African American-produced movies that use African oral forms as a narrative technique.

In a similar sense of imagining the African American experience through orality, Ralph Ellison suggests in his work, *Shadow and Act* (1964), that the predilection of African American (literary) writers is to find the appropriate medium to search for and maintain aspects of the experiences of African Americans that are worth preserving or abandoning. And in this quest to search for this medium, folklore, or broadly speaking, orality, comes in handy. According to Ralph Ellison, African folklore—a subset of orality—is the identifying form that allows African American writers to tell the stories of African Americans' experiences. He therefore intimates that:

> For us (*African Americans*), the question should be, what are the *specific forms* of that humanity, and what in our *background* is worth preserving or abandoning? The clue to this can be found in ***folklore***, which offers the first drawings of any group's characters. It preserves mainly those situations which have repeated themselves again and again in the history of any given group. It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it; and it describes those boundaries of feeling, thought, and action which that particular group has found to be the limit of the human condition. It projects this wisdom in symbols that express the group's will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies. These drawings may be crude, but they are nonetheless profound in that they represent the group's attempt to humanize the world. It's no

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

accident that great literature, the products of individual artists, is erected upon this humble base (Emphasis mine) (Ellison, 1964, p.147).

In this affirmation of the relevance of orality, what Ralph Ellison is conveying is that of the efficacy of folklore. He projects *folklore* as the vehicle that African American literary writers use to preserve or relegate those aspects of their background which are of need or have no need for their communal growth. Inherently, Ellison turns to suggest an alternative yet pragmatic channel that the African American writer can identify with culturally. This latter suggestion is relevant based on the premise that the idea of identity appears to be covertly or overtly visible in almost every African American literary work. Moreover, making reference to major European writers such as Dostoevsky, and Gogol, Ralph Ellison postulates that these European writers depended on Russian folklore in creating their body of works. So, by implication, Ellison suggests that for the African American writer also, relying on African folklore to express the group's history and the communal will to survive is not only profound but a poignant "attempt to humanize the world (of the African American)" (p. 147). Ultimately, this efficacy of orality in the lives of African Americans is consistent with how they imagine themselves.

The discussion so far has been revolving around African American writers and the projection of their communal worldview in their works. So, if the weltanschauung of African Americans is indeed African-based, as Richard Wright suggests in his 1937 critical essay titled, *Blueprint for Negro Writing,* then it is not

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

accidental that there are a plethora of African oral tropes found in African American literary oeuvres. From this line of imagining and conceiving the African American literary terrain, it is therefore not surprising to see African American literary writers write the (lived) experiences of their people by adopting various African oriented oral tropes as either the narrative technique—as August Wilson does in *The Piano Lesson* (1990)—or as an interpretive tool—as seen in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) or as a methodological approach—as seen in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

This use of oral African elements in the works of African Americans has implications. The implications can be seen in two ways. First, this attempt to use African oral tropes is for identification (Redding, 1949). This is because the usage of oral African elements in African American literary works go beyond what critics have touted as the reactionist strategy of African American writers. The intention then is that although African American writers have identified African oral forms as the voice to write in, this is not necessarily suggestive that they write to react to the criticism that they lack authentic means of telling their stories. Instead, these choices of using African oral forms are indications of identifying with their roots (Redding, 1949). In her critical essay titled, *American Negro Literature,* J. Saunders Redding contends that African Americans write—for instance, situating it within orality—as an identification with their roots and as a resistance strategy to the domineering writing space of Euro-Americans (Redding, 1949). Redding suggests that there is this uncommon resilience aura around what she calls the "[l]iterature of the negroes" (p.137), and this aura is as a result of the many experiences of the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

African-Americans that are linked to slavery. She discusses three ways that *Negro Literature* has survived extinction. One being *indifference*, the next being *external opposition*, and the last being *the unbounded enthusiasm of its well-meaning friends*. Through all these, she intimates that African American literature has survived due to the fact that this literature has its basis in orality. Redding then concludes that:

> Facing up to the tremendous challenge of appealing to two audiences, Negro writers are extricating themselves from what has sometimes seemed a terrifying dilemma. Working honestly in the material they know best, they are creating for themselves a new freedom. (p. 148)

What can be gleaned from Saunders Redding's assertion on the writing, and the imaginary of the African American literary space is that African oral elements are the "material[s] they (African Americans) know best" (p. 147). And in using these oral elements, these oral forms become the liberating channel for them to speak about their experiences as well as serve as the identification mark for them.

The second implication of the usage of African oral forms is that of a propagandist attempt by these African American writers to assert themselves as a minority group. In his speech delivered during the 1926 NAACP conference and later published as an essay with the title, *Criteria of Negro Art*, W.E.B. Du Bois asserts that "all art is propaganda and ever must be…" (p. 295) and that of the African American is no exception. This may be the case because the political undertone in African American literary works cannot be ignored. In further

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

commenting on what he refers to as the Negro Art, W.E.B. Du Bois maintained that because African American literary works are produced in what Susan Willis refers to as the "mulatto culture" (Willis, 1987, p.67), it is the inclination of the African American writer to write, and not just that, but to write the truth about his or her people. Du Bois (1926) states, therefore, that:

> …it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of beauty, of the preservation of beauty, of the realization of beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before (p. 293).

These *methods* that Du Bois intimates are rooted in orality. This is because, as previously stated, it appears that the only authentic voice that the African American writer values is a literary voice rooted in his or her ancestry. This is where African oral tropes become appropriated in African American literary works. The likes of Lorrain Hansberry in her work *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and, as this thesis will demonstrate, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* are all weaved around the dilemma tale type, a tale that is folkloristic and has its traces from Africa (Okpewho, 1997).

This section of the chapter has focused on situating orality within the broader landscape of African American literature. It has attempted to engage with and discuss seminar works that speak to the literary African oral tradition—its aesthetics and implications—as well as how it reimagines the larger African American literary landscape. The next part of this section presents a summary of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, discusses critical essays that locate literary African oral forms in August Wilson's body of works and review empirical works on *The Piano Lesson*. The empirical essays are specifically selected to shed light on the objectives of this thesis.

Summary of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990)

Set in the late 1930's during the Great Migration or depression, *The Piano Lesson* forms part of August Wilson's Pittsburg Cycle. This is a cycle of ten (10) plays set within each decade of the 20th century and chronicles the distinctive African American experience. In the narration, there is a dramatisation of August Wilson's confrontation of the complex and ambiguous conception of the African American past, which is at once the contemporary South and the slave era. The narrative revolves around a family heirloom—the piano—which is bequeathed to Boy Willie and Berniece after the demise of their father, Papa Boy Charles. This piano has history. Its origin is the history of the Charles' family, told in two vignettes; one from Boy Willie's perspective and the other, from Berniece's perspective.

Through the collective memories of Doaker and Wining Boy, the only remaining members of the Charles family, the narration tells us that the Charles' family was once a slave family owned by Robert Sutter. During the 10th wedding anniversary of Robert Sutter, he desires to give his wife, Miss Ophelia, a gift, but has no money but slaves. However, Joel Nolander, a friend of the Sutters who lives in Georgia, owned a piano. Robert Sutter then thinks of getting this piano for his

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

wife. Mr. Nolander then exchanges the piano with the choicest of Sutter's slaves; it is grandmother Berniece and Boy Charles (the first Boy Charles) that Mr. Nolander chooses. After a while, Miss Ophelia misses her slaves and therefore, through her husband, asks Boy Willie (Doaker says he was also called Willie Boy) (the one Boy Willie is named after) to carve her gone slaves on the piano. Willie Boy however, goes beyond this request to carve the entire history of his lineage on the piano. With these carvings on the piano, Boy Charles could not but think about it every day. Through the help of his younger brothers, Doaker and Wining Boy, and other maternal relatives, they are able to steal this piano from the Sutter's premises. This act leads to several deaths, including Boy Charles. The piano is finally in the custody of Berniece in Pittsburg. Boy Willie who lives in Mississippi comes to Pittsburg in an attempt to sell this piano so he could use part of his share of the returns to buy a land from James Sutter, a descendant of Robert Sutter and the former slave owner of the Charles family.

Boy Willie's attempts do not succeed however, central to the narrative is the question, what do you do with your past or legacy? Do you sell it or keep it as a (re)memory? It is within this context of interpreting the play that the dilemma tale becomes crucial. As a dilemma tale, the play then presents alternative perspectives as to what to do with the piano, which is an embodiment of the slave history of the Charles family (Bentum, 2021). In what follows, I engage with the critical reception on August Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson* where I pay particular attention to the issue of approach, method, findings and themes.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Tracking the Scholarship on August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

The African American playwright, August Wilson (1945–2005), named as Frederick August Kittel Jr., is reckoned in American Broadway theatre as one of the key African American playwrights. While alive, he dedicated himself to writing the Pittsburg Cycle of plays which dramatise 20th century African American experiences and the human condition in general (http://www.dartmouth.edu/-awilson/bio.html). Central to the literary works of August Wilson is the manifestation of orality, and this is by no means accidental. That is, he deliberately incorporates oral traditions into his works for a variety of reasons, as evidenced by a number of public commentaries on his art. In one of his popular speeches delivered on 26th June, 1996 at the Theatre Communications Group National Biennial Conference at Princeton University, which is titled *The Ground on Which I Stand*, published in many journal outlets, one being *Callaloo* in its 1997 edition, August Wilson delivered an eclectic talk on black theatre and the essence of measuring black creative works with black aesthetics. For him, "Black Americans are Africans" (p. 494), and thus relating their works to African-oriented ideas and traditions is appropriate.

On other occasions—both granted interviews and publications—August Wilson has continuously attempted to justify his commitment to his deployment of African literary oral forms in his literary works. And one such occasions, again, is his interview with Caleen Sinnette Jennings at the Kennedy Education Digital Center in 1992, where he states that:

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

> The talk is the whole point because I am dealing with a culture that has an oral tradition. These stories mean something different to these people. They are not just passing the time or entertaining themselves; they are creating and preserving themselves. In the oral tradition, stories are the way history gets passed down, so they had better be told right (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDjnZGI3WiE).

This affirms the fact that the usage of oral African tropes in the works of August Wilson is intentional. This is because the use of these or any of the features of African oral art is to portray a culture that these African Americans can identify with. Furthermore, Wilson's statement could be interpreted to mean that oral tradition—the embodiment of African oral art—gives African Americans voice and agency. This is to mean that the appropriation of orality gives the African American a sort of authentic medium to articulate his or her realities which include both the struggles and successes.

Aside from Wilson's personal public comments on his works, there have been a number of critical essays on his works. *The Piano Lesson*, published in 1990, is one of August Wilson's many literary works that have received critical acclaims. This play has garnered a lot of critical debates spanning from racial discussions, women and their representations, black history, Afro-aesthetics, among others.

Contributing to the debates on Wilson's (1990) play, Maulood and Barzani (2020), in their paper, *Trauma in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*, and based on Joshua Pederson's (2014) explanation of literary trauma theory, contend that the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

"play (...) deals with the social life of a broken (traumatized) African American family" (p. 107). Trans-Atlantic slavery, as intimated elsewhere, ended some four hundred years ago, but its ramifications still persist. Traces of these effects are realised in the imaginative writings and performances of African Americans. Set against this background, Maulood and Barzani read Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* as a dramatisation of the negative implication of the antebellum chattel slavery and subsequently argue that "[t]his shocking incident (slavery) causes cross-generational trauma and other traumatic incidents for the family as they retrieved the piano" (p. 110). For Maulood and Barzani (2020), the characters in the play are traumatised figures, and their trauma is weaved around the piano. They claim "the piano is the most significant object in the play" (p. 112). Maulood and Barzani's attention on the characters appears to shift the relevance of the piano which is rather at the centre of the play. Ultimately, the piano in the text could be seen as a meta discoursal symbol as Gates (1988) suggests elsewhere. Thus, the piano, as a meta discourse, is at the centre of the entire narrative, and each of the characters rather approaches this metaphor—the piano—differently. As a symbol of their ancestors' slavery memory, the piano becomes the symbol that reminds each of the characters—specifically Boy Willie, Bernice, Doaker, and Winning Boy—of their cultural past. Maulood and Barzani (2020) therefore intimate that these characters' conception of the piano becomes the beginning of their trauma.

Moreover, in advancing their argument, Maulood and Barzani (2020) contend that beyond the ambiguous dialectics of the piano that Berniece and Boy Willie present, Doaker and Winning Boy's narrative of the genesis of the piano

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

brings the Charles family's traumatic experience to the limelight. They claim that the preternatural memory of these two characters, who are now elderly Charles members, of what happened during the piano's acquisition "helps the audience learn the importance of the piano" (p. 112). Furthermore, they contend that images and metaphors such as the presence of ghosts—such as the Ghost of the Yellow Dog and Sutter's Ghost—are all relics of trauma as well as being peritraumatic. They therefore conclude that slavery is the genesis of Charles's traumatic experience and that the piano is the metaphor for this experience. This trauma, Maulood and Barzani (2020) conclude, is historical, transgenerational as well as firsthand and each of the Charles responds to this traumatic experience differently. The findings of Maulood and Barzani (2020) are revealing. This is because they first centre the piano as the motif of the lived experiences of African Americans. Second, they present a discussion that could be extended to the question of what the piano—the cultural heritage of the African American community—means to African Americans. The relevance of the response to this question lies in the fact that, as August Wilson himself is quoted to have said, "a link to the past, to Africa" (p. 102) is the basis for identifying with their roots and "clutching themselves from white supremacy" (Tian & Li, 2018). Consequently, an alternative way of finding a response to this question lies in interrogating the narrative technique used in the text, and as this thesis shall demonstrate, lies in the dilemma tale type. The dilemma tale therefore becomes the site where there is a "freeing of voices and a creation of multiple perspectives, out of which emerges a marketplace of ideas... (sic)" (Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006, p. 168-169). This site of freedom for

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

multiple voices and the emergence of ideas will be then known and appreciated when Wilson's (1990), *The Piano Lesson* is read as a dilemma tale.

Another essay that reads Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson* as a psychological play is Singleton (2009). In her essay*, Some losses remain with us: Impossible mourning and prevalence of ritual in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*, what Jermaine Singleton does is to read Wilson's (1990) play, *The Piano Lesson*, as a response to racial subjugation, resistance, and buried social memory. She overtly takes the psychological approach of reading this play to examine how August Wilson renders the legacy of African American's disremembered past under racial slavery. To achieve its purpose, the essay uses Sigmund Freud's concept of melancholy and Jacque Derrida's post-structuralist idea of the spectres of Karl Marx. She contends that August Wilson lays bare, in *The Piano Lesson*, a cultural melancholy of a divide between the past and the present by demonstrating how "hidden affect is sustained as a result of and in resistance to an enduring struggle with racial oppression" (p. 41). Singleton's implication is thus based on the assumptions that the play's ghost characters—Robert Sutter's ghost and The Ghost of the Yellow Dog—are racial and slave phantoms. For instance, it suggests that "Sutter's ghost is a metaphor for the psycho-social remains of the Charles' family's social history of loss, dispossession, and struggle" (p. 46). For Singleton, the rivalry between the siblings—Boy Willie and Berniece—and the entire Charles family revolves around their "impossibility of mourning" (p. 46). Thus, their inability to let the past go so they could live in the present. This, she claims, leads to their melancholic state. Moreover, Singleton (2009) argues that August Wilson's *The*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Piano Lesson attempts to genderise the slavery experience of African Americans. She therefore states that:

> Wilson genders the legacy of African chattel slavery in America by depicting the subject formation of Boy Willie and Berniece along overlapping and divergent trajectories of transgenerational haunting. The overlapping but not interlocking haunting Berniece and Boy Willie suffer stems from the socially disorganizing effects of the history of racial subjugation that parallel the piano's journey up from slavery (pp. 48-49).

The heinous crime of chattel slavery disabled the patriarchal rights of the black man, thereby equating the black man to the black woman. However, Singleton (2009), as deduced from the above extract, contends that August Wilson consciously positions both the black man and the black woman as victims of the institution of slavery by juxtaposing the characterisation of Boy Willie and Berniece. This approach to chattel slavery from a gender perspective is consistent with what bell hooks (1981) argues in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. hooks intimates that the institution of slavery victimised black women as much as it did to black men. Singleton consequently concludes that the protagonists in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* cannot live in the present because they cannot let the past go. She refers to this as the impossible mourning and since they cannot let it go, this inherently turns to haunt them. What could be deduced from Singleton's (2009) discussion is that of the perception of the legacy of slavery by African Americans. Although Singleton focuses on the psycho-social aspects of this topic which revealingly demonstrates that the African American past

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

is a socio-cultural memory of haunting, this thesis will show that reading the play as a dilemma tale can also help us understand how African Americans perceive the legacy of chattel slavery, which was abolished 400 years ago. Thus, this thesis argues that the African American past goes beyond this psycho-social hauntological representation of the African American past.

In addition to the above, another critical attention on Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is that, it is a situating narrative. By a situating narrative, it is a performance-based act that demonstrates what has happened in the historical past. From this perspective, Patrick Maley argues that *The Piano Lesson* is a performative neo-slave narrative. In his paper titled *Performing ancestry: Reading August Wilson's The Piano Lesson as a performative neo-slave narrative*, Patrick Maley intimates that *The Piano Lesson* is a neo-slave narrative and that it is a contemporary performance of the chattel slavery and its ramifications on the African American society. As a slave narrative, Maley (2019) contends that:

> *The Piano Lesson* is a play that most fully exploits Wilson's conception of history as performative, vivifying the struggle between moving towards or away from slavery (p. 64).

This idea from Maley corroborates with what Maulood and Barzani (2020) intimate. However, Maley (2019) specifically focuses on the performative intricacies of the play. In extending his argument, Maley (2019) states that the performative nature of the play operates on three levels: the first is the performance of ancestral community, where he argues that the play presents the African

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

American community as an ancestral community even in the 1930s during the Great Migration.

Second is the performance of the blues as a healing process for slave-wounded African Americans. There is no denying the fact that music is an integral part of any community, and the African American community is no exception. This art form has its own therapeutic relevance. So, Maley (2019) postulates that Wilson's (1990) *The Piano Lesson* performs the blues as a therapeutic mechanism. He says "by performing blues, (it) unleashes a powerful unifying force upon a fractured society" (p.77). And this assertion is realised through the *boogie-woogie* performance of one old African American spiritual by Boy Willie, Doaker, Winning Boy, and Lymon. The final performance act that Maley argues about in the play is the performance of history and the legacy of suffering. He concludes then that Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* forms part of the African American literary agenda of directly engaging with slavery and its associative legacies. Maley's (2019) contention is not only poignant as it also contributes significantly to the ongoing debate and discussions on the legacy of Trans-Atlantic slavery even after its abolishment some four hundred years ago. What Wilson's (1990) play does then, per Maley (2019), is to engage with the legacy of Trans-Atlantic slavery through a performance. Maley's dramatic perspective to interpreting the Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is relevant as it covertly relates to the orality of the text because Finnegan (2012) has stated that performance is a key feature of an oral art. This notwithstanding, Maley appears to have missed the link between the performance of this chattel slavery and exactly what this chattel slavery means to those who

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

survived it. It is therefore important to understand what this history or past means to the survivors of the chattel slavery and this is what this thesis proposes to add.

Also, Elam (2000), in his study, *The dialectics of August Wilson's The Piano Lesson,* notes that Wilson situates his dialectics within the literary semantics of interstices. Elam's contestation is that, like the plays of Wilson, in *The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson dwells on *space* as his way of approaching the lived experience and history of African Americans. Space, as Raj and Jose (2014) discuss in their essay on Wilson's (1990) play, is the recognition of the *past* of African Americans. This past, however, goes as far back as chattel slavery. From this perspective, Elam intimates that August Wilson, in *The Piano Lesson*, contests the present through the past. Thus, for the African Americans who are haunted by the cultural memory of chattel slavery to come to terms with their present and to borrow the words of Derrida (1994, p. xvi) to "learn to live finally," they need to go back into their past. Asempasah and Saboro's (2021) explanation of learning to live finally captures succinctly Elam's contestation of Wilson's dialectics in *The Piano Lesson*. For Asempasah and Saboro (2021),

> to learn to live finally captures the desire for a social formation wherein the present and especially the future become meaningful or livable on the basis of communion with ghosts, the dead. (p. 4)

The mentioning of ghosts, the dead in the above quote resonates with the idea of reconciling with one's past, or history, so as to come to terms with the present. The idea of the ghost is therefore understood as a social figure (Gordon,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

1997) whose presence in the present and engagements or confrontations have influence on the future. This way, like Jacques Derrida mentions, it makes one relate to and learn to live finally. Moreso, reconciling with one's history brings to bare the idea that history—as a permanent space in the past—can be re-examined to make meaning in the presence. Elam (2000) therefore suggests that history is more than just an idea about the past; instead, history can be understood as a "constructed and constructive agent that must be mediated, negotiated, and interrogated" (p. 363). Through this process of mediating, negotiating, and interrogating, history becomes the medium to re-imagine the present and envision the future. Conversely, for Elam (2000), Wilson's predilection in his play *The Piano Lesson* is to "productively negotiate the gaps between the African past and African American present" (p. 379). And that, in order to understand the present of African Americans and their perception of the legacy of chattel slavery, they must first understand their past. Revealingly, Elam also seems to suggest that the African American past is a space in time that only appears to be meaningful in the present. This reductionist sense of conceiving the past renders it half meaningful. And as this study seeks to demonstrate, August Wilson, beyond what Elam claims, confronts the African American past as an ambiguous past with complex conceptualisation of it. It is not just a space in an historical time or moment as Elam appears to suggest.

Extending the critical reception of Wilson's (1990) play, *The Piano Lesson*, Laminaa Youssef brings to the fore an exploration of the text as a search for identity through collective memory. As this thesis shall demonstrate, August Wilson's play,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The Piano Lesson, is largely premised on the Akan concept of *Sankofa,* which means "looking back while moving forward" (Opoku-Agyemang, 2017, p.1). This concept is loosely interpreted as searching through the past to inform the present and to envision the future. The relevance of this understanding is that while we seek alternative understandings to what the past means to African Americans, it is also essential that their past be interrogated. The medium to interrogate this past is what Wilson's (1990) play, *The Piano Lesson* provides. Youssef (2021) overtly reads *The Piano Lesson* in this regard.

In his essay, *Remnants of the past and the quest for identity*, Laminaa Youssef, based on Wilson's (1990) *The Piano Lesson*, contends that the descendants of slavery—African Americans—engage with their past with the intent of searching for identity. He claims this search and negotiation of the past becomes possible through collective memory. He opines that "collective memory is a conglomeration of individual recollections of past experiences handed down from one generation to another…" (p. 166) and adds that collective memory is fluid since it undergoes various transformations based on how people define and envision it. In extending his argument, Laminaa Youssef claims the Charles family is an example of a group of people who are bound by the same collective memory, which is, the chattel slavery. At the centre of this conception of the collective memory of the past lies the piano, which Youssef suggests as "an embodiment of the Charles' collective memory" (p.169). Contrary to what this thesis shall argue, Youssef (2021) claims Berniece relinquishes her role as a tradition bearer; Boy Willie as a bearer of materialist tradition; and Doaker and Winning Boy as direct victims of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

slavery and their role being to accept their responsibilities as tradition bearers. He therefore concludes that:

> Just as the traumatic experience of slavery brought together Africans from diverse tribes and was the basis for a collective consciousness that contributed to the emergence of the African American identity in America, so did the trauma of the final confrontation with Sutter's ghost bring together the different (and differing) family members into an inclusive experience that would strengthen their collective consciousness and help change their attitudes toward each other. (p. 169)

From the discussion of Youssef (2021) on Wilson's (1990) play, it could be deduced that the debate surrounding the mixed reaction of the legacy and historical past of African Americans still has some contemporary relevance. Contributing to this discussion in the form of paying attention to the dilemma tale type as a narrative technique that August Wilson uses in the play will consequently extend our reception and provide an alternative means of understanding the text. This way, we do not only shift from the regular thematic discussions that the play has received but also pay attention to another literary perspective of the play—the narrative technique—which is rooted in the ancestral lineage of African Americans. Most importantly, August Wilson, as has been mentioned earlier, has been a strong advocate for locating Africanness in his plays. So, reading the play as an (African) dilemma tale therefore appropriates it very well.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

On this issue of appropriating Africanness in his play, Amadou Bissiri provides a definitive perspective on how August Wilson and his African kindred, Wole Soyinka, perform a kind of duet in their writings. In his paper, *Aspects of Africanness in August Wilson's drama: Reading the Piano Lesson through Wole Soyinka's drama*, Bissiri (1996) argues that Wilson's (1990) play is an African text when read through Soyinka's drama. Reasoning in line with Soyinka's (1976) theorisation of myth, literature, and the African worldview, Bissiri (1996) sets out to trace the elements of Africanness in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and probes the relevance of Wilson's interest in using these African elements in his 1990 play. On the issue of the presence of African elements in *The Piano Lesson*, Bissiri (1996) claims that both Wilson and Soyinka share the same African worldview in their works, and that is evident in *The Piano Lesson*. Soyinka bases his works on Yoruba myth and cosmology, which he explicates in detail in his book, *Myth, Literature, and the African Worldview*. Based on this book, therefore, Bissiri claims Wilson's (1990) play is based on Soyinka's conception of the idea of "mythical thinking" (Soyinka, 1976, p.47). Thus, instances of the dominance of ghosts—Robert Sutter's and the Ghost of Yellow Dog—in the play are mythemes that have direct links to what Soyinka (1976) talks about as manifestations of mythical figures in African literature. Again, Bissiri intimates that "music constitutes a fundamental aspect of Africanness, a cultural feature that functions at both secular and religious levels" (p. 108). This should not be misunderstood to mean that music is a preserve of the African, however, it should be understood as a means of performing rituals that are similar—if not the same—in the African context. At the religious level, Bissiri

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

mentions that music functions differently in the lives of each of the characters in the play. For instance, he argues that "Berniece (…) re-takes possession of her identity through playing the piano at the end of the play" (p. 109). This act in turn helps her "reasserts the functionality of music as a cosmic language" (p. 109). On the secular level, Bissiri (1996) mentions that the songs by Boy Willie, Doaker, Winning Boy, and Lymon could be seen as works of secular music that invoke a sense of community and togetherness. Another aspect of Africanness that Bissiri discusses in Wilson's (1990) play, *The Piano Lesson* is the art of storytelling. He argues that Wilson's characters are "fantastic storytellers," (p. 110) with each character having a personal or communal story to share. Bissiri (1996) therefore concludes by reiterating the point that August Wilson's conscious effort to adapt African elements in his play, *The Piano Lesson*, is a way of identifying with his black African American root. We see in Bissiri's discussion of *The Piano Lesson* the African basis of the play, and this subsequently leads to the thought that a continuous exploration of other specific Africanness in the play, such as reading the play as a dilemma tale, is not out of place. Instead, it will be an affirmation of Bissiri's findings, and beyond that, it will greatly contribute to the on-going discussions on the African-based dramaturgy of August Wilson. This way, to borrow Amadou Bissiri's words, Wilson's voice will be heard as—like any other African American writer—"the black American speaking authentically" (p. 112).

Another African-centered reading of Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is by Boan (1998). In his essay, *Call and response: Parallel slave narrative in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*, Devon Boan pays attention to what he refers to as "black folk

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

tradition" (p. 264) in Wilson's fourth play, *The Piano Lesson*. Boan terms this black folk tradition upon which the narrative of the play is weaved as the call-and-response narrative. According to Devon Boan, *The Piano Lesson* is "a play within a play wherein a literal slave narrative is integrated into a metaphorical one." (p. 262). Boan claims that Boy Willie's narrative and Doaker's narrative about the piano constitute what is referred to in folk tradition as the call. Thus, the slave narratives carved on the piano become the call and each member of the Charles' reaction towards the piano and the carvings on it becomes the response. Boan therefore intimates that an "interchange between the two narratives becomes a form of the black folk tradition of call and response" (p. 264). Boan's contestations on the carvings on the piano and the individual reactions from the Charles family is illuminating. This is because it problematises the interpretations of the text which ultimately makes it open for other interpretations such as conceiving it as a dilemma tale. Conversely, Boan's focus on the narrative technique employed in *The Piano Lesson* suggests that, covertly, the play is open to the possibility of being read from other black folk tradition such as the dilemma tale.

It is therefore relevant as it will be imperative to consider reading the play as a dilemma tale. This is because, contrary to what Boan (1998) refers to as the counternarratives in the play, this thesis will demonstrate that each of the Charles' family member's conception of the piano—their legacy—is not a contradiction. Rather, it is as a result of the multiplicity of experiences that each character has garnered over the years. This conclusion would be made possible if the narrative of the play is seen as a dilemma tale. This is because, the dilemma tale, as this study

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

will demonstrate, provides the space for alternative voices to be heard around a central topic, in which in this sense, the alternative voices are those of Boy Willie, Berniece, and, by extension, Doaker, the paternal uncle to these siblings.

Beyond what has been discussed so far, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* has also received some essentialist readings. Premised on the fact that African Americans have and continue to assert themselves in a structurally racialised space like that of America, occupying material wealth dominates their resistance strategies in fighting back. Pennino (2009), for example, explores the role of property in twentieth-century African American drama by subjecting *The Piano Lesson* to a Lockean reading. In his essay, *Property, person, and piano: Ownership in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*, Anthony Pennino interrogates what ownership means to the African American. Pennino (2009) contends that:

> [t]he DNA of *The Piano Lesson* is that of families and communities torn asunder but that still remain families and communities through the sharing of oral histories, music, art, or, in other words, the media of culture; within this tradition, *The Piano Lesson*, a play—though written, a work presented on stage in performance—also assumes the role of cultural artifact (p. 25).

According to Anthony Pennino, the conflict between the siblings—Boy Willie and Berniece—stems from the fact that each sibling has a different proprietary understanding of the piano—a leitmotif on whose apprehension the play's narrative revolves around. In a similar vein, Sandy Alexandre appears to agree with Pennino on this materialist interpretation of the play. In her essay, *[The]*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

things what happened with our family: Property and inheritance in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson, she also, based on John Locke's explanation of labour and property, explores the possibilities of the radical notion of proprietary blackness. She argues against the backdrop that there is a radical shift from the conception of what is understood as ownership by African Americans. Far from the assumption that ownership is a long-time association with an object or a property, for Alexandre, the materialist understanding of ownership is that it is "the right to private property [that] can only be a consequence of the individual labour put into that property" (p.75). In this regard, Boy Willie's contestation to sell the piano to take a portion of the dividends to buy land that was formerly owned by Robert Sutter, a slave master, is understood in its right context as Alexandre claims. Thus, unlike Berniece, Boy Willie would rather want to own a portion of history that he indirectly laboured to create. Although this way of reading the characterisation of Boy Willie and Berniece is problematic, it suggests one thing: that there is a diversified interpretation, on the material level, of what the past means to African Americans. This ultimately suggests that interpreting *The Piano Lesson* as a dilemma tale will serve the ultimate purpose of better understanding, on the material level, what the past means to African Americans.

So far, this section of the chapter has positioned August Wilson as an African American playwright within the context of the discussion of black art and black aesthetics. Secondly, the discussion has specifically focused on literature that have interpreted Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* from different critical perspectives. What these essays have revealed at this stage of the chapter is that first, August

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Wilson admonishes that his plays, which include *The Piano Lesson,* could be interpreted from the African oral literary perspective; second, the discussion has also revealed that *The Piano Lesson* has an open-ended structure; hence, reading it as a dilemma tale is not out of place, instead, it will be an addition to the scholarship on Wilson's dramaturgy. In what follows, I engage with the debates on the use of African oral forms or folklore within the African literary canon.

The Prevalence of Oral Tradition in African Texts

Folklore, or oral tradition in its broadest sense, may have a universal outlook (Propp, 1968), but it is deeply rooted and popularised in an (African) context (Ben-Amos, 1971; Finnegan, 2012; Peek and Yankah, 2004). This is partly as a result of the late development of chirographic practise in many parts of the African context, especially in the south of the Sahara. This late development of writing in the sub-Saharan African context necessitated the prevalence and popularisation of what has come to be known as oral tradition (Finnegan, 2012). This notwithstanding, African folklore or oral literary forms still permeate the African literary space. Be it in the traditional literary genres such as novels or plays or in the new and emerging genres such as popular culture, the art of storytelling in the African fashion is still ongoing and garnering critical attention.

This idea of the prevalence of African oral tradition in African literary works is suggestive of the fact that the African creative writer—and by extension, the creative producer—is not oblivious to the significance of using the various oral tropes in his or her works. In this regard, it becomes obvious that African oral

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

tradition is still and continues to be in motion at home. Contrary to the philosophical interpretations of the term *home*, as in the case of Ahmed's (2000) explication of the term, *home* is used in this context to mean a place of origin. Moreover, it is worth reiterating that (African) oral tradition is used in this work to mean oral folkloric elements that have their roots in Africa as Iyasere (1975) clarifies. Therefore, oral tradition in motion at home suggests the idea that folkloric elements or African oral traditions are still employed, critiqued and used in African literary works.

Contributing to the discussion of the prevalence of oral tradition in African literary works and their relevance, Eileen Julien, in her 1992 work, *African Novel and the Question of Orality*, demonstrates that the African novelist employs folkloristic elements in his or her writings. According to Julien (1992), this conscious means of adopting and adapting oral tropes in African literary works has its own interpretative relevance. Thus, for Eileen Julien, folkloric elements are embedded in African literary works as a demonstration of intertextuality. This is to be understood as a situation where the produced literary works interact with various oral traditions. In this regard, the adopted oral tradition—in a significant way—influences the entire narrative in which it is employed within.

True to Eileen's observation, it appears to be the case that African literary works, in one way or the other, seem to interact with the indigenous ways of telling a story in the African cultural space. Of particular interest among the various oral traditions—but not exclusive in its usage—to the African writer is the trickster tale.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Mwinlaaru and Nkansah (2018), for instance, claim that the Ghanaian novelist, Benjamin Kwakye, uses the trickster tale in his debut novel, *Clothes of Nakedness,* as a signifier to construe the postcolonial issues of survival and economic insecurity in the urban centre of Ghana. What Mwinlaaru and Nkansah's (2018) discussion suggests is that the appropriation of African oral traditional elements situates well in comprehending topical issues facing an African region like Ghana. Mwinlaaru and Nkansah's (2018) claim about the proliferation of African oral tradition in African text is supported by Shipley (2015), who also holds the view that Ghanaian theatre, in its inception, was full of the adaption of the oral traditions. According to Shipley Jesse, the Ghanaian theatre in its early days appropriated the trickster tale tradition as a reimagination of urban Ghana. For him, and like others who have reflected on the idea of survival in the cosmopolitan urban spaces of the African postcolony, the trickster character becomes the imaginary for conceiving how to learn to survive and live finally.

Another function of oral tradition, as seen through its usage in African literary texts, is its disruption of political hegemony. Again, reflecting on the trickster tale as an instance of an oral tradition, Yékú (2016) maintains that Akpos, the popular Nigerian cyberpop hero, functions as a trickster character who webs his means of survival across liminal spaces. As a metaphor for challenging and disrupting unpopular human institutions such as racism and political trickery, Yékú contends that oral tradition makes it possible for this cultural hero to engage with political hegemony. He therefore concludes that Akpos tales, "enable a remapping of the contours of power in Nigeria" (p. 245). This is perhaps the one-

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

sided function of all African oral traditions. It is the case that other oral traditions like the dilemma tale, when conceived in other African literary texts could provide another perspective to understanding the African space and its people.

This discussion on the appropriation of oral traditions in African literary space transcends written texts such as novels. Critics, on the other hand, have paid equal attention to oral tradition and its use in African cinema. Contributing to the other side of the discussion, Tomaselli, Shapperson, and Eke (1995), based on a number of Francophone cinema demonstrate that indeed, oral traditions permeate African movies. They claim that African cinema is a Third World cinema, which they explain a Third World cinema as "a cinema that offers resistance to imperialism and oppression" (p. 25). They further maintain that African cinema is mostly scripted based on oral tradition as a way of indigenising African thoughts and practices. With this, they claim:

> [o]ntologies shaped by orality assume that the world consists of interacting forces of cosmological scale and significance rather than of discrete secularized concrete objects (p. 18).

This conception of orality within the scope of African cinema suggests that the adoption of orality is significantly symbolic. Thus, it signifies both the materialistic and metaphysical beliefs of the African people. Moreover, what Tomaselli, Shapperson, and Eke are suggesting is that oral tradition is like a meta-discourse that speaks to the thoughts and practises of the African people. In addition to the above, Diawara (1988), in his essay, *Popular Culture and Oral Tradition in*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

African Film, also adds that interpreting African cinema through orality is like looking "straight in the eyes" (p. 6) of the film; the critic turns to better see and understand not only the issue conveyed but the aesthetics of the art as well. She therefore maintains that orality is the language of the African film. By implication, Manthia Diawara suggests that orality provides the better option for interpreting and understanding African films.

Based on what has been discussed so far, it seems to be the case that there is no contention to the assumption that oral tradition is prevalent in African literary texts. Moreso, it appears the attention has been on only the trickster tale as a folkloric element that is used in African literary texts. But contrary to this, and as this work will demonstrate, the dilemma tale is also used as a narrative technique in African literary texts like Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. The essence, then, will be that viewing the film through the lens of the dilemma tale will give insight to understanding, in its proper narrative context, what legacy or the historical past means to the Ghanaian and, by extension, the African. Furthermore, this alternative interpretation of the film will seek to contribute to the debate on the role of oral tradition in African literary texts in general and African cinema in particular.

This section has critiqued works and discussions on the location of orality in the African literary context. In what follows, I give a plot summary of the movie which is followed by a review of critical works on Kwaw Ansah's 1988 FESPACO award-winning film, *Heritage Africa*.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Synopsis of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) Movie

Produced and premiered in 1988 but set in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, during the Gold Coast or British colonial era, *Heritage Africa* is a dramatisation of the rise and fall of the first black District Commissioner by name Quincy Arthur Bosomfield, née Kwesi Atta Bosomefi. The film revolves around the protagonist, Mr. Bosomfield, and his loss of selfhood due to his incessant quest to please the colonial government at the detriment of himself and his community.

In the narration, Mr. Bosomfield attends a church service with his family together with other converts of Catholicism. His younger child, Archibald, goes out to get fresh air during mass but ends up at a fetish dance ground. The father locates him amidst other children after the mass has ended, sends him home, and whips him mercilessly, punctuating every stroke of the whip with the chorus, "a Christian child never watches a fetish dance". Young Archibald's corporal punishment continues the next day in school after the father had complained to the local school headteacher. As a result of the whipping, young Archibald dies of tetanus. The wife complains about her husband's attitude, but Mr. Bosomfield would rather respond by beating her. She leaves Mr. Bosomfield. Afterward, the mother—Maame Afua Atta—of Mr. Bosomfield hears about her son's promotion to the District Commissioner (DC) position in the colonial government and comes to his new residence to congratulate him and also hand over their family's 500-year-old *kuduo* (casket) to him. He receives it only to hand it over to the governor of the colony. The mother rains insults and curses on him for his act of willingly giving out their

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

family's heirloom to the colonial governor. This curse haunts him till he finally dies.

As an indictment of colonialism and a hopeful re-assessment of the African tribe, the film ends on the screens but opens with a conversation on what heritage means to the protagonist and his mother which can be seen as representations of the colonial African tribe. The film presents conflicting comprehensions of heritage to the African.

Tracing the Critical Receptions on Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988)

In 1989, during its 11th edition of awarding the best picture motion picture from the African continent, FESPACO—a Pan-African film and television festival organised biennially in Ouagadougou, Benin—adjured Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* film as the Gold Stallion—Grand Prize (Étalon d'Or de Yennenga—Grand prix). This award was organised by a committee which was chaired by Ousmane Sembene, an African filmmaker whom many cinema critics credit as one of the pioneers of African cinema. Fundamentally, Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* film was awarded for its distinctive contribution to cinematography in Ghana, as the chair of the award ceremony, Ousmane Sembene, mentioned.

Beyond this point, the film—*Heritage Africa*—has received considerably little critical attention despite its global outlook. This notwithstanding, critical essays and public conversations on this film have discussed it from different thematic perspectives.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

In a conversational interview with Francoise Pfaff which was later published in 1995, Kwaw Ansah, in an affirmation of an assertion he had earlier made about his movie ten years ago about it being a crusade for cultural revitalisation, states that:

> I can't afford not to since, as you well know, the Black Race in general has gone through a long period of cultural deprivation. In today's Ghana, we are still suffering from foreign cultural intrusions and interventions. We, as black people, have contributed much to world culture, and we still have so much to contribute. Yet, we are being made to feel as if we were coming from nowhere... (Pfaff, 1995, pp. 186–187).

As a cultural activist, as he has consistently described himself publicly, Kwaw Ansah is unapologetic about his position on which side of history he is on. Unsurprisingly, and like most of his contemporary African American (literary) apologetics, for Kwaw Ansah, his mission in Third World cinema is to propagate African culture and right the wrongs of what has been erroneously perpetuated about the African/Black race. As an African cultural apologist, Kwaw Ansah believes that the African culture has gone through various deprivations. And to salvage this situation, he chooses film, a digital medium that appeals widely to the masses, to convey his message. With this intention in mind, and in the same interview with Pfaff in 1995, Kwaw Ansah therefore comments that *Heritage Africa*, like his other films, tries to reclaim and preach about the positive aspects of the lost African culture.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

This thematic concern of cultural identity and identity reclamation is further echoed in Anyidoho (2000). In his essay, *The struggle for liberation is not yet won: Kwaw Ansah's Heritage Africa,* Kofi Anyidoho describes Ansah's (1988) movie as a national liberation movie that brings to the fore the issue of the cultural alienation of Africans from their own cultural values. Reflecting on the characterisation of Kwesi Atta Bosomefi also known as Quincy Arthur Bosomfield, the protagonist of the movie, Anyidoho (2000) contends that *Heritage Africa* is a "soul-searching film" (p. 318). He claims the protagonist is a microcosm of the Ghanaian and, by extension, the African who, having received formal education, turns to prioritise the values of the Empire over his or her indigenous culture. This idea is similarly echoed in Aryee (2015), who also describes the film as a discussion of cultural alienation and its repercussions. Again, Anyidoho (2000) discusses Mr. Bosomfield as a tragic character whose alienation from his culture leads to his tragic death. This tragic discussion on the protagonist comes at the backdrop that Mr. Bosomfield has willingly donated his family's 500 years old heirloom to Guggiswood, the Governor of the colony "as a humble token of high esteem" (p. 318).

This heirloom is central to the narrative. It is a metaphor for the spiritual link between Bosomfield's ancestors and his family. Bosomfield willingly giving it out to the Governor, therefore, according to Anyidoho (2000) is a betrayal of sorts to his family, which consequently could be looked at as Bosomfield's attempt to alienate himself from his cultural roots. Besides, prior to this voluntary donation of the heirloom to Governor Guggiswood, he had already betrayed and alienated himself from his cultural roots by anglicising his names from Kwesi (a Sunday male

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

born), Atta (a twin) and Bosomefi (a reincarnated illustrious ancestor) to Quincy Arthur Bosomfield. Anyidoho concludes that *Heritage Africa* is an important part of a larger anticolonial project aimed at liberating Africans from their colonial legacy. Kofi Anyidoho's discussion of Ansah's (1988) film unravels an essential thematic—alienation and reclamation of cultural identity—concern that is central to the overall narrative. His essay suggests that further thematic interpretations could be given to the movie most especially as a literary text.

Another critical essay that comments on Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* is Ennin (2014). In her work, *Men, sex, and power in two Ghanaian films*, Theresah Ennin examines the idea of men and masculine intricacies in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* and Shirley Frimpong-Manso's *The Perfect Picture*. In her intimation of Ansah's (1988) movie, Ennin claims that *Heritage Africa* is a film about identity crisis. She explains that this identity crisis is as a result of the making of the protagonist as a traditional masculine figure who is a reconfiguration of colonialism. She contends then that "when he gives away his inheritance, Bosomfield [the protagonist of the film] declares a rejection of his African identity and a break with his cultural roots" (p. 12). According to Ennin (2014), Bosomfield, the "Obedient Boy of the Empire" as Anyidoho (2000, p.316) describes him, loses his cultural identity as a Ghanaian and, by extension, an African because of his willful masculine attitude, which subsequently leads to his demise. It is worth mentioning that this toxic traditional masculine features of Bosomfield does not cause only him gravely; instead, he loses his immediate family—the wife leaves him, young Archibald, his only son, dies and his mother even curses him. Ennin

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

(2014) therefore concludes that (c)overtly, *Heritage Africa* is a crusade for a new African man who can blend traditional images of masculinity with his formal education for the collective good of the Ghanaian or African society. Essentially, Ennin's masculine interpretation of the movie is revealing. However, beyond this masculine intimacy in the movie, this study will demonstrate that the predilection of Ansah towards this movie is to crusade for a cultural revitalisation and that is exactly what the movie does.

In a similar sense, Meyer (1999) thinks of Ansah's (1988) movie, *Heritage Africa* as a call for the emancipation of black people. In her intimation, Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* is a pop culture material concerned with the "emancipation of the colonised intellectual and seeking to restore authentic cultural roots" (p. 93). According to Meyer Birgit, Ansah strategically uses a medium—cinema—that appeals to the contemporary masses to drive home his cultural restoration message. As "an anti-colonial cinema par excellence" (p. 102), the film does more than just drive home the cultural message. Inherent in the narrative is the interrogation of the idea of the excesses of colonialism. According to Birgit (1999), the film also asks what the African can do with his heritage. The answer, which Birgit (1999) does not overtly provide, as it presents itself as more problematic and complex than it may seem on the surface. She concludes, however, that:

> The emergence of this popular art form certainly calls for a fresh approach, which leaves behind reified notions of an authentic African Culture struggling against the West, and urges us to think about these two sides together (p. 112).

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

In response to the call that is echoed in Meyer's (1999) concluding remarks, this thesis will demonstrate that the dilemma tale can be a new approach that can help critics interpret Ansah's (1988) film. Moreover, although rethinking an alternative approach to interpreting the film from both an Afro-centric and an Euro-centric perspective is relevant to the scholarship, this may defeat the purpose for which the movie was produced. The intention of the movie as Kwaw Ansah claims in his 1995 conversation with Francoise Pfaff was to preach for a restoration of the lost African heritage. Interpreting the film from an Afro-centric perspective therefore aligns with the intention and purpose of the film. This way, interpreting the film as a dilemma tale is therefore not only relevant but situates well within the overall Afro-centric intention of the playwright who is in the person of Kwaw Paintsil Ansah.

Beyond these thematic concerns, however, is the dearth of knowing what narrative technique was used in the film. And as this thesis will demonstrate, it is imperative to examine the narrative technique that Kwaw Ansah uses in this anticolonial Afro-centric film to arrive at the various thematic concerns. Moreover, as indicated earlier, Kwaw Ansah is conscious of the Africanness of his film. However, it appears that critical discussions about his film have been centred on the themes, giving little to no attention to the narrative technique. This thesis will demonstrate that Ansah's (1988) movie can be interpreted as a dilemma tale. This is because the narrative presents a dilemma centred around the heirloom that the protagonist, Mr. Bosomfield, receives from his mother, Maame Afua Atta. This thesis contends that it is only after fully comprehending the narrative technique

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

used in the film from the literary African oral perspective that we can fully comprehend the African-centered theme(s) that Kwaw Ansah discusses in the film. The dilemma tale as the narrative technique of the film therefore, as this thesis argues, provides this avenue for interpreting the Afro-centric issues in the film.

Comparative Discussion on African and African American Literary Texts

There appears to be a dearth of works that focus on a comparative reading of African and African American literary texts, despite the similarities that these two seemingly different cultures share in common. Although a number of critics have made the attempts to make African-centered meanings from African American literature (Benesch, 1988; Dvinge, 2006; Jones, 1991; Rutledge, 2013), the gap remains that there seems to be little literary comparative discussion on these two cultures. Fundamentally, however, a comparative probe into the literary connections between these two cultures will invariably extend our understanding as well as affirm the assumption that there still appears to be a continuity of tradition between these cultures despite the repercussions of the Middle Passage.

Moreover, beyond the esoteric knowledge that will emerge from reading literary texts from these two cultures comparatively, seeing their works interact thematically or conceptually with each other is, in a way, contrary to Sara Ahmed's expression, a kind of *familiar encounter* instead of a *strange encounter*. Relegating the postcolonial undertones and idioms associated with the term *encounter* as Ahmed (2000) suggests, this work uses the term in its nominal form as a reunion between two groups. Moreover, this *encounter* is *familiar* in the sense that these

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

cultural groups—African and African Americans—appear to share a lot in common, and these similarities are manifest in their literary works.

To continue, although the literature on a literary comparative between African and African American is scanty, one such critical essay that demonstrates a link between African and African American literary works is Yékú (2021). In his work, *Trickster and female warriors: Womanist interweavings from Orita to Wakanda*, James Yékú explores conceptual and cinematic associations between African and African American cultural traditions. Based on Tunde Kelani's *The Narrow Path* and Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*, Yékú specifically examines how the Yoruba concept of Esu, the trickster figure, plays out in these two movies as a discussive tool in exploring black womanhood and sheroism. He demonstrates that Africans and African Americans are connected in that both cultures privilege women in the cultural setup despite the strong presence of patriarchy. He subsequently claims the trickster image plays out in both movies through the characterisations of the female protagonists in these movies. This Afro-centric interpretation of these, especially Coogler's *Black Panther*, resonates with the thinking that African American fictional works signal a connection with the African continent, as Ananya Kabir, one of the critics of the movie, mentioned during its premiere in 2018. It is therefore in line to do a comparative discussion on the narrative architecture of August Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson*, and Kwaw Ansah's movie, *Heritage Africa* where the former is an African American and the latter is an African. Consequently, this extends our understanding of the similarities and differences between these cultures.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

In a similar vein, though beyond the screen representations of the connection between Africans and African Americans, Okonkwo (2022) presents evidence of a literary as well as an aesthetic vision that cuts across the works of Toni Morrison and Chinua Achebe. In his book, *Kindred souls: Toni Morrison and Chinua Achebe*, Okonkwo puts up the argument that African and African American literary writers are *literary kindreds*. His argument is that both Achebe and Morrison build their narratives on what he calls *villagism*, which he defines as follows:

> The consciousness of the village, of modernity—and the city-impacting rural models of being, thinking, doing, and valuing the world and in the world—is not eclipsed. (pp. 43–44)

Okonkwo further suggests that, based on the parallel thematic issues such as colonialism and slavery, as well as conceptual concerns in the oeuvres of Achebe and Morrison, it is therefore imperative to consider these two literary giants as kindred souls. Again, Okonkwo's contestation on the intersection between Achebe and Morrison provides the basis for an extension to be made between other African and African American writers like August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah. This form of extension is relevant in the sense that it does not only augment our understanding of these two cultures but it as well demonstrates that these cultures may appear more similar than different.

Moreso, Thomas (2003) reads Ralph Ellison's *Invincible Man*, Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* as

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

thematically linked through the issue of diasporic subjectivity. He maintains that while Ellison and Morrison chart the path to navigating around and confronting racial injustice and racism in America, Tutuola also echoes the idea of (colonial) subjectivity in his text. Fundamentally, Valorie Thomas argues that:

> All three texts encode vertigo as more than inexplicable instances of perceptual disturbance. Vertigo captures the relationship of the internal experience of the colonized to the colonized environment (p. 82).

In his intimation, Thomas (2003) claims that there is no doubt that inherently, there is a bond of sort having its trace from the ancestral home of Africa between Africans and African Americans. This link, however, manifests itself through the various thematic concerns that are recurrent in the works of, in this case, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Amos Tutuola.

From the afore discussion, it is evident that there appears to have been little critical attention on literary comparative interpretations of African and African American texts. What is more? What appears to have been done is a look at either an Afro-centric reading of an African American literary text or methodologically read an African American text through an African text (see Bissiri, 1996). Per this, a comparative reading of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* will not only expand the literature; instead, it stands a great deal of filling a knowledge gap of contributing towards the discussion on what legacy—the excess of either colonialism or slavery—or the past means to both the African and the African American.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Theoretical Review

This section clarifies the theoretical context within which this thesis is situated. It goes further to discuss the analytical tool to be used in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

This study is situated within the broader theoretical context of orality. Orality is understood in this study as the folkloric elements that are prevalent in the thoughts and artistic expressions of cultures based on verbal expressions (Ong, 2002). This folklore is classified based on its form and content, such as tales, which are popular in oral cultures such as African (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1977; Yankah, 2004) and African American societies (Ellison, 1964; Gates, 1988). The point worth reiterating is that the advent of the technology of writing (Ong, 2002) has made it possible for its imaginative creatives to ensure its continuity in their writings.

As an orally based theory, orality takes its form from verbal expressions such as history and myths. According to V. Y. Mudimbe, history and myth "operate as bodies of functional ideas and truths responding to the needs of a specific community and interact[ing] with these needs" (Mudimbe, 1991, p. 98). The needs of these specific communities in question include but are not limited to their worldview and, for instance, what tradition means to them. By extension, what Mudimbe suggests is that African epistemology is grounded in African ontological thoughts. Similarly, Ralf Ellison argues in his book *Shadow and Act* that the theory

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

of orality provides a basis for better understanding African American society. Ellison (1964) therefore claims that:

> For us [Afro Americans], the question should be what in our background is worth preserving or abandoning. The clue to this can be found in folklore which offers the first drawings of any group's character (...) It projects the wisdom in symbols which express the groups will to survive... (p. 172).

Fundamentally, what Ralf Ellison suggests is that African Americans' link with their background—Africa—is a better life line for their survival and not just that, but the understanding of the lived experiences of their society.

In explicating this thought of better understanding oral cultures and their arts through their own body of reasoning, Henry Louis Gates theorises on orality in *The Signifying Monkey* that African American cultural practices (and texts) can be interpreted within folkloric traditions. These folkloric traditions he mentions are located in orality. He therefore traces the folkloric origins of African American cultural practises of *signifying by* some selected Afro-American texts and subjects them to interpretation through the Yoruba Esu Elegbara trickster motif and the Signifying Monkey found in the African American context. He suggests that "Black writers (...) turn to the vernacular in various formal ways to inform their creation of written fiction" (Gates, 1988, p. XXII). By turning to *the vernacular*, these writers make use of the tradition of orality to convey their message, which is often almost about their community. This idea of the usage of the vernacular is utilised when, in her Nobel Prize speech in 1993, Toni Morrison carved her narrative of the efficacy

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

of language and the creative writer through the fable of the bird in the hands of a group of nameless children and the old blind woman. Morrison's attempt to ground her proposition within a fable is intellectually relevant. This is because it creates the appropriate context—the use of language for its authentic purpose—for her message to be understood by the African culture which she comes from. Due to the broader conceptualisations of orality, this work focuses on an aspect of orality, which is the dilemma tale, as the interpretive tool for the analysis of this thesis. This selection is based on the premise that the dilemma tale as an interpretive tool speaks to the issues being discussed in this thesis.

This study explains the dilemma tale as an offshoot of orality. Although it is from the broader theoretical context of orality, the dilemma tale will be used in this study as the interpretive framework. Specifically, this study is based on the *form* of the dilemma tale as the guiding interpretive framework.

The dilemma tale type is one of the many folktales in the African oral oeuvre, and its structure, features, and relevance to understanding the literary space of Africa are essential to human understanding. This tale type has been discussed by a number of scholars (cf. Bascom, 1975; Ben-Amos, 1971; Propp, 1968). William Bascom, for instance, states that:

> [dilemma tales] are prose narratives that leave the listeners with a choice among alternatives, such as which of several characters has done the best, deserves a reward, or should win an argument or a case... (Bascom, 1975, p.1).

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The Dilemma tale follows the narration of a story that is open ended with multiple choices for the participatory audience to choose from or take a side with. The narrator, or the speaker, presents the narration without any prejudice; the narration is presented in such a way that whichever side the audience takes, there is a basis for it. The choices that are presented in this tale type are often based on morality, ethics, or cultural grounds, and the aftermath—although there is no end to this tale type—is that it provides room for alternative views or choices on a situation. Depending on the dimension the audience may want to take, each participant is neither right nor wrong. However, the judgment from the audience usually emanates from the grounds that each choice presents. Ethically, a dilemma tale may be judged by the audience based on the moral principle that each audience may prefer.

According to Bascom (1975), "two broad categories of dilemma tales may be distinguished" (p.14). The first category involves competitions where the audience is required to make a judgment, and this judgment usually comes in the form of stating one's stance on the strength of the narrative character. The second category involves situations where the narrator usually resolves the dilemma and "involve[s] moral or ethical judgments" (p. 14). This particular category sheds light on cultural norms and values. Bascom (1975) states that "there is no sharp dividing line between these two categories" (p.15). The narrative structure of the dilemma tale is in two parts; the first part involves the actual tale or the narration. In this structural part, the narrator tells the tale as it is and leaves it to the audience to take their own stance. The second part involves the discussion that ensues after the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

narration. When the narration ends, it does not end entirely but leads to further deliberations. Another feature of the dilemma tale is its interrogative formula. At the end of every narration, the audience is left with a thought-provoking question—either explicitly or implicitly—and its answer is dependent on the side that the audience chooses.

At the end of every narration of a dilemma tale, the implication goes beyond the mere participation of the audience in the tale; as Bascom (1975, p.3) succinctly puts it, "it is their intellectual function and their relevance to ethical standards... that make dilemma tales interesting" (p.3). The point is that after the narration, the solicitation from the audience provides the avenue for an intellectual interaction where each participant takes his or her stance and provides a justification for such a stance. This involves an intellectual exercise, for it allows the audience to select among alternatives and construct a persuasive argument. On ethical grounds, the dilemma tale type allows for knowing the alternatives available and questioning the ethics of a community.

Contrary to Bascom's (1975) claim that "...dilemma tales have little literary merit" (p.3), Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah (2006) show that this claim may not necessarily apply to all literature. They assert that a dilemma tale is a literary product, and as such, it gets the reader involved in the meaning-making process of the literary text. As a literary product, the dilemma tale operates on two main levels: first, as a structural device; and second, as a rhetorical device. As a structural device, the dilemma tale allows for the organisation of the narrative around a

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

defined issue. Thus, the dilemma is going to be centred around a central idea from which different perspectives will emerge from. Moreover, structurally, the dilemma tale type has a less complex plot structure, creating a situation where the narration is short with relatively no denouement (Bascom, 1975; Yankah, 2004). Unlike traditional tale narratives like fairy tales, the dilemma tale type comes with its simplistic form (Propp, 1968). The narration begins with an explanation of the central problem in which the characters are involved; each character makes his or her point(s), and the narrator concludes by inviting the audience to an open debate or discussion about which side of the narration or whose point is ethically, morally, or culturally correct, and why. Conversely, the narrator presents an unresolved issue that is meant to be debated by the audience. This other side of the narration makes the dilemma tale open again for another discussion, for while the main narration ends, it opens up for another discussion. As a rhetorical device, the dilemma tale allows for the articulation of alternative views on a defined issue.

The literary merit of the dilemma tale therefore implicitly lies in its applicability as an interpretive framework for literary texts. This is because the characteristics of the dilemma tale render it necessary to engage in the politics of interpretation since, as an oral art form that does not end, the dilemma tale provides a multiplicity of ways of interpreting a text. It provides an alternative means of open-ended discussion of an issue. Consequently, the literary function of the dilemma tale as an interpretive tool is that it shows that meaning-making in a complex society is divergent and not unitary. As a literary product, the dilemma tale will therefore serve as the interpretive tool in this thesis. Attention will be

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

turned to specific features of the tale that manifest in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on two broad items. The first part did an empirical or related review of literature that has bearings on this thesis. The second part reviewed the theory and the analytical tool for this study. The related reviewed literature reveals that orality is central in the literary ontologies of both African and African Americans. Moreover, it can be deduced that despite the (literary) implications of the usage of African oral tropes (orality) in the literary works of Africans and African Americans, there appears to be a dearth in how comparatively, these two cultures dwell on the efficacy of orality to examine what the legacy of their past means to them. This work therefore seeks to fill this knowledge gap. In the next chapter, a discussion of the two selected texts is conducted based on the objectives of this work.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER THREE

CONFRONTING THE AMBIGUOUS AFRICAN AMERICAN PAST: THE DILEMMA IN AUGUST WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON*

History is the fruit of power but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots (Trouillot, 1995, p. XIX).

Introduction

This chapter is a response to the first research question: through the dilemma tale, what does the past mean to the African American in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*? In response to this question, this chapter specifically focuses on the characters; Boy Willie, and Berniece, and how their characterisations speak to the ambiguous reception of the past to the African American. The ambiguous African American past is operationally explained in this study as the reception of the history of African Americans as a history that is narrated and conceived from different perspectives. These specific characters—Boy Willie and Berniece—are selected based on their different attitudes and divergent comprehension of the piano, which, this study will establish, is the metaphorical representation of the Charles family's slavery past. Conversely, the chapter presents the case that each of the siblings, Boy Willie and Berniece, makes regarding the selling and/or otherwise of the piano.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

"The Piano as a Piece of Wood": The Case of Boy Willie

At the heart of the hermeneutical reading of the oeuvre of August Wilson is orality, and *The Piano Lesson*, as Boan (1998) argues, is no exception. Revealingly, two broader aspects of the dilemma tale as a literary product play out in the play. First, it is a structural device. *The Piano Lesson* is structured around the oral tradition of the dilemma tale to reveal the thematic concern about the meaning of the past and identity to the two siblings. Thus, as a structural device functioning as a narrative technique, the dilemma tale makes it possible for Boy Willie's claim about the piano to be examined, and most importantly, to be seen as a counternarrative to that of Berniece, his sister. Second, as the discussion will demonstrate, the dilemma tale is seen in the play as a rhetorical device. This is because the interpretation of the play is open to listening to the side of Boy Willie as well as his sister about what to do with the piano. This section examines the case of Boy Willie with regard to what the piano means to him. Essentially, the arguments of Boy Willie about the piano are situated within Christina Sharp's (2016) conceptualisation of Black being *in the wake* or the consciousness of the afterlife of chattel slavery.

According to Sharp (2016) in her book entitled, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, she contends that:

> ...to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding (…) [r]ather than seeking a resolution to blackness's ongoing and

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

irresolvable abjection, one might approach Black being in the wake as a form of consciousness (Sharp, 2016, pp.13–14).

By this rumination, Christina Sharp proposes an alternative means for the descendants of the chattel slavery seeking to live finally after the shameful enterprise of slavery. Moreover, per Sharp's contestation, living as a black (African American/diasporan) person after the chattel slavery is to be aware of not just the present but what to make of the present with the past.

In *The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson examines how to live *in the wake of slavery*. By this, he proposes a sort of consciousness of being black after the chattel slavery and the quest to carve an identity for oneself to live finally. This is because the play presents the confrontation of the legacy of slavery's denial of black humanity through the abjection of blackness. And to achieve this black being, Boy Willie seeks *to be in the wake*. Thus, Boy Willie becomes conscious of what he seeks to do with his family's slavery past which is the piano.

As Christina Sharp proposes, this understanding of being Black consciously presents a binary position in which one can choose to be on either side of the Black experience. Moreover, this presentation of the binary positionality could be read as a dilemma of the conscious Black being. This understanding of black consciousness is contrary to what W.E.B. Du Bois proposes in his 1903 book titled *The Souls of Black Folks* as double-consciousness where he argues that African Americans suffer from a double identity crisis as a result of being torn between being Africans or being Americans.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The post-slavery *wakeness* or consciousness that Sharp (2016) proposes is one that leads an individual to choose to be aware of what identity he or she wants to carve for himself or herself. Thus, the African American in his or her quest to engage with post-slavery in a grand attempt to search for or deny his or her identity is presented with the binary and oppositional options. According to Bissiri (1996), and in contributing to the discussion on August Wilson's vision of engaging with the issue of slavery and identity, he opines that "to deny or to search for the past engages and determines one's ontological self, one's identity" (p. 101). This search for one's self-identity, however, can be situated within the notion of the dilemma tale, herein lies Boy Willie's engagement with his past to carve a new identity for himself; an identity of economic and racial freedom.

For Boy Willie, he seeks to occupy what Hartman and Wilderson (2003) term as "the position of the unthought" (p.183). To occupy the position of the unthought, according to Hartman and Wilderson (2013), is to work radically towards occupying certain *culturally impossible* positions. For Boy Willie, he seeks to trade "…that piece of wood for some land" (p. 50). This land in question belongs to James Sutter, a descendant of Robert Sutter, who was once a slave master of Boy Willie's family. This is a radical position that Boy Willie takes in order to break the boundaries and mentality of the enslaved. The position of the unthought, although it resonates with the idiom of the enslaved, as Hartman and Wilderson (2003) suggest, Boy Willie's pragmatic sense of making something economically tangible from the piano suggests that he seeks to occupy a socio-racially defiling status position that his father could not occupy. He seeks to own a property; a land of his

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

own to farm for himself. An endeavour that his referenced father could not dream about. Moreover, Boy Willie's attempts to sell the piano could be interpreted that he identifies himself with the passive and accommodationist class of African Americans who will face the history of slavery as a gesture toward the national integration project of America. His move affirms Pennino's (2009) point that property and economic ownership are central to the identity search for the African American. It is also a gesture towards an anti-exclusive white proprietary.

As Alexandre (2009) contends, a materialistic reading of *The Piano Lesson* suggests that Boy Willie's attempt to sell the piano is against the backdrop that he seeks to challenge "white propriety rights and privileges" (p. 73). This way, he assumes that right and status where if "[t]hey mistreat me I mistreat them right back. Ain't no difference in me and the white man "(p. 38). Essentially, this vision of Boy Willie is premised on the fact that he should by all means gain economic freedom, and the alternative means for him is to engage with the tripartite medium of his freedom. He says:

> Sutter's brother selling the land. He say he gonna sell it to me. That's why I come up here. I got one part of it. Sell them watermelons and get me another part. Get Berniece to sell that piano and I'll have the third part (p. 9)

Conceptually, Boy Willie presents his case such that he (c)overtly says his economic freedom is tied to the piano. He sees the piano as the last piece to complete his search for the economic freedom triad. He ultimately defines African

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

American freedom within the context of material proprietary. This way, his search for his part of the American pie lies in acquiring "land, the only thing God ain't making no more of" (p. 50). But most importantly for him, the piano must be turned into a commodified motif for him to achieve this vision. The narrative, through Berniece, reveals that he would go to every length to achieve this vision for when "[h]e get his mind fixed on something and can't nobody turn him from it." (p. 69). Revealingly, according to Sharp (2016), "living in/the wake of slavery is living the afterlife of property…" (p. 16). This means that the idea of property ownership is integral to the definition of *Black being* and post-slavery consciousness.

Beyond this leitmotif of the search for post-slavery black identity through property ownership, Boy Willie's case for the selling of the piano forms part of the grand crusade against racial suppression. This is because Boy Willie's radical attempt to sell the piano is geared towards demonstrating how "hidden affect is sustained as a result of and in resistance to an enduring struggle with racial oppression" (Singleton, 2009, p. 41). In this crusade against racial suppression, Boy Willie seeks to build on what Papa Boy Charles left him or, perhaps, continue what Papa Boy Charles would have done had he gotten this option that he (Boy Willie) has now, and that is to sell the piano to get him something tangible—land—that could be his forever. In this context, he tells Berniece:

> Many is the time I looked at my daddy and seen him staring off at his hands. I got a little older I know what he was thinking. He sitting there saying, "I got these big old hands but what I'm gonna do with them? Best I can do is make a fifty-acre crop for Mr. Stovall. Got these big old hands capable of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

> doing any-thing. I can take and build something with these hands. But where's the tools? All I got is these hands. Unless I go out here and kill me somebody and take what they got... it's a long row to hoe for me to get something of my own. So what I'm gonna do with these big old hands? What would you do?" See now . . . if he had his own land he wouldn't have felt that way. If he had something under his feet that belonged to him he could stand up taller. That's what I'm talking about. Hell, the land is there for everybody. All you got to do is figure out how to get you a piece. Ain't no mystery to life. You just got to go out and meet it square on. If you got a piece of land you'll find everything else fall right into place. You can stand right up next to the white man and talk about the price of cotton . . . the weather, and anything else you want to talk about. (pp. 91-92).

The argument of Boy Willie from the above quote is best understood within the context of hegemonic discourse. Antonio Gramsci (2005), in his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, explains hegemonic discourse in the context of making meaning from goods and practices to maintain economic and political status. From this perspective, hegemonic discourse is understood in this context as the process of creating and maintaining one's status through economic gains. This meaning of the term could be used in the slavery context where slaves owned no property and, hence had no economic freedom. Lovejoy (2000) reports that during the chattel slave period, the slave was the property of his or her master—the white and as such, "as property, slaves were chattel; which is to say they could be bought and sold" (pp.1-2). And the narrative is that everything the slave does, together with its

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

associative benefits, goes to the slave master. This was a one-sided way of living for the slave because the slave during the chattel slavery period only lived under the proprietary of her or his owner (Lovejoy, 2000). This is why as the narrative reports, the returns of any carvings that Papa Willie Boy made went to his slave master, Mr. Sutter. He lived for Mr. Sutter and therefore himself together with everything that came out of him became the property of Mr. Sutter.

Unsurprisingly, the imbalance of life bridled in a single life in the slave trade era transits to the post-slavery era where African Americans suffered—and continue to suffer—systemic racial suppression throughout the twentieth century and today. For Boy Willie, his father during the slave era did not have what it took to stand at par with the white man. And for him, owning land—the land of the Sutters—is a subversion of this (imperial) norm. That is, his ability to own a land which he could produce something from is a gesture, for him to confront this single livelihood of the African American whose ancestors were slaves. Ultimately, the piano becomes a racial resistance tool for Boy Willie in the sense that he could "stand right up next to the white man and talk about the price of cotton" (p. 92) should he be able to sell it and get the remaining part of the money to buy the land. In all these, Boy Willie does not only seek to assert himself as a black conscious man, but he also seeks to be an economically independent black man. This economic status will inherently be a racial resistance mechanism for him.

Furthermore, although he is a descendant of slaves, Boy Willie's position on what the past means is one steeped in an accommodationist materialism. In this

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

regard, the characterisation of Boy Willie resonates with the philosophical position of the 20th century African American cultural thinker, Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). This historical contextualisation of Boy Willie's character within 20th century African American cultural thought is not only in consonance with the historical setting of the play, but it is also suggestive of the dilemma intricacies of the play. During the 20th century period, Williamson (1986), as cited in Bissiri (1996), intimates that there were "two strains of Black American cultural thought represented by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois" (p. 100). Whereas the latter was an assimilationist, the former was passive, pragmatic, and accommodationist towards what the history of the chattel slavery means to the African American. This is a manifestation of a dilemma of sorts for African Americans during the Great Migration in the 1930's. Boy Willie, however, chooses to be on the property-owning side, a stance that will lead him to economic freedom and, most importantly, help him to live as he wants, whether with white or black folks. The description of the cultural stance of Booker T. Washington is echoed in the description of Boy Willie.

In *The Piano Lesson*, the stage direction in the opening scene of the first act describes Boy Willie thus:

> BOY WILLIE is thirty years old. He has an *infectious grin* and a *boyishness* that is apt for his name. He is *brash* and *impulsive*, *talkative* and somewhat *crude* in speech and manner (Emphases mine) (pp. 1-2).

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

This description from the above quote foregrounds the personality of Boy Willie. The descriptive adjectives ascribed to him are suggestive of his pragmatic although radical idea towards the conceptualisation of being Black. Thus, these words contextually foreground Boy Willie's ideals of being vociferous about what should be pragmatically done to the piano.

Again, to understand what the past means to Boy Willie is to come to the understanding of what the *past* means within the scope of black consciousness. Speaking on the power of story and the past, Michel-Rolph Trouillot intimates that "the past–or, more accurately, pastness–is a position" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 15) that one occupies at a point in time. In this regard, history or the aftermath of the historical event of the slave trade could be understood in the context of positionality. Thus, Boy Willie's materialist understanding of the history of slavery is a matter of position. Sharp (2016) adds that "in the wake, the past that is not past reappears to rupture the present" (p. 9), and this idea is echoed in the epigraph of this section, where Michel-Rolph Trouillot appears to suggest that pastness has power and that this power is dependent on what it is used for.

Revealingly, the stage direction of the first scene of the first act reports that "...but there is something in the air that belongs to the night... a coming together of something akin to a storm" (p. 1). The presence of Boy Willie in Pittsburg, in Bernice's house in the North, is the storm whose arrival, in the words of Christina Sharp, "ruptures the present" (p. 9). This is because Boy Willie's presence in the house initiates the conflict of the plot. Thus, prior to his arrival, little to nothing is

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

heard about the piano; instead, when he arrives, the understanding of the piano is made known to the audience.

Significantly, August Wilson dwells on interstice as an approach to frame and deepen the conflict of the plot. Thus, Boy Willie's decision to move to Pittsburg goes beyond just the idea of him selling the watermelons and the piano there; inherently, Pittsburg becomes the safe space for him to construct, interrogate, negotiate, and mediate the commodification of the piano. Here, space is understood on the level of physical geography, and as Elam (2000) mentions, space forms an integral part of August Wilson's dialectics in his plays, especially *The Piano Lesson*. Historically, the northern part of the United States of America, which includes Pittsburg, a city in the state of Pennsylvania, was a safe haven for runaway slaves (Patterson, 1982). It is therefore not surprising that the embattled piano finds a safe residence in Pittsburg, and beyond that, it also functions as a place of truce for both Boy Willie and Berniece over the selling of the piano. Space, in this regard Pittsburg, complicates the dilemma surrounding the piano in the sense that it influences the decision and choice of Boy Willie. He is only able to negotiate as well as articulate his position on the piano because Pittsburg functions as a safe space for his voice to be heard amidst a racially prejudiced American society.

Another way the feature of the dilemma tale plays out in Boy Willie's plea to sell the piano is for him to play on the religious card. Religion—or in its skewed form, the belief in the supernatural—becomes the trump card for Boy Willie to make his case for the sale of the piano. This is important for him because, as Bissiri

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

(1996) argues, August Wilson dwells on African indigenous belief in the supernatural to complicate the characterisation of his major characters in the play, *The Piano Lesson*. In this regard, as part of stating his reason for selling the piano, Boy Willie claims that:

> ...talking about Sutter looking for me. Sutter was looking for that piano. That's what he was looking for. He had to die to find out where that piano was at… If I was you I'd get rid of it. That's the way to get rid of Sutter's ghost. Get rid of that piano (p. 15).

It can be gleaned from the above quotation that Boy Willie recognises how much help playing on the belief in the existence of spirit beings can be for him in making his case for selling the piano. Boy Willie therefore rides on the image(ry) of Sutter's ghost to persuade Berniece to sell the piano. Boy Willie's attempt to use the ghost of Sutter as a rhetorical scheme can therefore be understood as being woke in spiritism. To be wake in spiritism could mean to be conscious about the efficacy of and an engagement with the ghosts. This is because, although the grand intention of Boy Willie is to gain economic freedom, in his *wakeness*, as an African American, he counters on the efficacy of spiritism or dabbles in the idea of the presence of ghosts. Although he appears to be ambivalent about spirituality—for he dismisses the idea of the presence of Sutter's or ghost on one account, "that ain't nothing but in Berniece's head" (p. 15), but still goes ahead to use this same idea about the presence of Sutter's ghost as a trope to convince Berniece to sell the piano.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The implication of this act by Boy Willie is suggestive that he falls for what John Mbiti, in his 1970 book titled *African Traditional Religions and Philosophy,* describes as the religious notoriety of Africans. This extension of the meaning of Africans to include African Americans is relevant because these two cultures share a similar ancestral background. Most importantly, Boy Willie uses a hypothetical imperative this time around to make his case for why Berniece should allow him to sell the piano. The implication is two-fold: first, this suggests that he is fully *in the wake* of recognising the ghosts as an integral part of the African American experience. And second, he tries, but fails, to persuade Berniece to move from "living at the bottom of life" (p. 93) to see things from his (Boy Willie's) perspective.

Moreover, Boy Willie sees the past—the piano—as a haunting mytheme. As a haunting mytheme, the piano becomes the socio-historical story of the Charles family of which Boy Willie belongs to. This sense of the hauntology of the piano as a socio-historical figure is echoed in Avery Gordon's text, *Ghostly Matters*. According to Gordon (1997), and arguing in the context of history and the inheritance of slavery, she contends that to be haunted is to be in that old scaring story "and wishing not to be there but not having anywhere else you can go" (p. 190). In *The Piano Lesson*, Boy Willie conceives the piano as that seemingly old scaring history of the Charles family that, instinctively, he wishes not to be a part of. This is the story of the Charles' slavery past on the premises of Robert Sutter. And this forms the basis for him together with his friend, Lymon "riding two days in that truck" (Wilson, 1990, p. 2) all the way from the south side of Mississippi to

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the north, Pittsburg, just to sell the piano. It appears selling the piano becomes his only available option. Thus, he has nowhere to go. Ultimately, as a sort of an escape point from this haunting past, the idea of doing everything within his power to sell this piano becomes the basis for his materialistic disposition towards his family's slave past. This is to mean that for Boy Willie, in order to convince Berniece to sell the piano, he argues the piano, materialistically reasoning, is a mythical piece of wood that only does one thing; haunt the Charles family. As a haunting mytheme, therefore, the piano can also be seen materially as a figure, imbued with the presence of a being that has the powers to revisit the living in a haunting manner. Conceptually, Boy Willie's deliberate act of exploiting the hauntology of the past which is herein understood to be the piano to satisfy his materialist desires confirms that the past is a position. The positionality of the past manifests itself in this regard in the sense that we turn to see it from one different perspective; a materialistic perspective. This also suggests that not all African Americans hold a puritanical view of Black history. This is inherently another manifestation of the dilemma story in the play as it demonstrates that the issue of identity and where the post-chattel slave African American stands in the face of the African American past is a matter of choice, devoid of any moral or ethical judgment. Moreover, the piano can be interpreted from the perspective of Boy Willie as a haunting figure because, to borrow the words of Avery Gordon, "haunting is exactly what causes declarative repudiations…to fail" (p. 190). Contextually, this is to mean that the failure of Boy Willie to either sell the piano on his own or convince the sister, Berniece to sell the piano is preconditioned on the idea that indeed, the piano is a social figure of their

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

family that can only be engaged and not commodified and sold out. Conversely, Boy Willie's failure to accept his family's past is the very reason why he fails to sell the piano. He is tied to the historical and social effects of his family's past. Unsurprisingly, Boy Willie is not the only character who holds this haunting gothic view of the piano; even Doaker thinks that "Berniece need to go on and get rid of it. [For] it ain't done nothing but cause trouble" (p. 57). The trouble, again, in this context, is the "ruptures of the present" (p.9) that Christina Sharp talks about as the effect of the visitation of the past into the present. This subsequently affirms the contestation that the piano is a hauntological mytheme. Thus, according to Doaker also, the piano appears to be causing them troubles through the regular visitation of Mr. Sutters' ghost via it.

August Wilson's forte, however, in dramatising the ambiguous—thus the choices made regarding what the past means to the African American—reception of the African American past lies in his attempt to combine sentiment and logic to drive home what the past means to the African American. To this end, Boy Willie demonstrates to Berniece—in his attempt to make his point about, again, selling the piano—that he (Boy Willie) also attaches the utmost sentiment to the piano, but sentiment without practical reasoning is a waste of resource. This is because sentiment alone can blind one from experiencing total wakeness that will subsequently transcend to depriving one from realising the other side of reality. Although Boy Willie fails to convince Berniece to sell the piano, it is not surprising that Boy Willie's pragmatic notion about the piano largely influences Berniece to

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

put the piano into use by playing on it at the tail end of the narration. He tells his sister that:

> The only thing that make that piano worth something is them carvings Papa Willie Boy put on there. That's what make it worth something (…) You looking at the sentimental value. See, that's good. That's alright. I take my hat off whenever somebody say my daddy's name. But I ain't gonna be no fool about no sentimental value (p. 51)

In this contestation, Boy Willie goes in both sentimental and logical directions. After Berniece has told him that the piano is a relic of their family's slave past and that it is essential to keep it instead of bartering it for money, Boy Willie argues that keeping the piano for only sentimental value is akin to being "a fool" (p. 51), and for him, the sentimental value of the piano must be augmented with practical reasoning. Herein lies his request to "take that piano out of [t]here and sell it" (p. 51). Although he recognises that their family's history carved on the piano deserves his respect, hence doffing his hat to the mentioning of the name of his father, the piano with those carvings on it is going to remain the same artefact if nothing tangible is made out of them. In this way of reasoning towards the piano, Avery, the preacher, appears to share a similar view with Boy Willie. He also tries to convince Berniece that:

> [y]ou ought to start a choir at the church. Maybe if he seen you was doing something with it—if you told him you was gonna put it in my church—

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

> maybe he'd see it different. You ought to put it down in the church and start a choir (pp. 69-70).

Avery's point, like that of Boy Willie's, is a practical interpretation of the piano. Both characters seem to imply that the piano's dormancy adds no value to it; rather, if its caretaker—Berniece—could turn it to something useful, it would serve a wise purpose. This is because Boy Willie is bent on not wishing to be seen as a fool for only attaching sentimental value to the piano.

Ultimately, Boy Willie's point is that "I got to mark my passing on the road. Just like you write on a tree, 'Boy Willie was here'" (p. 94). Per this intention, Boy Willie's way of claiming his position within the wake of being Black forms his ultimate vision. He wants to be known and heard when he dies. He does not want to remain at the bottom. Instead, he seeks to continue "living at the top of life" (p. 92). This articulated vision of Boy Willie becomes the basis for the stance that he takes on what should be done to the piano. Conclusively, in his state of consciousness, Boy Willie seeks to silence his past through the commodification of his ancestral history. He fails— perhaps temporarily—for he tells Berniece that "…if you and Maretha don't keep playing on that piano…ain't no telling…me and Sutter both liable to be back" (p. 108) yet his attempt is indicative that, he, to borrow the words of the poet, "suggested heat without radiating it" (Opoku-Agyemang, 2000, p. 75). His actions shake his sister, Berniece, to resume playing on the piano after a long while. The closure of the play can therefore be argued to be as a result of Boy Willie's incessant persistence on his sister, Berniece, to put the piano into

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

use. This is because the play ends with Berniece playing on the piano in a call for the invocation of their parents to come and help them deal with the haunting spirit of Robert Sutter. Significantly, the tears that Berniece sheds as a result of playing on the piano at the end of the play is in consonance with what Mama Ola also does while attending to the piano. Berniece reports that Mama Ola cleaned the piano with her tears and so, at that instance where she sheds tears while playing on the playing could be seen as an emotional connection between her and her ancestors. It is a connection of sorts between the past and the present. These tears are therefore symbolic of the emotional connections between the Charles family.

From the discussion so far, what *The Piano Lesson* demonstrates is that the history of African Americans is steeped in dilemma. This way, to understand the lived experiences of African Americans during the 1930's is to go back to history; the history of the heinous Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its attendant ambiguities. This history is a vignette re-told as a dilemma, and understood differently from the perspectives of the two siblings, whose ancestors before them were direct victims of slavery. The first of these siblings is Boy Willie. He does not want to remain at the bottom of the society and therefore articulates his vision regarding the family's heirloom, the piano, as a materialist motif.

The next section focuses on Berniece, Boy Willie's eldest sister, and her claim(s) about the piano. It focuses specifically on what the piano means to her as well as how her understanding of the piano fits into the grand scheme of the African American's complex pastness.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

"The Piano is the Soul of the People": The Choice of Berniece

Berniece construes the meaning of the piano differently from that of Boy Willie. For her, it is more than just a piece of wood as Boy Willie may see it. This alternative way of presenting the meaning of the piano is a manifestation of the key feature of the dilemma tale. This is because, the dilemma tale, as intimated earlier on presents choices among alternatives from which each choice is understood dependent on justification(s) provided (Bascom, 1975; Opoku-Agyemang & Asempasah, 2006).

For Berniece, the piano, which is at the centre of the conflict between her and her younger brother, Boy Willie, is the soul–the very umbilical cord–that links the past, the present, and the future. This way of identifying with her past is worth examining because it presents an alternative to the thematic concern of confronting the ambiguous past of African Americans. To understand this perspective of Berniece on the piano, the discussion situates Berniece's claim within Morrison (1993; 1984); and Sharp (2006).

Morrison (1993), in her Nobel Prize Lecture, delivered on December 7, 1993 presents the efficacy of orality. Central to the message of her lecture is the presence of an anonymous old woman. In this speech, Toni Morrison presents an anecdote about "an old woman. Blind. Wise". This woman, she says, is:

> the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. (https://www.nobellprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/)

This old woman in this anecdote is what Morrison (1994) refers to as "the presence of the ancestors". She is prevalent, as Toni Morrison claims, in almost every African American creative work. The ancestors' presence in any African American literary work is important: "they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" (Morrison, 1984, p. 343). Although this idea of the ancestor figure is ubiquitous in African American literary works, their presence goes beyond just a character presentation; they, as this discussion seeks to demonstrate, are an embodiment of as well as custodians of the norm of the tribe. Due to this function of the ancestors, they are always *in the wake*. This is because they are conscious of the tribe's history and their reputation as the wisdom pot of the community is demonstrative of this consciousness that they possess. Although Christina Sharp appears to be silent on which age group or gender could be in the wake of the chattel slavery, it could be the case that this is of less importance in the post-slavery era because the traumatic effect of the chattel slavery transcends age or gender (Maulood and Barzani, 2020).

From this context, Berniece is the ancestor in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. She is first described as being "fifty-five years old... [and] she is still in mourning for her husband after three years" (p.3). This is the first time Berniece is introduced, and in this quoted stage direction, she is presented as a mother as well

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

as a mournful figure who is still grieving the passing of her husband, Crawley. Beyond these descriptions, which sort of set the background tone for who Berniece is, she appears to fit into Morrison's ancestor figure quite well.

She is a descendant of the Charles family, who, the narration reports, were once slaves to the Sutters although it should be mentioned right from the outset that Berniece is a free person and not a slave. This idea of Berniece being a descendant of slaves resonates with the historical event that happened in 1619. Historically, 20 slaves (negroes) are reported to have been shipped to the coast of Jamestown, Virginia in the year 1619 (Philip, 2008). They worked on plantations for their white owners. These slaves would later on expand to be African Americans (although it is worth mentioning that not all African Americans are descendants of the slaves). These African Americans in question are those whose ancestors were forcefully carted to the Americas during the Middle Passage as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a neo-slave narrative (Maley, 2019), therefore, *The Piano Lesson* relies on this historical event in developing the character of Berniece. From the narration, except for her father, together with her uncles, Doaker and Wining Boy, Berniece's predecessors were slaves, and this ultimately makes her a daughter of slaves. Moreover, her movement to settle in Pittsburg, to the north, is indicative of the fact that she is living outside the *home*. This is because home to the descendant of the chattel slavery is the south. This is why Boy Willie repeatedly referred to Mississippi as home. He asks Wining Boy, his uncle, "you ready to go back down home?" (p. 108) after he surrenders to letting Berniece take possession of the piano.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Beyond all these, however, as an ancestor, Berniece *was in the wake* right from the onset. Her position on the selling of the piano is affirmative that she is not trading off her cultural status as an ancestor, a custodian of the memories of a family's history for the personal parochial needs of her younger brother. The first time she is heard speak on the idea of trading the piano, she says, "I ain't selling that piano, Boy Willie" (p. 27). This declaration is an affirmation of her stance on the piano. She becomes the law regulating what is to be done to the piano. Thus, in this sense of safeguarding the piano, she becomes the representative of those sections of African Americans to whom the history and memory of the chattel slave trade is to be preserved. This is because her statement does not only affirm that she is the eldest between her and Boy Willie, it is as well suggestive that she wields a sort of power that neither of her uncles could traverse her decision regarding the piano. This single act of Berniece resonates with what Ellison (1964) argues as the preservation of the aspect of the background of the African American that is worth preserving. To this end, Berniece conceives the piano as the history of her family that needs to be preserved.

Moreover, Berniece's assertiveness towards the piano is instructive. In a self-imposed custodian manner, the tone in her statement is suggestive that she has an ultimate say in what could be done to the piano. This sort of power, in the African American setting, appears to be the preserve of the ancestor only. She does not silence her past; instead, she dictates what should be done with it. Unsurprisingly, she bears the same name as her great grandmother, for whom the piano was exchanged for. Mama Berniece is the name of this great grandmother. Berniece's

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

decision not to sell the piano therefore partly suggests that she intends to preserve the memory of her namesake. And what does she explicitly say is the reason for her not selling the piano? According to Doaker, "[s]he say it got blood on it" (p. 10). Metaphorically, this blood in question is in reference to two generations; the first is Mama Berniece—her great grandmother, and Willie Boy–her grandfather. These are the two ancestors of hers whom Robert Sutter exchanged for the piano. Performing her ancestor duty, therefore, she needed to recognise their memory as the blood on the piano, hence her decision not to sell the piano. The second generation is Mama Ola and Papa Boy Charles. These are her parents. Mama Ola is her mother, who:

> polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years, she rubbed on it till her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in... mixed *it up with the rest of the blood on it*. Every day that God breathed life into her body she rubbed and cleaned and polished and prayed over it. "Play something for me, Berniece. Play something for me, Berniece." Every day. "I cleaned it up for you, play something for me, Berniece." (Emphasis mine) (p. 52)

According to Bernice, her mother preserved this piano by physically keeping it clean and metaphorically cleansing it with her tears and sweat. This act is to be understood as a perpetuation of preserving the continuity of the memory of the great grandmother as well as the grandfather. Most importantly, Mama Ola's blood mixing up with the rest of the blood on the piano routinely for seventeen years is indicative of the fact that there is still that family link and bond going on between the past, the present, and the future. This is the case because Mama Berniece

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

becomes the past who was exchanged for the piano; Mama Ola does not play it but requests Berniece to play it; Berniece, per the narration, also makes Maretha to play on it. The link, explicitly, is that there is a continuum of an uphold of what the piano means to this family precisely because it is the link or the soul that binds these generations. Significantly, the Mama Ola's tears that, according to the narrative, she uses to clean the piano for seventeen years is interpreted as the struggle as well as the toil of the enslaved Charles family prior to their emancipation.

It is also worth mentioning that Mama Ola's persistent request for Bernice to play the piano suggests that she is the custodian of the history of her family. This ultimately resonates with the Akan reverence for the idea of *aberewa*. Commenting on the political position of the old woman among the Akans, Yankah (1995) reports that "…within the traditional lore…the aberewa, the old lady, is considered the epitome of wisdom, oral history, and eloquence" (p. 70). The understanding is that in the Akan conception of hierarchy and respectability, the octogenarian woman is almost always consulted before a difficult and life-threatening decision is taken. In such difficult situations, it is mostly said in the indigenous parlance that "*yereko bisa aberewa tia"* which is loosely interpretated as a consultation with the old wise woman. This reverence for the octogenarian woman is often loosely translated as 'we are going to consult the old woman'. In this sense, the old woman is the ancestor to whom, Toni Morrison claims, is bequeathed with "certain kind of wisdom". Although she is sometimes anonymous, her advice is seen as the ultimate law to be respected. Mama Ola's assertion that she cleaned the piano for Berniece becomes relevant in this contestation of Berniece functioning as the ancestor.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Although Berniece is not an octogenarian, she becomes the "aberewa nana…the witty youth" (Yankah, 1995, p.70) who is able to function as the epitome of wisdom and custodian of history in the absence of the *aberewa*, her mother, Mama Ola as well as her grandmother, Mama Berniece. The understanding, per Mama Ola's cry, is that Berniece is the one to ensure the continuity of the memory of the Charles family, which is herein understood as the piano. This way, as indicated, the role of Berniece as the only surviving matriarch of the Charles family moves from just being the custodian of the piano to ensuring that the history of the Charles family is not silenced through the sale of the piano. This is a manifestation of Berniece being in the wake of her past. In her wake state, she takes on the role of the ancestor, and her statement on the piano becomes definitive and final. This is why Boy Willie could not sell the piano despite his hollering about the piano.

Again, although Berniece appears to have a problem with her patriarchs for fully understanding their actions and inactions, "I look at you and you're all the same. You, Papa Boy Charles, Wining Boy, Doaker, Crawley... you're all alike" (p. 52), she still dutifully performs her matriarch role of ridiculing and accepting them into her fold. By referring to her patriarchs as being all the same, Berniece is referring to their careless acts of putting the life of their family into jeopardy. This is because, Berniece thinks that their attempts to steal the piano from Sutter's premises was a careless one which could have resulted in the killing of all the members of the Charles family including herself. Despite this, she still persists in keeping and preserving the memory of her father, Papa Boy Charles, who also dies as a result of the piano. Her father got burnt in one of the Yazoo Delta railroad

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

boxcars in the 3:57 Yellow Dog (this is the name of a train) after smuggling the piano from Sutter's residence on "**Fourth July, 1911**" (p. 45). This historical date is important not only to Berniece but also to a larger section of the African American community.

4th July 1911 was the day of the declaration of emancipation for enslaved African Americans in the United States. In his lecture delivered on 5th July, 1852 to the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society at Corinthians, Frederick Douglass suggested in his lecture titled *What to the slave is the Fourth of July?* that this date is a day of remembering the heinous trade of slavery and its attending criminal injustices done to the black race (https://teachingamericanhistory/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/). Frederick Douglass intimated that it is the day that enslaved African Americans were declared free in the United States. From this historical context, Papa Boy Charles' attempt, together with his brothers, to take the piano from Sutter's residence marks the emancipation of the enslaved Charles family. This is because, as Doaker reports, Papa Boy Charles says that the piano was his family's history and "it was the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it…he had us. Say we was still in slavery" (p. 45). Berniece, aware of this all-important historical event, would not want another (white) man to own this piano. She is fully in the wake of the chattel slavery and also aware of the power of her family's slave history. So, she is not going to trade this ultimate mark of her family's invisible power, hence her desire to protect this memory.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Insistent that she allows him to sell this piano so he could get enough money to buy the land from Sutter, Berniece further vehemently tells Boy Willie that:

> Money can't buy what that piano cost. You can't sell your soul for money. It won't go with the buyer. It'll shrivel and shrink to know that you ain't taken on to it. But it won't go with the buyer (Act 1: Scene 2, p. 50).

At this point, Berniece turns to being philosophical about her family's slave history so that her younger brother, who is reluctant to do anything contrary to his intention, would reason with her. She becomes personal with her stance on the fate of the piano. She begins to let Boy Willie know that his selfish quest to sell the piano will subsequently make him cower after gaining the money to buy the said land—and that is if that land would not be even sold to two or more people, as Wining Boy tries to tell him. According to Berniece, therefore, both the seller (Boy Willie) and the buyer are liable not to go with the piano, for she knows that her ancestors inhabit this piano. When Avery Brown also tries to talk her through at least to start a choir with the piano as a means of doing something with it, she categorically tells him that:

> I done told you I don't play on that piano. Ain't no need in you to keep talking this choir stuff. When my mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her (…)…say when I played it she could hear my daddy talking to her (…) I used to think them pictures came alive and walked through the house. Sometime late at night I could hear my mama talking to them. I said that wasn't gonna happen

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

to me. *I don't play that piano cause I don't want to wake them spirits*. They never be walking around in this house. (Emphasis mine) (p. 70)

This quotation sums up Berniece's other reason why she will not sell or *materially* use the piano. By materially using the piano, Berniece does not seem too excited about the idea of using the piano for any other purpose aside from what Mama Ola used to tell her to play it for. Moreover, the piano is like the African war drum for her. This is because it is implied in her assertion that anytime she plays it, it wakes the spirits of her ancestors. Consequently, she does not want to wake these resting spirits, hence her reason for not engaging in it materially. Berniece's anti-materialist attitude towards the piano is one that could be described as a separatist notion towards the past (Bissiri, 1996). This was a 1930 ideology propagated by W.E.B. Du Bois. Per this view, Du Bois suggested that contrary to Booker T. Washington's culturalist notion of assimilationism, African Americans during the Great Migration era were to identify with their historical past on a sentimental level (Bissiri, 1996). This notion of Du Bois evolved and subsequently changed, though. However, Du Bois's attitude towards the African American past is reflected in the characterisation of Berniece. Berniece's attitude towards the piano also evolved. Per the narration, she used to play on the piano for her mother prior to her demise. She stops but then plays on it again after the intense haunting of the ghost of Sutter becomes threatening to her and her entire family. Avery, the preacher man, could not exorcise this ghost. He confesses to Berniece, "I can't do it" (p. 106) and so, it is at this scary moment of emotional torture from Sutter's ghost that Berniece resumes to employ the functionality of the piano. The stage direction narrates that:

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

> [There are more sounds heard from upstairs. DOAKER and WINING BOY stare at one another in stunned disbelief. It is in this moment, from somewhere old, that BERNIECE realizes what she must do. She crosses to the piano. She begins to play. The song is found piece by piece. It is an old urge to song that is both a commandment and a plea. With each repetition it gains in strength. It is intended as an exorcism and a dressing for battle. *A rustle of wind blowing across two continents*]. (Emphasis mine) (p. 108)

The significance of the above quotation lies in the fact that it summarises the inherent reason for why Berniece has been adamant about either selling or playing on the piano. Accompanying the playing of the piano, most importantly, is a song that the narrative describes as a war song, a plea, as well as a commandment. Here, there is an assemblage of warfare weapons through the invocation of the spirits of her resting ancestors. She calls on these ancestors, with whom she has maintained a long connection, to "help [her]" (p. 108). Moreover, the song is coming from two continents which, perhaps, could be no other continents than the African and the (North) American continents. The link between these two continents in question lies in the fact that the characters—the Charles family—involved, per the narration are Africans whose predecessors were slaves shipped to North America. This, revealingly, becomes an aspect of Africanness in this play, as Bissiri (1996) intimates. It is therefore worth stating that this is a function that is solely performed by a chosen few, specifically the living ancestor who has a sort of, according to Morrison (1994), a timeless relationship with the dead ancestors. Berniece therefore becomes the reserved living ancestor whom August Wilson uses

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

to perform this all-important function in the play. The implication, therefore, is that August Wilson appears to see the matriarch in the African American setting to function similarly to the octogenarian in most if not all, African countries; she ensures the continuity of the tribe. This is perhaps what, in his interview with Caleen Sinnette Jennings at the Kennedy Education Centre, August Wilson explains as the important role of the female gender in his plays. Revealing, Berniece is not the only *ancestor* in Wilson's oeuvre; Ma Rainey in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* for instance, appears to ensure the continuity of the tribe. In the end, upon realising "a calm comes over the house" (p. 108), Berniece chants the praise-song, "Thank you" (p. 108) repeatedly to her ancestors for saving them from the haunts of the ghost of Sutter. The choice and voice of Berniece in this play becomes the voice of the ancestors, who genuinely function as the link between the living and the dead. Consequently, what August Wilson does is to dwell on the characterisation of Berniece to "emphasize the link between womanhood and cultural continuity" (Bissiri, 1996, p. 103). This is because, it is through the woman, Berniece, that the Charles family survives from the haunting ghosts of Robert Sutter. By extension, Berniece's singular act of invoking her dead ancestors to come to their aid amidst the scary presence of Sutters' ghost is also suggestive of the idea that she is there to ensure that her culture including her generation and community lives.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Conclusion

This chapter seeks to respond to the question of what the past means to the African American as seen in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. The discussion has revealed that the conception of the African American slave history or past is presented in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* as a complex and ambiguous one. To confront this ambiguous past, the narrative revolves around the characterisation of Boy Willie and Berniece. These siblings have different and divergent perspectives on what to do with their historical past, which is couched in the narrative surrounding a piano that was once exchanged with their enslaved ancestors. This structural as well as rhetorical device that August Wilson uses to approach what the past means to the African American is seen in this chapter as a dilemma tale. The discussion has demonstrated that whereas Boy Willie conceives the African American past as an inheritance with materialistic importance, Berniece conceives this same past as a memory as well as the link that binds the past, the present, and the future. These divergent confrontations of the African American past present it as a problematic and ambiguous past whose meaning is dependent on which side of history one chooses to be.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER FOUR

SITUATING NARRATIVE: DRAMATISING LEGACY AS A FIX IN KWAW ANSAH'S *HERITAGE AFRICA*

Every time a man has brought victory to the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to enslave his fellow man, I have felt a sense of solidarity with his act (Frantz Fanon, 1967, p.156).

…alongside normal people behaving rationally according to human psychology, there are those who behave pathologically according to an inhuman psychology (Frantz Fanon, 1967, p.27).

Introduction

In this chapter of the thesis, attention is focused on what legacy or heritage means to the African. With this focus, the discussion responds to the second research question, which is: how does the dilemma tale unravel the meaning of legacy to the African in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*? The discussion in this section, therefore, is in two folds: the first section examines what heritage means to the African through the perspective of Mr. Quincy Arthur Bosomfield, the protagonist; and the second section focuses on the perspective of Maame Efua Atta regarding the meaning of heritage to the African. Essentially, this chapter discusses the dilemma in Kwaw Ansah's Heritage Africa and goes further to examine how the dilemma tale, as a narrative technique, gives insight into understanding the dual conceptualisations of historical past to the Africa.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

"I Feel Like an Alien in an Ancestral Home": The Dilemma of Kwesi Atta Bosomefi

African literature is premised on pre - or postcolonial histories. This is why "African literature can't escape intercourse with African history" (Opoku-Agyemang, 2008, p. 82). And one of the histories of Africa is the history of colonialism. For this reason, there continue to be narrations, writings, as well as visual dramatisations of the pathologies of the history of colonialism in the African setting. This is the preoccupation of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* feature film as he visually dramatises the excesses of colonialism on the African continent and the African people.

In *Heritage Africa*, Kwaw Ansah presents, through his protagonist—Mr. Quincy Arthur Bosomfield—a colonial figure who struggles to belong to two worlds at the same time. The first is the world of his birth, his ancestral home, and the material place of abode; and the second, is the world that he struggles to fit into; the world of his employers—his colonial masters. His dilemma then becomes his inability to fit in at the same time in these two worlds. This means that the film highlights the personality disintegration of Mr. Bosomfield, the protagonist, and herein lies his dilemma to confront as well as live finally in these two worlds.

Conceptually, to understand the characterisation and/or psyche of Mr. Bosomfield and why he unsuccessfully straddles these two worlds, Fanon (1967) presents a roadmap to understanding this psyche of the colonial figure. In his rumination on the excess of colonial rule and its psychological damage on the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

subjects of colonialism, Fanon (1967) engages with the crisis of identity that the colonial system create(d) for colonial subjects and "the consequent need to escape from these neuroses" (p.8). He labels this psychological behaviour as neurotic because he conceives the problem of the colonised as psychological. Of particular interest to this discussion is Fanon’s engagement with what he dubs the "so-called dependency complex" (p.72). He contends that the idea of inferiority complex is a colonial product and that "inferiorization is the native correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority" (p.68). This way, he presents this concept as neurotic behaviour that the colonialists create(d) for their victims to fit in. The understanding, therefore, is that the idea of inferiority complex was created through the machinations of colonisation for colonial subjects as a (c)overt tool of subjection and control.

Revealingly, Mr. Bosomfield, on his journey to assimilate into a full white mask while in his black skin, becomes ‘the perfect zombie of the empire’ (Anyidoho, 2000, p.316), although he still finds himself in a fix between relating with his black folks and his white employers. Thus, in his quest to occupy the shadowy silhouette of the colonial system (white mask) even though he is a black person, Mr. Bosomfield becomes the colonial subject who faces the dilemma of who he is. This problem of his is partly as a result of the inferiority complex that he suffers from as a result of the machinations of the colonial system; and largely as a result of his personal quest to please the colonial machinery. The latter point appears to be the case because Bosomfield is not the only colonial subject who has had British training. The likes of Kwame Akroma and the leaders of the Trade

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Union appear to have all had British educational training. Mr. Bosomfield, however, suffers from a psychological disorder that prevents him from relating amicably with his indigenous folks and his colonial employers. This is an internal disintegration that he suffers, and it is predicated on his first attempt to psychologically whiten himself. To whiten himself, as Fanon (1967) suggests is to assimilate into being a white person. In his interaction with Governor Guggiswood—the colonial representative of the British Crown in the Gold Coast—after reflecting on what Kwame Akroma—a teacher in the government school who happens to come from the same community as Mr. Bosomfield—had earlier asked about who he is, Mr. Bosomfield tearfully tells the governor, Governor Guggiswood, that:

> I was named Kwesi—a Sunday male born—Atta—a twin—and Bosomefi—an illustrious ancestor reborn but changed Kwesi to Quincy, Atta to Arthur, and Bosomefi to Bosomfield…(Ansah, 1988, 1:47:29).

This is when his internal disintegration started. He wants to fit where he has little to no space to fit. Mr. Bosomfield's attempt to anglicise his native name engenders the process of the crisis of identity that he faces afterward. He becomes unconsciously unaware of what could be *in* a name. This attempt ultimately alienated him psychologically from his tribe. As Agyekum (2006) maintains on the sociolinguistic essence of Akan naming, and as a Fante who belongs to the larger linguistic as well as cultural Akan tribe, Mr. Bosomfield becomes oblivion to the cultural and spiritual importance that his tribe attaches to their names and naming

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

practices. He, therefore, becomes a colonial puppet of the sort who denigrates ancestral practices by rendering his names in the form of phonetically mimicking the colonial imperialist. Beyond this rendition of his name, Mr. Bosomfield forgets, perhaps, to realise that he assumes into a senseless state of being. A state of being that makes him a wayward soul, lost amidst his tribe. He loses himself and his identity by taking upon himself names—Quincy, Arthur, Bosomfield—that have no meaning, especially among his tribe. Although these British influenced names have a similar pronunciation with his indigenous names, Bosomfield's willful act of corrupting his indigenous to phonetically sound the same as the British correlates is an indication of his sense of loss of identity. If he loves and respects his cultural heritage, he would have maintained his names like the way his superiors—Governor Guggiswood and Mr. Sniper—maintain their names. The point of contestation is that when an African changes or renders his or her name in the language of the colonial imperialists, he or she suffers from self-loss, self-rejection, and identity crisis. This is because, names as Agyekum (2006) argues, form an integral part of the socio-cultural makeup of the Akan.

It is important again to reflect on the cultural import of Mr. Bosomfield's indigenous names. In his expository essay on the days of the Akan calendar, Bartle (1978) mentions that the day *Kwesida—Sunday—resonates* with the 'universe' (p. 82), and this implies that its associative name will connote a sense of custodian of heritage of sort. The name Atta among the Akans, especially Fantes, is a twin name, and it is understood from the narrative that he is the elderly, and Bosomefi is a Fante name, which means the reincarnated ancestor. This implies that Mr. Bosomfield,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

whose indigenous given names are Kwesi Atta Bosomefi, is meant to be an elderly reincarnated ancestor whose task among his tribe would have been to protect them. However, he fails in this regard from the initial stage when he rejected himself by anglicising his names, within his Ghanaian African context, to some semantically empty British English names. In this regard, Mr. Quincy Arthur Bosomfield becomes no different from Kobina Sekyi's character, Mrs. Borofosem, who tries to change her name as well as instructs her husband to call her Duckie, in oblivion of the fact that Duckie is called such a name by her British husband because she walks like a duck.

Fundamentally, ancestors among Africans, specifically the Fantes, to which Mr. Bosomfield belongs, play the role of physically and spiritually protecting their kindred (Soyinka, 1976). To relinquish this duty through changing one's name only to be a sycophant and a puppet to the colonialist means Mr. Bosomfield is functioning, indeed, as his wife confidently and repetitively says, "Kwesi, you're a slave." In this context, Mr. Bosomfield becomes a slave in the context where he voluntarily denounces himself by switching his indigenous names to colonial names. Additionally, this culturally important function is performed by a selected few whom the tribe reckons to be of good standing and are direct descendants of the tribe. But again, Mr. Bosomfield becomes oblivion to this culturally important role.

Functioning as a colonial puppet, therefore, Mr. Bosomfield, who now lives in between two worlds, is used more by the colonial machinery to perpetrate

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

colonial absurdities. Take, for instance, the scenes where elderly folks line up in a long queue so they could use the public toilet; children playing in filth instead of a clean playing ground like that of Mr. Sniper's child's cricket playing ground; the members of the trade union also nag about their poor working conditions plus the poor housing they live in while the Europeans stay in their bungalows; and we are also told in the narration that there is a separate hospital for Europeans and the indigenes, and the frustrating part is that medicines in this European hospital are procured with the sweats of the indigenes, yet in their local hospital, there is no medicine to cure their sick.

Predicated on these problems and led by Mr. Kwame Akroma, "the teacher-turned-freedom-fighter" (Anyidoho, 2000, p. 317), the indigenes send a petition to the colonial government through Mr. Bosomfield, the new DC, who is one of their own, hoping that "he would reason with [us]". But he turns a deaf ear to their plights describing them as "a few disgruntled agitators". Ordinarily, as a member of the indigenes, Mr. Bosomfield is to at least recognise the inhumane conditions of his people. He visits his mother and siblings, although not often, and he sees or knows where they live; a poor, demarcated slum. He is meant to channel the plights of his people to the colonial government for redress. However, he denies them the privilege of even registering their plights to the governor by refusing to forward their numerous petitions to the governor. He, therefore, becomes what Fanon (1963) describes as the "colonized intellectual" (p.46), where he uses his colonial privilege to block the well-being of his folks.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Arguably, Mr. Bosomfield loses himself through the colonial education that he gets. Although he appears not to be the only British-educated African among his peers, he, however, becomes alienated from his tribe. This way, it is understood that Mr. Bosomfield's alienation from his tribe is by choice. This attitude from Mr. Bosomfield, therefore, aligns with what Fanon says about the decision that the colonial subject could make between being alienated or disalienated. According to Fanon (1967), "disalienation will be for those whites and blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized tower of the past" (p.156). To this end, Mr. Bosomfield could have chosen to be like Kwame Akroma, who has also had a British colonial education; or Dr. Acquah, whom we know has also had a colonial education but now practices at the local hospital.

Mr. Bosomfield, however, becomes the colonial intellectual subject who is deeply steeped in colonial fantasies to the detriment of his tribe. He, therefore, becomes a victim of dependency. His dependency syndrome reveals that he needed to change his name so he could first of all fit into the colonial world of being. He faces an unconscious dilemma of 'whiten or perish' (p.73) and he becomes temporarily unaware of his existence within his tribe. Kwame Akroma's survival upon his imprisonment by the colonial government and its subsequent ill-treatments, therefore, becomes the opposite reflection of Mr. Bosomfield. Mr. Bosomfield dies a tragic death, yet Kwame Akroma survives. By implication, what Kwaw Ansah covertly suggests is that colonial machination cannot break the colonial subject who stands strong behind the values and ideals of the ancestral African home. This ultimately situates in what in his interview with Francoise Pfaff,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Kwaw Ansah terms the 'cultural revitalization' (Pfaff, 1995, p. 186) agenda. The thrust of this cultural revitalisation crusade is to either achieve a balance between the colonial system and indigenous reasoning or get accustomed as much as possible to the ideals and values of the African home.

Another manifestation of the dilemma of Mr. Bosomfield lies in his inability to locate and occupy his reality. To occupy a colonial reality, according to Fanon, is to align with a particular group and their experience(s); the colonised or the coloniser. And in the general scheme of things, as an indigene who has risen to the colonial position of a District Commissioner, Mr. Bosomfield is to be the link between his tribe and the colonial governor. This is his reality, as his name Bosomefi implies—an illustrious ancestor being born again. He is to be that ancestor, like his uncle, Kwaw Bosomefi, the great warrior, who will rescue as well as ensure the welfare of his tribe. However, he becomes psychologically alienated from his tribe to the extent that, although he undergoes what Fanon (1967) refers to as a "definitive mutation" (p.19), he is still found at the margins of his reality. Fanon explains definitive mutation as the instance where the black man, after his direct encounter with the colonial machinery and training, "become literarily full of himself" (p. 165). In the case of Mr. Bosomfield, he only strives hard as well as craves to be in the reality of the colonialist. This is an unreal and one-sided sycophantic relationship that will only make him impress the colonial governor and the entire colonial machinery. Thus, he craves and succeeds in becoming 'a mechanical robot in the service of the British' (Ennin, 2014, p. 15). He therefore could not belong to either the whites or his tribe.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Through a definitive mutation, Mr. Bosomfield becomes a colonially convertible figure who thrives on the dictates of his colonial employer at the peril of the general and collective welfare of his folks. This is demonstrated in his willful act of giving his tribe's 500-year-old casket to Governor Guggiswood as his 'humble token of high esteem'. His action is an indication that, as a psychologically derailed colonial subject, he sees the materialist world as being equivalent—if not better—to the Akan spiritual world, which is not the case. This is because the weltanschauung of the Akans, like any other African tribe, is premised on the idea that the spiritual world controls the material world and any imbalance created between these worlds leads to a tragic end (Mbiti, 1970). But for Mr. Bosomfield, like most (post)colonial subjects, he defines the materialist world as his definitive reality; he sees no world beyond the temporary recognition that he will get from the colonial governor, and herein lies his alienation from his tribe, which consequently becomes his dilemma. By implication, therefore, his singular act of gifting the heirloom, which his mother describes as the "link" between his ancestors and the living, to the governor is a dramatisation of how the colonial subject sells himself or herself willingly to the colonial imperialist for temporal recognition.

Conceptually, Mr. Bosomfield, therefore, alienates himself from his tribe because he is in search of his materialist needs at the expense of the collective survival of his tribe. He becomes docile in this regard as he sees no other option than to trade his ancestral heirloom for the acceptance and recognition that he seeks to gain from the governor. This dependency complex then makes him function as a colonial robot who first needs to satisfy his material urges. Again, this indicates

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

why the other British colonially educated characters, like Kwame Akroma and Dr. Acquah, do not become puppets of the colonial government. Fanon (1967) therefore intimates that 'not all peoples can be colonised; only those who experience this [materialist] need' (p.72).

Although a pathetic colonial subject, however, Mr. Bosomfield could be seen to be operating on the level of inadequacy; a psychological moment of losing himself through discontent as a result of striving hard to impress the *Other*. This *other,* in this context, is the colonial system which in his state of neurosis, Mr. Bosomfield sees to be superior to his indigenous ways of living. This way, like the secretary of the trade unions, Mr. Bosomfield finds security in crying for attention by participating in the scuffle for recognition from the colonial system of the colony. He would go to any extent to please the colonial government. This is demonstrated in the opening scenes of the film when he flogs his son, Archibald, for him to sustain injuries. The poor boy's crime? 'A Christian child never watches a fetish dance'. He sees the colonial religion to be the ultimate and civilised form of worship, and therefore he does not see anything wrong with caning his son to the extent of reporting him to his headteacher for another punishment.

Unsurprisingly, he could formulate his justification for flogging his son and reporting him to his headteacher for another punishment based on some illogical colonial thought. He unashamedly rebuts his wife's claim that their son died of tetanus by saying:

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

> …shall we all not die of something? (...) What about all the other children who were caned that day? Did they all die of tetanus? (…) Whoever went through school without getting punished for doing something or other wrong—for not going to school or church? (…) if a child could be caned for speaking his own mother language, I do not see how a child from a Christian home should be spared from indulging in pagan festivities...(Ansah,1988, 0:59:48).

His rebuttal points to the fact that Mr. Bosomfield would rather please the colonial machinery than feel for his immediate family. He sees and/or feels nothing wrong with denigrating whatever is indigenous and claiming firm allegiance to anything colonial. His admittance to the heinous act of whipping a child for speaking his indigenous language at the expense of the colonial tongue, first of all, affirms the level of psychological damage that the colonial system has done to his thinking pattern.

Secondly, by going to the extent of branding the indigenous religious practice as "pagan festivities", Mr. Bosomfield reaches the peak of the black inferiority complex. This is because he sees the very foundation of his being as bad. All these, therefore, become a portraiture of what he would become as the film progresses. While he becomes oblivious to his fate, Mr. Bosomfield dies when his son, Archibald, also dies. This is a fate that he shares with his son but never realised it. He forgets to realise that his son is a reflection of himself. Thus, he shares a similar fate with his own biological son.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Moreover, in his incessant but delusional quest to please the colonial system, Mr. Bosomfield would, again, rather perform a Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*—ironically. He performs Hamlet's famously quoted soliloquy "to be or not to be" to entertain his old school guests while he keeps his mother waiting in the corner of his house. This is a line in reference to Hamlet's contemplation of his death or survival. He dies anyway, as an acceptance of his fate. However, oblivion of the meaning of that Shakespearean scene that he performs to his guests, perhaps, like any colonial sycophant, Mr. Bosomfield again, participates in orchestrating as well as executing his own loss of himself unknowingly. Mr. Bosomfield articulates as well as performs his own tragic death without realising it. Moreover, he sees nothing wrong with keeping his mother in the corner of his bungalow, and he would prefer to refer to his mother's visit as "just one of the relatives coming around to see him". This could only happen in the reserved European bungalow where he now resides. This is an isolated place where the act of living is based on caged, fenced, and individualism as opposed to the communal way of living which is the way of life of Mr. Bosomfield's people.

The European quarters, therefore, become the place, to borrow the words of Fanon ‘'an island with (…) whom no real relationship can be established" (p. 75) between the indigene, and his or her folks, except those who would share the same social status with them. The sort of relationship that is revealed between Mr. Bosomfield in the scene where he hosts his old Achimota mates in his bungalow is one based on a celebration of debauchery on one hand, and a mimicry of a fanciful European lifestyle on the other hand. One of the guests, Mr. Ferguson, teases him

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

thus, "why couldn’t your visitor join us, ah! (with a loud laugh). Esther, he is at it again? (All of them laugh)". His ironic response affirms that his residence is a place for dramatising colonial fantasies, which consequently adds to his tragic end. This is because he could not build a real relationship with them on real indigenous values because, again, he is on a journey of, what Fanon describes as whitening himself. This ultimately adds up to becoming a part of his own attempt to alienate himself from his tribe.

Beyond this level of interpreting the characterisation of Mr. Bosomfield, however, Kwaw Ansah subtly suggests an alternative means for the colonial subject to retract back to his roots. Subtly, Kwaw Ansah proposes that to borrow the words of Fanon, "for many black men, disalienation will come from refusing to consider reality as definitive" (p. 156). The alternative means of the colonial subject disalienating himself, therefore, lies in denouncing the reality that will undermine the collective survival of the African tribe. Thus, to survive as a colonial subject is to find a balance of sorts that will not make you lose yourself and your identity. For Mr. Bosomfield, his genuine disalienation lies in his realisation of who he is. This turning point, however, is initiated by Kwame Akroma. When he visits Mr. Akroma in the prison, the last expression he could remember Mr. Akroma saying is "have you ever asked yourself who you are—Mr. Bosomfield?” This becomes the moment that pushes Mr. Bosomfield, after his haunting dreams, to confront the governor to tell him who he is. In his confrontation with Governor Guggiswood, Mr. Bosomfield, therefore, opens up by saying:

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

> A man must know where he is coming from to find his bearing (…) When I was born, I was named Kwesi Atta Bosomefi, and my name had meaning. Kwesi means a Sunday male born, Atta means a twin, and Bosomefi means an illustrious ancestor has been born again (…) So, I anglicise it, Kwesi became Quincy, Atta became Arthur, and Bosomefi became Bosomfield (…). So sir, tell me, what's in a name? Your excellency! I feel like an alien in an ancestral home; like a man without a heritage. I can't even relate to my own mother anymore. I suppose I know more about other people's values than what I really know about my own: Karl Marx, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington…Oh yes! You name it! Anything that is foreign to me and I'll readily claim knowledge and pride in it. Perhaps that's what makes me an intellectual…but who am I? (Ansah, 1988, 1:47:24)

In the above quotation, Mr. Bosomfield begins his attempt to disalienate himself from the colonial shackles of selflessness. Here, he finds his voice to articulate, for the first time, his feelings of craving to belong to his own tribe. He, therefore, becomes conscious by choice and as per the circumstances around him. His inability to relate well with his mother, coupled with his own realisation that 'a man's fight for what is duly his should not be denied him', psyches him up to find his bearing by retracting back to his roots. It is worth pointing out that it is after this confession that Mr. Bosomfield meets his tragic death. This notwithstanding, his death is a celebratory one. Like Anyidoho (2000) states, 'his death comes just in time to rescue him from a tragic life' (p.316).

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

As a selected and worthy torch bearer of his tribe, the end of Bosomfield would have been tragic had he not died during his confrontation with the governor in the last scene. The significance of his death can be seen on two levels. First, the death of Mr. Bosomfield is worth celebrating because he freed himself both psychologically and physically from mental slavery of upholding the ways of the Europeans and othering his. Thus, the courage to face his master to tell him about the meaning of his original name and question his thoughts and beliefs alone is worth celebrating. This confrontation with his colonial superiors becomes a site of contestation where he delinks himself from the colonial machinery and attempts to return to belonging to his original ancestral home. His boldness to articulate the meanings of his indigenous names to the Governor, as well as his attempts to fight Governor Guggiswood to get the *kuduo* back, affirm the reason for the call for the celebration of his death. And like his mother says in her dirge, "…if madness is recovering your soul, then it is not madness (let the ancestors welcome you home)". For the mother in particular, the death of Mr. Bosomfield is worth it because he was fighting to recover his soul. This attempt by Mr. Bosomfield to re-track back to his indigenous tribe is primarily what is echoed in the epigraph of this chapter by Fanon as bringing victory to the dignity of the spirit. This ultimately makes his death worth celebrating. Secondly, his death is important because he dies in the hands of an indigenous policeman and not from any European. This is because it would have been, perhaps, more shameful for him—an illustrious ancestor for that matter—to have been killed by either Robert Sniper or Governor Guggiswood. This would have been a dent in his image as an illustrious ancestor who has been born

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

again. Reflectively, and as this thesis has argued, young Archibald, the reflection of old Mr. Bosomfield, also dies in the hands of an indigene, his father, and by extension, the headmaster of the local school. Beyond this, both father and son die on their journey to search for themselves. Archibald dies primarily because of his subversive act of defiling his father's orders to go and witness a fetish dance; and old Bosomfield also dies as a result of confronting the governor of the colony for his ancestral heirloom. Both father and son's deaths are therefore symbolic and relevant in the sense that they both die in their attempts to dignify their spirits as well as the spirits of the ancestors.

From the discussion so far, it is revealed that part of Kwaw Ansah's grand agenda of calling for a cultural revitalisation in the African setting is to present the ramification(s) of the colonial system as a process that contributes to the psychological disintegration of the colonial subject. He, therefore, approaches this problem by casting Mr. Bosomfield as a colonial subject who wallows in the mud of an internal identity crisis. Conversely, Mr. Bosomfield becomes what Bhabha (1994, p.20) refers to as "the in-between hybridity". According to Homi Bhabha, the end-product of two cultures (forcefully) meeting is the creation of a hybrid. As an intermediate colonial hybrid, therefore, Mr. Bosomfield becomes the victim of colonial power when he willfully gives away his family's 500 years old kuduo to Governor Guggiswood as a token. Moreover, inherent in this crisis of identity of Bosomfield, as the discussion shows, is the ambivalent reception of his African legacy herein lies his dilemma. For him, he appears to be a colonial subject in search of his material needs, and this makes him forfeit his cultural responsibility of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

safeguarding his ancestral heirloom, which is meant to be the *sunsum—the spirit/link*—of his tribe, as his mother puts it. Beyond this internal dilemma, however, Ansah proposes a panacea for his colonial subject; he suggests that he retracts back to the ancestral home, although it may be a long journey home, which may lead to his tragic but celebratory demise. In what follows, the discussion centres on what the heirloom also means to Maame Efua Atta, the mother of Mr. Bosomfield.

"This is the Soul and the Pride of the Family": Maame Efua Atta's Comprehension of Heritage

Ancestral heritage is understood differently from the point of view of Maame Efua Atta (Abokuma), the mother of Mr. Bosomfield, nee Kwesi Atta Bosomefi. Unlike her son, the heirloom means something more than just an enticement to material recognition. In the movie, Kwaw Ansah presents Maame Efua Atta as the mother of twins—Kwesi Atta Bosomefi and Afua Atta. She is the last surviving matriarch of her immediate family, in whose custody their family's ancestral heirloom is. She significantly appears in three scenes in the entire two-hour duration of the film. The first is when she "feels so proud she's come to congratulate" her son in his European bungalow for his new position as the District Commissioner and also to handover their 500-year-old family heirloom to him as the next person to keep it; the second is when she hurls curses on her son for willingly gifting the heirloom to Governor Guggiswood; and her last appearance is when she performs a dirge for her dead son while he lies in state. Despite her less

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

dramatic appearance, she makes an important contribution to understanding what the heirloom or casket means to her family.

In the case of Maame Efua Atta, she becomes the ancestor that Morrison (1993) speaks about as the foundation of the tribe. For Morrison, the ancestor is the link between the living and the dead and also serves as the custodian of the customs of the society. Her role then is to ensure that first, on the metaphysical level, the spiritual survival of her tribe is ensured, and second, her role is to pass on the *kuduo*—which is understood as the embodiment of the customs of her tribe—to her 'worthy son'. The implication of her characterisation in the film is thus to present a different and contradictory comprehension of what legacy means to the African—if the film is to be understood from the context that it is a representation of colonial Africa.

Regarding her understanding of the 500-year-old heirloom and her first articulation of this same object in the scene and dialogue between mother and son, it is worth quoting in full to appreciate what this heirloom means to her and the entire tribe:

> This heirloom has been in the family for generations. Thousands of beloved lives were lost pursuing it. Your ancestor, Kwaw Bosomefi, a mighty warrior, led his men to capture it. Anyone of us who possesses this heirloom must be a person of outstanding achievements. Not of the wayward stock and must be a true descendant. Libation was poured for ancestral guidance for the next custodian. This is the soul and pride of the family. Your late

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

uncle held it. You are the next, my son. I trust you'll take good care of the ancestral heirloom to uphold generations to come…(Ansah, 1988, 1:11:23)

Packed in this scene is a presentation of ancestral history, heroism, continuity, and responsibility. Most importantly, choosing to first tell her son that the *kuduo* has been in the family for that long resonates with Maame Efua Atta's role as the griot of the family. Like Morrison's (1993) matriarch character in her anecdote during her Nobel Prize speech, Maame Efua Atta becomes the mouthpiece of her *Nsona* tribe, through whom the ancestral history of the family is passed on to the next generation, which is represented by her son, Mr. Bosomfield. In her narration of the anecdote, Morrison mentions that this old woman is perhaps "a griot," who could be male or female. It is understood within the African oral setting, however, that part of the predilection of the griot is to serve as a living archive of [her] people's traditions' (Bebey, 1969, p. 24). Per this understanding, although Maame Efua Atta is neither blind nor a descendant of slave as in the case of Morrison's protagonist, her role as her family's griot is pivotal in the plot of the film. As the archive of the tradition of her family, it is through her articulation on the heirloom that we get the understanding that it has been passed on from generation to generation till the time of Mr. Bosomfield.

Conceptually, Maame Efua Atta conceives the heirloom as the *sunsum*-spirit of the family. This is because for her to equate the heirloom to the idea of *sunsum* is in consonance with the Akan conceptual meaning of personhood. According to Gyekye (1995), in the philosophical thinking of the Akan, *sunsum* is

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

an integral part of forming a person. Thus, the *okra* and the *sunsum* combine to form *onipa,* and whereas the *okra* is quasi-physical, the *sunsum* is spiritual. It carries with it the fate and personality of every Akan. This understanding of the concept translates into why Maame Efua Atta would refer to the heirloom as the *sunsum* of the family. Her basis is grounded in the Akan philosophical understanding of the term *sunsum,* which is believed to be the spiritual side of every Akan, to which Maame Efua Atta and her son belong.

Moreover, her stance on the heirloom rests on the ancestral knowledge that it is only the worthy son of the tribe who gets to safe-keep it and not any wayward stock. Steeped in this understanding of continuity and responsibility, therefore, Maame Efua Atta, who reckons her son to be the worthy descendant of her tribe, gives and instructs him to take 'a good care' of it. Ultimately, this heirloom is to 'remain [his] source of strength and pride'. Revealingly, it is not only Maame Efua Atta who thinks of the efficacy of the heirloom as the strength and pride of Mr. Bosomfield and his family. Kwaw Bosomefi, the said warrior who led his tribe to get this heirloom also tells Mr. Bosomfield, through the dream he has that '[i]t will forever be the soul and pride of our people'. The implication is that both Maame Efua Atta and her ancestors recognise this heirloom as heritage beyond the physical. Their instructions and articulations on the casket pinpoint to the fact that it is a metaphysical motif representing the very existence of their family. From this perspective of understanding the meaning of the heirloom, the question then becomes, what happens if the linkage of the family is sold out for selfish self-satisfaction?

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

To answer this question is to attend to the second-scene appearance of Maame Efua Atta. As a loving and proud mother, as she is, Maame Efua Atta welcomes her all-white-dressed son into her house. She does what customs demand by letting him drink water first before any conversation. She then enquires from her visiting son about the welfare of the heirloom, only to learn that her son has voluntarily gifted it to Governor Guggiswood as his "humble token of esteem". Her frightening face, projecting a loving but revengeful motherly appearance towards her son after hearing his willful giveaway of the heirloom, demonstrates her disappointment in him. The first word she could utter is the interjection, *ebei*! This is in a context where the mother is highly disappointed in her son's decision to willingly give out the family heirloom to the Governor. It could therefore be equated to the mother's own way of referring to her son as being reckless. But to fully register her full displeasure in full sentences, she then bemoans:

> Kwesi Atta Bosomefi! You've wounded my soul…You've broken the ancestral link. Kwesi Atta, what happened to all the classroom education? Even your illiterate twin sister would have understood this simple message…You'll never be free if you don't return the heirloom. Your ancestors will haunt you! (Ansah, 1988, 1:16:29)

Condensed in the above extract is a wailing mother who is disappointed in her son's willful act of being reckless at the expense of the collective welfare of his tribe. Her disappointment is summed up in three phases; the first is her connection with this heirloom. Her exclamation that the son has wounded her soul is an indication of the fact that she believes that she has a tie with this heirloom; her

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

connection is beyond the physical. And again, this connection, according to her, is what fuels the spiritual survival of her family. A break away from it means a disconnection from her soul. This way, the son's act of gifting it to no other person than the governor is, to her, a way of separating her from her ancestors, which is equivalent to her death. Moreover, as the matriarch of the family, she interprets the action of her son as *musuo/mbusu*—a taboo—as the Fantes of the Akan tribe would call it. Commenting on Akan concepts and systems, Gyekye (1995) posits that *musuo* is committed when "an extraordinary (moral) evil" (p. 25) is committed. This understanding of the term translates to Mr. Bosomfield's act of giving the heirloom out. This *musuo* committed subsequently will lead to the dissolution of the ancestral link of the family.

Furthermore, in an attempt to articulate her disappointment, she questions European thinking and institutions like formal education. Fundamentally, for her to question the relevance of the 'classroom education' that the son has and subsequently equate the reasoning pattern of her elderly son to his younger twin points to the fact that she sees formal education to be useless to the African child if he cannot reason to decode 'simple message' of taking care of an ancestral legacy that will not only be his 'source of strength and pride' but will also ensure the ancestral link between the living and the dead.

Beyond all these, however, she punctuates her disappointment in her son with a curse. This pronouncement is to be understood within the context of the repercussions that one suffers from if s/he commits an *mbusu*. Gyekye claims that

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

within the Akan setting, *musuo*–taboo–is frowned upon and the perpetrator would not go unpunished. This means, therefore, that Maame Efua Atta's curse on her son is just a resumption of the role of the ancestor who superintends over ensuring that the collective health of the tribe is maintained irrespective of the victim's affinity with the tribe. Unsurprisingly, and true to her pronouncement, the son begins to experience nightmares right after leaving the mother's presence. These nightmares serve as a reminder for him to mend his strained relationship with himself and his parents. Although he harkens to this call, he meets his tragic end.

The role of Maame Efua Atta is integral to the overall plot of the film. This is because she 'represents a person with a great deal of common sense who is able to combine pride in her culture with an openness to change' (Ennin, 2014, p. 11). Her common sense takes her to her son's residence to congratulate him on his new position as well as ensure that this son in question gets to safeguard a generational heirloom. And her open-mindedness drives her to educate her son in formal education despite the damages that it poses. Moreover, and most importantly, she exudes a motherly aura. Despite the son's childishness to gift away the family's heirloom, which would consequently lead to his demise, in the final scene of the film, her dirge for the dead son could be understood as a ridicule as well as a praise song. As a ridicule, part of her dirge rhetorically questions her son:

> [h]ow come the Prince of such great ancestry shall belittle the heritage? Didn't you know, my son, that the painful heat of fire turned the black to red? (Ansah, 1988, 1:58:58)

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Inherent in her proverbial expression is her subtle attempt to, again, question why Mr. Bosomfield will go to the extent of not understanding a message of 'take care of this heirloom'. To her, the action of the son is an attempt to 'belittle the heritage'; their heritage and the very link that connects both the living and the dead. The proverb about the crab turning red because of disobedience sums up her point that Mr. Bosomfield, her son, orchestrated his own tragic ending. Moreover, as a praise song, Maame Efua Atta's last scene speech is a peaceful farewell message to her departed son. She says:

> Suddenly, they're saying you were mad. If madness means recovering your soul, then let the ancestors welcome you home and offer you peace (…) If by the grace of Twereampon, you should ever return, remember and let it be known, my son, that however rotten your teeth, they shall forever remain the nearest comfort to the tongue (Ansah, 1988, 1:59:31).

To her, despite her son's temporary waywardness, he is still a hero. His heroic deed stems from the fact that he attempts to 'recover [his lost] soul'. And this, to the mother, is not madness. Her cautionary voice cannot go unnoticed. Although she sings praise for him, she cautions him to be true to himself when next he reincarnates. This is an embodiment of an ancestor who will ridicule where necessary and, at the same time, save a member of her tribe from falling apart. Thus, she ensures the continuity of the tribe.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Conclusion

The preceding discussion shows how Kwaw Ansah uses Mr. Bosomfield and his mother, Maame Efua Atta, as representational characters to dramatise what ancestral legacy means to Africans. It is revealed that African colonial subjects have divergent conceptualisations of what their heritage means to them. Ansah shows that to the colonised intellectual, African heritage is a token of recognition for the coloniser. Kwaw Ansah warns that this willful act of subjecting the African self to the coloniser as a means to perpetuate colonial absurdities could lead to a tragic end. On the other hand, Ansah presents the African mother as the hope for the continuity of the continent's heritage.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON* AND ANSAH'S *HERITAGE AFRICA*

Introduction

The previous chapter examined what legacy means to the African through Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) movie. This was an attempt to discover what the past or legacy meant to Africans. In order to identify the narrative differences as well as the similarities in both August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988), this chapter examines the points of convergence and divergence in the selected texts. The chapter is the response to the third research question which is, what are the points of convergence and divergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* regarding the conceptualisation of legacy? The aim of this chapter is to determine the points of convergence and departure of these selected texts, although the narrative technique of both texts hinges on the dilemma tale.

The Convergent Points in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*

Two broad points of convergence are prevalent in both August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*. The first is the gender roles that each protagonist plays in relation to the central idea of what legacy means in each of the texts; the second is the prevalence of ghosts or ancestors in each of the texts and what these spirits stand for regarding the conceptualisation of legacy.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

These converging points in the selected texts would be interpreted in line with Morrison's (1993; 1984).

Gender Roles

Framed around gender dynamics, both Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa* dramatise the binary gender roles towards what legacy means to the African and the African American. Thus, there is a representation of what each gender—in the traditional sense of the term—conceives of legacy in the African and African American setting as presented in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* play and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. The male protagonists—Boy Willie and Kwesi Atta Bosomefi—in each of the texts conceive of legacy differently from the female protagonists—Berniece and Maame Efua Atta Abokuma. This goes further to indicate the dilemma intricacy of the texts. This is because each gender presents a unique perspective on what legacy means to Africans and African Americans. Consequently, this goes further to affirm Opoku-Agyemang and Asempasah's (2006) assertion that the dilemma tale presents alternatives to the conception of a single idea.

In Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, the ancestor—as Morrison (1984) explains—is the female, and she is in the person of Berniece and Maame Efua Atta, respectively. This could be interpreted as a deliberate attempt by both Wilson and Ansah to appropriate the traditional role that is performed by the female in the African traditional setting. According to Singleton (2009), for instance, "[August] Wilson genders the legacy of African chattel slavery

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

in America" (p. 48). And Singleton's comment comes against the background that in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, there is an appropriation of traditional gender roles that are primarily performed by the female protagonist, who is in the person of Berniece.

The characterisation of Berniece as the reincarnated ancestor (Mama Berniece) is an affirmation as well as a performance of August Wilson's intention that there is the need for the African American to connect with his or her roots. This is because, in his conversation with Caleen Sinnette Jennings in 1992 at the Kennedy Education Center, August Wilson unequivocally stated that as an African American, "in order to construct the future,…you'd need to know where you're coming from" and, historically, African Americans trace their ancestry to Africa. So, in this context of the African American connecting with the root, August Wilson brings to light in his play, *The Piano Lesson*, one vital role played by the matriarch in the African setting, which is the persistent act of safeguarding tradition. Thus, the link that ultimately binds the living and the ancestors.

Most importantly, for Wilson, this custodian of tradition role that Berniece plays in the 1930s during the Great Migration, as the setting of the play depicts, even has its traces back to slavery time. Mama Berniece is understood to have been the main person who was exchanged for the piano, while Papa Boy Charles was just a toddler who was a surplus for Mr. Norlander. From Mama Berniece, the next matriarch to be directly associated with the piano is Mama Ola, who "polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years" (p. 52). In the case of Berniece, her role

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

is to continue with what her matriarchal predecessors have done; safeguard the piano. While Mama Berniece's fate was to exchange her soul–and this is not because she had any say; she was a slave who had no say in deciding her fate–for the piano, Mama Ola's was to ensure the continuity and respect for not just the spirit of Mama Berniece but the Charles' family. This is because the piano contains carvings on it, which Maley (2019) argues is the neo-slave narrative of the Charles' family. Moreover, for Berniece, and as a slave descendant, her role is to keep this ancestral cord intact. This explains why Berniece would not sell the piano to anyone, including that white man who goes "around to all the colored people's houses looking to buy up musical instruments" (p. 25). Berniece's decision is grounded in the African indigenous thought that the mother is like the earth; she protects and does not destroy tradition. Conversely, her decision not to sell the piano is echoed in the Akan adage that you do not destroy tradition if you know it. Berniece, like the matriarch figure in Morrison's (1993) fable, knows as well as understands the tradition of her people, which is herein understood to be the piano.

In the case of Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, Maame Efua Atta Abokuma is the ancestor. Her characterisation depicts that of the "wise old woman" (Morrison, 1993) that Toni Morrison talks about in her anecdote. For Maame Efua Atta, she understands her role in the cultural setup as the seer and the link between the living and the dead. Unknown to Mr. Bosomfield, she tells him first that, even "before the *kuduo* was brought out, the family head had to perform libation". As a seer, she foretells the *kuduo's* efficacy to her son, saying, "it'll be your source of strength and pride," and when he reports to the mother about gifting it to Governor Guggiswood,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the pronouncement she makes, punctuated by her frightening and disappointed facial expression, suggests that she is aware of what will happen to the son. In this regard, the scene that shows Maame Efua wailing deeply while her face slides on a muddy wall is a funerary performance for a child who is yet to die a physical death.

Revealingly, in a spirit of anguish mixed with motherly tendency, as the scene depicts, she tells the son that "you'll never be free if you don't return the heirloom. Your ancestors will haunt you". This pronouncement comes into being as the ancestors keep haunting him in his dreams till his death. Moreover, Maame Efua Atta's single act of handing over the heirloom to the son is indicative of the fact that she is performing the traditional role of serving as a link between the living and the ancestors. Her fate, therefore, is to ensure that the heirloom gets into the hands of "a person of outstanding achievements. Not of the wayward stock". This becomes an important role that Ansah reserves for his female matriarch, who is in the person of Maame Efua Atta Abokuma.

Ultimately, these go further to suggest that the female in the African and the African American settings is the custodian of traditions and as such, her role is to protect and not to destroy tradition. Thus, the roles that Bernice and Maame Efua Atta play in each of the texts resonate with the female protagonist character in Toni Morrison's 1993 anecdote, told in her speech at her Nobel Prize event. Conversely, as Bissiri (1996) suggests, "the link between womanhood and cultural continuity is a universal truth" (p. 103) that both August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah emphasise in *The Piano Lesson* and *Heritage Africa,* respectively.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The Prevalence of Ghosts/Ancestors

The second converging point in both August Wilson's play and Kwaw Ansah's movie is the prevalence of ghosts/ancestors. Both texts are premised on the significant roles that ghosts/ancestors play in the lives of Africans and African Americans. Ghosts, or ancestors, are understood as supernatural beings who are believed in the cultures of Africa and African America to have an influence(s) on people. In explicating this notion in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, Singleton (2009) argues that the prevalence of phantom figures in the play is an indication of the "psycho-social remains of the Charles' family's social history [of slavery]" (p. 46). These spectres are invariably reminders that for the Charles' *to live finally*, there is the need for them to engage with these spectres who are symbolic of their cultural history. True to the plot of the narrative, Berniece's confrontation with these ghosts through the playing of the piano affirms Maulood and Barzani's (2020) findings that there is a form of healing in the form of an understanding between Boy Willie and his sister, Berniece.

Moreover, characteristic of their efficacy, the two dominant ghosts in *The Piano Lesson*—Sutter*'s* ghost and the Ghost of the Yellow Dog—all assert their influence on the living characters. Thus, Robert Sutter's ghost keeps haunting the Charles family in the north until the latter scene, where Berniece plays the piano to invoke the spirits of her ancestors to come to their aid. The Ghosts of the Yellow Dog, as well is understood to be haunting folks in the south by pushing people into wells to avenge their deaths.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Similarly, in the case of Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, Mr. Bosomfield dreams of his ancestor haunting him to return the heirloom that he has willingly given out to the British governor. Oblivion, or perhaps confused as to how to decode the message in this dream, he consults his secretary, Mr. Roberts, who, aware of the import of dreams as an African, honestly tells Mr. Bosomfield that, "every dream is a reminder of what once has happened or is to happen. It may come in many forms, but every man must learn to interpret his own dreams".

As a mode of figuration, these haunting dreams of Mr. Bosomfield, as Henry Louis Gates Jr., intimates in his explanation of the *signifying* as black discourse, are a signifier of what is to befall Bosomfield, which is his tragic death. Why did the ancestors of Bosomfield not haunt the governor who was in possession of the heirloom but Mr. Bosomfield is a question worth asking. The answer lies in the fact that, as Soyinka (1976) implies, the ancestors have a link with their people rather than the stranger, and thus it is incumbent on the African to ensure that what binds him or her to the ancestral cord is not severed.

Moreso, the manifestation of the ancestors in the dreams of Mr. Bosomfield is an attempt by Kwaw Ansah to complicate the characterisation of Mr. Bosomfield as a confused colonial subject who is on a journey of searching for himself (Anyidoho, 2000). Inferentially, the presence of the manifestation of the ancestors in the lives of the living could be thought of as a moment of (re)direction for the living. In this sense, the prevalent presence of Bosomfield's ancestors in his dreams

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

is to redirect him to the path of his African roots, which is ultimately understood as a reminder for Bosomfield to return the *kuduo* from the governor.

These two converging points in the two texts demonstrate that there is indeed a sort of literary link between the African dramatists and the African American dramatists, as Bissiri (1996) suggests. Beyond this linkage, these converging points reveal that the conceptualisation of legacy by both the African and African Americans shares a common background. In what follows, the next section discusses the points of divergence in both August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* and how this divergence ultimately suggests the dilemma intricacies of these texts.

The Points of Divergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*

Despite the narrative similarities that both August Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson,* and Kwaw Ansah's movie, *Heritage Africa,* share, there are still major points of divergence in the plot structures of each text. These diverging points revolve around the recurrent motifs in each text and the historical contexts that each text is borne out of. Regardless, this divergence highlights the overarching thematic issue of what legacy means to Africans and African Americans.

The Piano

Central to the narrative of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is the image of the piano. This piano is both symbolic of the slave history of the Charles family

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

(Maley, 2009; Maulood and Barzani, 2020; Youssef, 2021) and a materialist property of the Charles family (Alexandre, 2009; Pennino, 2009). As a motif that sort of divides the siblings into either side of history, the piano becomes a metonymy of the surviving will of the Charles' family. Simply put, as a signifier, the piano is a symbol that all the characters acknowledge contains, in the words of Ralph Ellison, "wisdom which expresses the surviving will" (Ellison, 1964, p. 172) of the Charles family. It first becomes the structural device, around which the historical understanding of the Charles family is organised. Thus, the piano becomes the defined issue around which the narrative of the play revolves. It becomes an open-ended motif with which each of the major characters has a divergent opinion on. Second, the piano is a rhetorical motif. As a rhetorical motif, the piano becomes the centre for the articulation of the divergent conceptualisations of the slave history of the Charles family. This means of conceiving the piano as a symbolic figure from different perspectives indirectly presents the slave the history of the Charles family as ambiguous or divergent. Its ambiguous nature makes it possible for each of the characters to articulate his or her opinion and herein lies its dilemma intricacies. Conversely, the piano, as a representation of the history of the Charles family, presents two different sides of what this history of the siblings means.

Beyond all these, conceptually, the piano is a leitmotif that suggests two things: a hauntological figure and an exorcist figure. The piano, like the Zong—the slave ship—becomes "a work of haunting where the spectres of the dead make themselves present" (Philip, 2008, p. 201). In explicating the hauntological

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

presence of slave ships, specifically the *Zong*, Philip Nourbese intimates that the presence of the slave ship, like any other relics of the chattel slavery, haunts the living. Similar to the haunting nature of the slave ship is the piano to the Charles' family. Inhabited in this piano are both the ghost of Robert Sutter and the carvings of the Charles family. And the latter keeps haunting the living until it dawns on Berniece to invoke her ancestors, who are also believed to be inhabiting this same piano, to come to her aid and that of the rest of the members of the Charles family. As an exorcist motif, the piano, therefore, becomes the medium through which the haunting spectres of the Charles family are exorcised. The relevance of this functionality lies in the fact that not even the Christian God could exorcise the haunting phantom of the piano. This is evident in Avery Brown, the preacher's proclamation that "I can't do it" (p. 106) when, in his presence, the ghost of Sutter starts haunting the Charles family while he is to exorcise this ghost.

With all these, one central question comes up, which is, what do the dead have to do with the present? The answer lies in African indigenous thought, which holds that dead people are not truly dead; they are liminal beings who can exist in both the material and the spiritual worlds. Conversely, they have a space that they need to occupy in the lives of the living. They represent a past that cannot be forgotten, at least not in the lives of Africans and African Americans. They form an integral part of the life cycle of the African and by extension, the African American. Thus, as Soyinka (1976) suggests in, *Myth, Literature and the African Worldview*, the ancestors, who are understood to be spirit beings, form a continuum of the past, the present, and the future. And for them, they are the past. The living

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

is the present, and the future is the unborn. This tripartite is interconnected, and the omission of one leads to societal imbalance.

Revealingly, there is disruption and instability among the Charles family until Bernice invokes the spirit of her ancestors. The implication, then, is that Berniece's invocation of her dead ancestors is an invitation for them to mediate between the past and the future. Most importantly, the piano becomes the figure that does not only help her to exorcise the haunting presence of Robert Sutter's ghost, but it as well makes it possible for her to call on her ancestors to mediate for them. When they arrive, calm returns to the house of the Charles and Berniece could not but to say "Thank you" (p. 108) to them for their arrival and then the restoration of calmness. This calmness is an affirmation of the kind of futurity that the Charles family craves for; a future where there is harmony between the past, the present, and the future.

The Land

The other recurrent motif present in August Wilson's, *The Piano Lesson* is land. As an agrarian, the character of Boy Willie resonates with the agrarian lifestyle of the people of the south (Bissiri, 1996). And in his attempt to have his own property, Boy Willie yearns to purchase Sutter's land. This is the land that according to Boy Willie, "Sutter's brother is selling to [him]" (p. 9). Ironically, this is the same land that the family of the Charles worked on earlier as slaves. Silent on articulating this reason for wanting to get this land from this historical perspective, Boy Willie desperately wants to acquire this land because that is what

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

will ultimately lead him to his economic as well as social freedom. This land therefore functions as a signifier en route to Boy Willie's emancipation from white domination.

As a leitmotif, land becomes the site for Boy Willie to articulate his means to economic freedom. Land signifies property ownership for he tells Berniece, his sister, that "[l]and, the only thing God ain't making no more of" (p. 50). Thus, he craves to have his own share of what nature is not producing anew. Of importance to this discussion is Boy Willie's conscious act of disavowing his historical roots at the expense of his economic freedom. For him, this land is what he needs to assert himself before any white man and that, although they could acquire another piano, land is a permanent property.

The manifestation of the dilemma in this regard lies in Boy Willie's decision to choose his emancipation as against his historical slave legacy. As pragmatic as he appears to be, historical relics are supposed to be converted into tangibles; thus, acquiring the land through the sale of the piano would not only make him an emancipated African American, but it would also mean the continuation of what his father left behind.

In the articulation of Boy Willie's case, land, therefore, signifies freedom that the African American craves to get from white supremacists.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The 500 Years Old *Kuduo*

In the case of Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, the *kuduo* becomes the recurrent motif. This *kuduo* is a 500-year-old ancestral heirloom that, according to Maame Efua Atta, has "been passed on from generations". It is "a priceless and sacred container of the spirit of the entire lineage [of the Nsona family]" (Anyidoho, 2000, p. 316). Unlike the piano in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, this *kuduo* does not only *signify* the embodiment of the link of the Nsona clan, but on an individual level, it is what ushers Mr. Bosomfield into discovering himself as an African.

As "a soul searching movie" (Anyidoho, 2000, p. 318), the narrative of the movie dwells predominantly on the efficacy of the *kuduo* to negotiate the path for Mr. Bosomfield to identify who he really is. Prior to receiving this *kuduo* from his mother, Mr. Bosomfield identifies himself more with British colonial thoughts and principles. And when he receives it and subsequently willfully gives it out to Governor Guggiswood, he complicates his personhood and his African identity. Thus, according to Ennin (2014), "when he gives away his inheritance, Bosomfield declares a rejection of his African identity and a break with his cultural roots" (p. 12). This is where Bosomfield's internal dilemma of alienation and displacement continues to be complicated.

This complication stems from the fact that he commits the deliberate act of denial of who he is by gifting his inheritance to the colonial power. He could only dream of being robed by the Queen of the Empire instead of safeguarding the very link that binds his clan together. In commenting on the African and his search for

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

his identity, Bissiri (1996) contends that "to deny or to search for the past engages and determines one's ontological self, one's identity" (p. 101). The *kuduo*, in the movie, is conceived as the historical past of the Nsona clan. So, again, for Bosomfield to gift it out to the governor of the colony is an indication of the fact that he denies himself of his identity.

Unlike his compatriot, Boy Willie, in the case of Bosomfield, his denial of his identity by gifting the *kuduo* to the governor is for self-gratuity. His action is a sycophantic one, which is understood to be a decoy to win him the recognition of the colonial power. Contrary to his expectations, his ancestors, through nightmares, haunt him until he recognises who he is and what the *kuduo* means to his clan. The *kuduo*, therefore, functions as a hauntological figure that reminds Bosomfield of his identity as an African. This is because, until he finally realised his true identity as an African and became conscious of the ordeals of his kindred, the *kuduo* kept haunting him. Most importantly, he is to decipher the true meaning of this *kuduo* by himself and not even his mother or his old man secretary, Mr. Roberts. Essentially, the *kuduo* is different from the piano in the sense that even though both are hauntological figures, they are materially represented differently in both texts.

Again, as a sacred heirloom, the *kuduo* resonates with the indigenous African conceptualisation of totem. Totems are symbolic artifacts that are representative of the beliefs of a group (Frazer, 2011). It could be a plant or an animal or anything worth representing a human group. In the case of Bosomfield's family, their totem is a casket-like container made of metal. Moreover, the African

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

family's totem can neither be sold nor given out as a gift (Frazer, 2011) and so, for Bosomfield, he commits *musuo* by gifting out his family's 500 years old totem to the governor. *Musuo* is an Akan conceptualisation of taboo, and according to Gyekye (1987), *musuo* committed will not go unpunished.

For Bosomfield, his punishment therefore for committing this ancestral taboo of giving out his family's totem to the colonial power meant that he was to suffer a tragic death. This is a death penalty that he pronounces on himself, perhaps unaware. This is because the *kuduo* contains the *sunsum*, the spirit of each member of the Nsona clan which includes Bosomfield. So, the consequence of giving it out means that he has murdered himself before his death. According to Gyekye (1987), in the Akan worldview, the idea about the formation of a person is that it consists of the *okra*/ soul, the *sunsum*/spirit, and the body. And the absence of one leads to the imbalance of the body which could subsequently lead to the demise of the individual. It is therefore not surprising that Bosomfield suffers a tragic death at the end of the movie. His death, invariably, is covertly linked to his decision to willingly give the *kuduo* to Guggiswood as his "humble token of esteem".

The Historical Contexts

The other points of divergence in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa* are their historical contexts. The two main historical contexts within which each of the texts are set are the (post) slavery period—for Wilson's *The Piano Lesson—and* the period of British colonialism—for Ansah's *Heritage*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Africa. Each historical context contributes to the overall thematic concern of what legacy means to both the African and the African American.

(Post) slavery Period

Set in 1936 in Pittsburg, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is situated within the historical context of post-slavery. The play is specifically set in 1936 during the Great Migration but alludes to the time of the chattel slavery and the emancipation day of enslaved African Americans on 4th July 1911. The symbolic relevance of this historical date—1936—and the place—Pittsburg—lies in the fact that first, the 1930s marked a revolutionary moment in the lives of African Americans, and second, Pittsburg is historically known to have been a safe haven for runaway slaves during the chattel slavery.

Historically, in the 1930s, there was a large movement of African Americans from the south to the northern part of the United States due to economic hardships and racial segregation. Although some stayed in the South, a number of African Americans moved to the North in search of favorable opportunities and good conditions of life. It is within this historical context that August Wilson sets his play, *The Piano Lesson*. In the play, except for Boy Willie, the rest of the remaining members of the Charles family move to the north, specifically to Pittsburg, to ply their trades. Berniece works as a house help in a rich house while she single-parents her daughter, Maretha; Doaker works as a railway cook (p. 1), and Winning Boy, like Senchi in Sutherland's (1967) *Edufa*, moves in-between spaces as a musician-reveler. While some moved to see what the North has to offer,

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

others relocated to the industrialised North permanently. Lymon Jackson represents those who moved during this period to the north to "see what this place has to offer" (p. 32). However, for the likes of Berniece and her paternal uncle, Doaker, they relocate to Pittsburg—a northern town in the US—to stay there forever.

Most importantly, Berniece, who has relocated to the industrialised north gets custody of the piano—which is at the center of the plot of the play—and this is an indication of Wilson's contention about the need for African Americans to adapt to functioning in between their agrarian lifestyle in the south and the industrialisation lifestyle in the north. Ultimately, this is evident in Boy Willie's failure to get the piano sold so that he could purchase the land of the Sutters with which purpose, he has travelled to the north.

Conceptually, this period in the lives of African Americans signifies a moment of cultural balancing. The economic hardships coupled with the systemic racial segregation fueled by the Jim Crow law—a racially prejudiced law that favoured white people over coloured people— then influenced, at first glance, the Charles' decision to relocate the piano to the north where it is to be kept safe for both the African American and his or her tradition. This is because part of the effect of racial segregation during the 1930s in the United States of America was that the African American could not have the breathing space, in the South, to preserve his or her identity (Bissiri, 1996). Consequently, the North becomes the safe space for both the personhood of the African American and his or her culture. The culture in question, as this thesis argues, is the piano. Moreover, Boy Willie's movement from

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the agrarian south to the north is Wilson’s conscious attempt to present a cultural balance of sorts between these two spaces, the south, and the north. This is because, these two spaces, in the post-slavery time as the play depicts, become the space where the African American can assert himself or herself. This stance is evident in Boy Willie’s assertion that "[t]hey mistreat me I mistreat them right back. Ain’t no difference in me and the white man" (p. 38). This is a stance that the Jim Crow segregational racist law would have not allowed Boy Willie to carry-out. However, in the post-slavery period, Boy Willie is able to unequivocally assert this.

Beyond this, although the historical setting of *The Piano Lesson* is the 1930s, the play also alludes to the chattel slavery period to provide context to the history of the piano, which is at the centre of the rivalry between Boy Willie and his sister, Berniece. This slavery period complicates the dilemma in the play to the extent that it gives further information on what the piano is and its historical background. Moreover, against the backdrop of the futility of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln, 4th July 1911 was a revolutionary moment for all enslaved African Americans to declare themselves free from slavery. In his essay, *What to the slave is the fourth of July?*, Frederick Douglas intimated that the July 4th proclamation marks the true emancipation of the enslaved African Americans. Unsurprisingly, Wilson navigates the history of the piano around this historical moment to mark an important happening in the lives of the Charles’ which is the freedom that they can *take* from the Sutters by stowing away their piano from the premises of the Sutters. As the 4th of July is marked as the

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

emancipation of enslaved African Americans, so does the Charles family claim their emancipation from the Sutters.

Wilson's artistic vision of weaving this plot around this historical period is essential to the thematic concern of what the past or history means to the African American. Thus, Wilson subtly presents history as a collective memory. He does this through the characterisation of Doaker and Winning Boy, the remaining elders of the Charles family. It is through Doaker that we get to know the history surrounding the piano. This notwithstanding, Doaker does not tell this history alone; he tells it with his younger brother, Winning Boy. From the narration when retelling the history surrounding the piano to Lymon, Doaker keeps inquiring from Winning Boy "…am I telling it right, Winning Boy?" (p. 44) to which Winning Boy would also respond thus, "[y]ou telling it" (p. 44). This is a collective means of telling the history of a group.

The implication for this art of telling history as a collective memory is that contrary to Adichie's (2012) claim that "we [all] remember differently" from the context of furor, Doaker and Willing Boy's conscious effort to collectively tell the history of their family means that "history is to a collectivity as remembrance is to an individual" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 14). To the Charles, therefore, the slavery history surrounding the piano is that of a group's effort to remember and not just an individual's proclivity to claim. By extension, what the characterisation of Doaker and Winning Boy in connection to the historical period of the piano suggests is that the history of the African American is a history of the community.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Colonial Period/ Pre-independence Ghana

Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* (1988) is set in the colonial period of British imperialism or pre-independence Ghana. Specifically, the movie could be seen to chronicle the events prior to the independence of Ghana, a West African country. This means that it is the case that it is "set in the late 1950s in pre-independence Ghana" as Ennin (2014, p. 8) suggests. Events and happenings in the narration have their historical antecedents to the events that occurred in pre-colonial Ghana prior to its independence.

The presence of the British colonial machinery is prevalent in the movie. The plot of the movie is structured that there is a colonial government represented by a governor who is in the person of Governor Guggiswood and assisted by Mr. Sniper. And the District Commissioner rank is occupied by the first Black person who is the protagonist of the movie. This hierarchy follows the British colonial government system where the Queen or the monarch of the British empire is represented in a colony by a governor with an assistant and a commissioner of the police system. The latter position was always often occupied by the least in the crown system which was occupied by an African who distinguishes himself intellectually in the British language and British culture. This way, the British monarch ruled her colonies indirectly through her representatives in the colonies.

In *Heritage Africa*, Kwaw Ansah sets the plot of the movie within this historical context where his protagonist, Mr. Bosomfield becomes the first black District Commissioner; a position that makes him appear as the "Obedient Boy of

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the Empire (O.B.E)" as Anyidoho (2000, p. 316) describes him. This colonial position becomes the trap for his misfortune. As a puppet of the colonial machinery, Bosomfield falls low to the dictates of the colonial power to the extent that he exchanges his ancestral inheritance for this position. This attitude of Bosomfield is to be understood within the context of the colonial period where most of these colonially trained Africans, turned to willingly alienate themselves from their indigenous culture (Aryee, 2005).

The colonial setting has implications for the thematic issue of cultural alienation in the movie. Cultural alienation is understood as the rejection of one's culture at the expense of another culture. This form of abandoning one's cultural background has links with the arrival of colonial power in Africa. Historically, colonial imperialism arrived in Africa with its bundles of foreign cultures and principles. In the case of British colonialism, the colonies were, among other things, influenced by British culture. Those subjects of the colonies that took British culture to the extreme are those who suffered cultural alienation.

In *Heritage Africa*, the colonial period turns Bosomfield into a colonial character of contradiction and tragedy. As confused as he becomes, Bosomfield becomes engulfed in colonial fantasies to the extent that he only dreams of acceptance and recognition from the British crown while his folks, whom he is to be the mouthpiece of, wallow in poverty and poor conditions of service. He feels less for the pain of his immediate family and would respond to his wife's mourning of their son with a deep rejection. These form his colonial contradiction as he acts

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

in this light oblivion of who he is. Needless to say that he is the only British-trained African in the colony; the likes of Kwame Akroma and the leaders of the trade union all appear to be British trained. However, Bosomfield culturally alienates himself from his roots while religiously clinging to those of the British colonial powers. This way, he would not mind whipping and reporting his son to the local government school authority for the poor child's crime of witnessing a fetish dance. The effect and his late recognition of his waywardness become the propellant of his tragic death. In essence, the colonial setting of the movie becomes the basis for understanding the dilemma that Bosomfield suffers from.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the points of divergence and convergence in both August Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson,* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. Revealing, although both texts adopt the dilemma tale as the narrative technique, there are still traces of converging as well as diverging points. Essentially, both texts acknowledge traditional gender roles. Thus, both August Wilson and Kwaw Ansah deliberately ascribe to the matriarch, the role of safeguarding tradition. Again, both texts demonstrate that spiritism is a pivotal aspect in the lives of both the African and the African American. On the other hand, the aspects of differentiations in both texts are there are different motifs that central to each text. Moreover, the historical contexts for each text also differ.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The previous chapter presented a discussion on the points of divergence and convergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*. The chapter concluded that although both texts use the dilemma tale as the overarching narrative technique, there are still different divergent and convergent points in each text. This chapter, however, is the conclusion of the entire thesis. It presents a summary of the research and the key findings that the analytical chapters have revealed. This chapter further provides the implications of this thesis and suggests some recommendations for further studies.

Summary of Research

The objective of this thesis was to explore the dilemma tale as a narrative technique in August Wilson's Pulitzer prize winning text, *The Piano Lesson,* and Kwaw Ansah's FESPACO award-winning movie, *Heritage Africa*. Precisely, the aim was to ascertain how the meaning of heritage or the past for both the African and the African American is presented through the dilemma tale in these two selected texts. These two texts are seen as a representation of the lived experiences of the African and the African American society. Thus, the selection of these texts was based on the idea that they reflect both the African and the African American society. Moreover, these texts share a common thematic concern regarding the meaning of legacy, which is steeped in the communal oral epistemic of the African

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

and the African American society. Despite this, however, a comparative reflection on these texts appears to have received no critical reception, hence the justification for their selection.

The study is therefore structured into six chapters. The first is an introductory chapter, which comprises sections such as the background to the study, a thesis statement, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitation, methodology, and a conceptualisation of a movie as a literary text. This introductory chapter concludes by providing a context for the entire thesis.

The second chapter reviews literature related to this thesis. This second chapter is broadly divided into two main sections. The first is a review of related literature, which is subsequently divided into four main sub-sections. The first sub-section reviews literature that imagine the African American (literary) society as a society steeped in orality. The section concludes that the appropriation of orality is pervasive in African American literary texts where the idea of literary texts extends beyond the written canons to other media of knowledge production such as movies. The second sub-section reviews literature on Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson*. It engages with critical debates on Wilson's play to identify the niche that needs to be occupied. This section as well concludes that despite the numerous scholarship on Wilson's play, it appears none has focused specifically on how the dilemma tale plays out in the play. This, therefore, becomes part of the research gap that this current study sought to fill. The penultimate sub-section also engages with

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

scholarship on Ansah's movie, *Heritage Africa*. The review of Ansah's movie revealed that the movie has received little critical reception and all these receptions are thematically based. The last sub-section reviews literature that pays attention to a comparative study between African and African American texts. It revealed that this is a grey area worth exploring. Hence, this study sought to examine the dilemma tale as an intersecting narrative technique in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa*.

The second main section focused on the theory for this study. It engages with the theory of orality as Ellison (1964), Gates (1988), Morrison (1993), and Mudimbe (1991) present it. It specifically focused on the dilemma tale as an element of orality, as Asempasah and Opoku-Agyemang (2006) and Bascom (1975) explain. As the interpretive tool for this study, the dilemma tale is augmented with concepts from Sharp (2016), Morrison (1994), and Fanon (1967). The choice for this theory and the interpretive concepts was to allow African and African American texts to authentically speak for themselves about the reality of their societies. The chapter concludes that, despite the critical acclaim for Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, there appears to be no comparative study of these texts and how the dilemma tale, as the narrative technique in these texts, allows us to imagine what the past or legacy means to both African and African American societies, which appear to share the same ancestral background. This, therefore, becomes the ultimate gap that this study sought to fill.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The third chapter is the beginning of the three analytical chapters. It specifically responds to the first research question, which is, "Through the dilemma tale, what does the past mean to the African American in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*?" The chapter is thus titled "Confronting the ambiguous past of African Americans: The dilemma in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson"* as the response to the research question. In essence, the discussion in this chapter is a direct response to the first research question. The fourth chapter continues suit by responding to the second research question, which is also framed as, "How does the dilemma tale unravel the meaning of legacy to the African in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*? In response to this question, the discussion in this chapter is under the title, "Situating narrative: Dramatising legacy as a fix in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa.* The final analytical chapter, which is chapter five, responds to the last research question, which is, "What are the points of convergence and divergence in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* regarding the conceptualisation of legacy?".

The final chapter, Chapter Six, concludes the whole study. Thus, it provides a summary of the entire thesis; identifies the key findings of the study; provides implications for these key findings, and makes recommendations for further study.

Key Findings

Regarding the first research question, the discussion revealed that August Wilson first situates the narrative within the broader scope of the dilemma tale. Thus, the idea of the dilemma tale plays out in the play through the complication

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

of the conception of the past around the two siblings—Boy Willie and Berniece. Ultimately, the theory of orality manifests in this discussion through the manifestation of the dilemma that ensues between the siblings regarding what the piano means to each one of them. Beyond this, each sibling is representational of the meaning of the past to the African American. Specifically, the discussion demonstrated that the past is either spiritual or cultural with emotive connotations, or the past is material.

Materially, to the African American, the past is a haunting motif that intrudes into the present to distract it and Boy Willie becomes symbolic of this representation. To assuage this hauntology of the past, the discussion demonstrated that it is necessary to engage with this past as a form of *wakeness* at the expense of proprietary benefit. This finding corroborates with Pennino (2009) and Alexandre (2009) who also identify material ownership as a recurrent thematic issue in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. On the other hand, the discussion revealed that in Wilson's play, African Americans also conceive the past as a spiritual or cultural motif with sentimental equations and the discussion on the characterisation of Berniece revealed this. Conceptually, the discussion revealed that Berniece presents the octogenarian that Morrison (1993) references in her anecdote.

Ultimately, the findings in the first analytical chapter demonstrate that the narrative architecture of Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is hinged on the dilemma tale and the essence is to dramatise the complicity of the historical past of African Americans. This consequently is in sync with Singleton's (2009) claim that August

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Wilson deliberately left the rivalry between Boy Willie and Berniece open so that the audience can contemplate on. It is therefore in this moment of the contemplation on the rivalry between these siblings that the dilemma intricacy of the play unfolds.

Another key finding of the study is how the dilemma tale operates both at the personal and the interpersonal levels in Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. This is realised in chapter two which sought to examine how Kwaw Ansah dramatises legacy as a fix by using colonial Ghana as a representation of the African setting. At the personal level, the discussion revealed that the protagonist, Mr. Bosomfield, suffers from an internal dilemma that is realised through the identity crisis and alienation that he goes through as a colonial intellectual. This finding contradicts Ennin (2014), who claims Bosomfield's identity crisis is as a result of his masculine ego. And at the interpersonal level, the study found that there is an ambivalent reception of legacy among Africans, as seen between Mr. Bosomfield and his mother, Maame Efua Atta.

Beyond this, the discussion in this chapter revealed that whereas legacy means a token of selfish recognition to Mr. Bosomfield, on the one hand, it also means the spiritual embodiment to Maame Afua Atta. This means that by implication and extension, while legacy means materiality to the African, it also has a metaphysical connotation on the other hand. This is seen in how Bosomfield conceives of legacy as against how his mother, Maame Efua conceives of it.

The final analytical chapter revealed that first, both Wilson's play, *The Piano Lesson,* and Ansah's movie, *Heritage Africa* thematically intersect by giving

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

credence to traditional gender roles and spiritual beings. Regarding gender roles, the discussion revealed that the matriarch is the custodian of legacy while the male appears to be materialistic in thinking. Again, it is seen that in both the African and the African American context, the spiritual controls the material. This affirms Mbiti's (1970) assertion about the religious inclination of Africans.

On the point of divergence, the study revealed that Wilson's play makes use of the image of a musical instrument—the piano—while in Ansah's movie, an ancestral heirloom—*the kuduo*— is central. Significantly, the study revealed that both the 'piano' and the '*kuduo'* are symbolic of the link between the present and the past. While the 'piano' links the Charles family together, the '*kuduo'* links the Nsona clan together. Thus, the piano, including the slave narratives carved on the piano becomes the old Charles family whose presence in the present is concretised through the piano. Subsequently, it is through this concretisation of the piano that the current Charles family engages with. In the case of the *kuduo* in Ansah's movie, it becomes the container of the spirit of the ancestors with which the Maame Efua Atta, and his son, Mr. Bosomfield engage with.

Additionally, the study revealed that the historical setting for Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* differs from Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. The (post)slavery historical context of Wilson's play suggests the transitioning period of African Americans from the heinous crime of slavery into a time of their emancipation. And the colonial period within which Ansah's movie is set also implies a period of reconstitution of the colonial African person.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Essentially, the key findings of this study demonstrate three things. First, the dilemma tale as a narrative style makes it possible to understand meaning-making—of historical past or legacy—as a process that is not absolute. Thus, the contemporary African and African American makes meaning of his or her history based on different contexts. Second, the use of the dilemma tale as a narrative technique is a gesture towards the future, and third, the spiritual, within the African and the African American context, supersedes the material. This is to mean that in a complex society like African and African American societies, history or legacy has a divergent interpretation and the dilemma tale serves as the narrating tool to narrate this complexity.

Implications of the Study

Findings and conclusions made from this study have implications generally, for a comparative study between African and African American Studies. It contributes to the seemingly little academic work done in this regard, while it specifically has implications on a further work where the concentration is on the intersection between Ghanaian and African American literary texts.

Moreover, the findings of this study have implications for both Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Ansah's *Heritage Africa* movie. This study contributes to the oral disposition of the play which August Wilson continued commenting on till his demise. in the case of Ansah's *Heritage Africa*, this study contributes to its critical reception. The findings and conclusions of this study have implications for

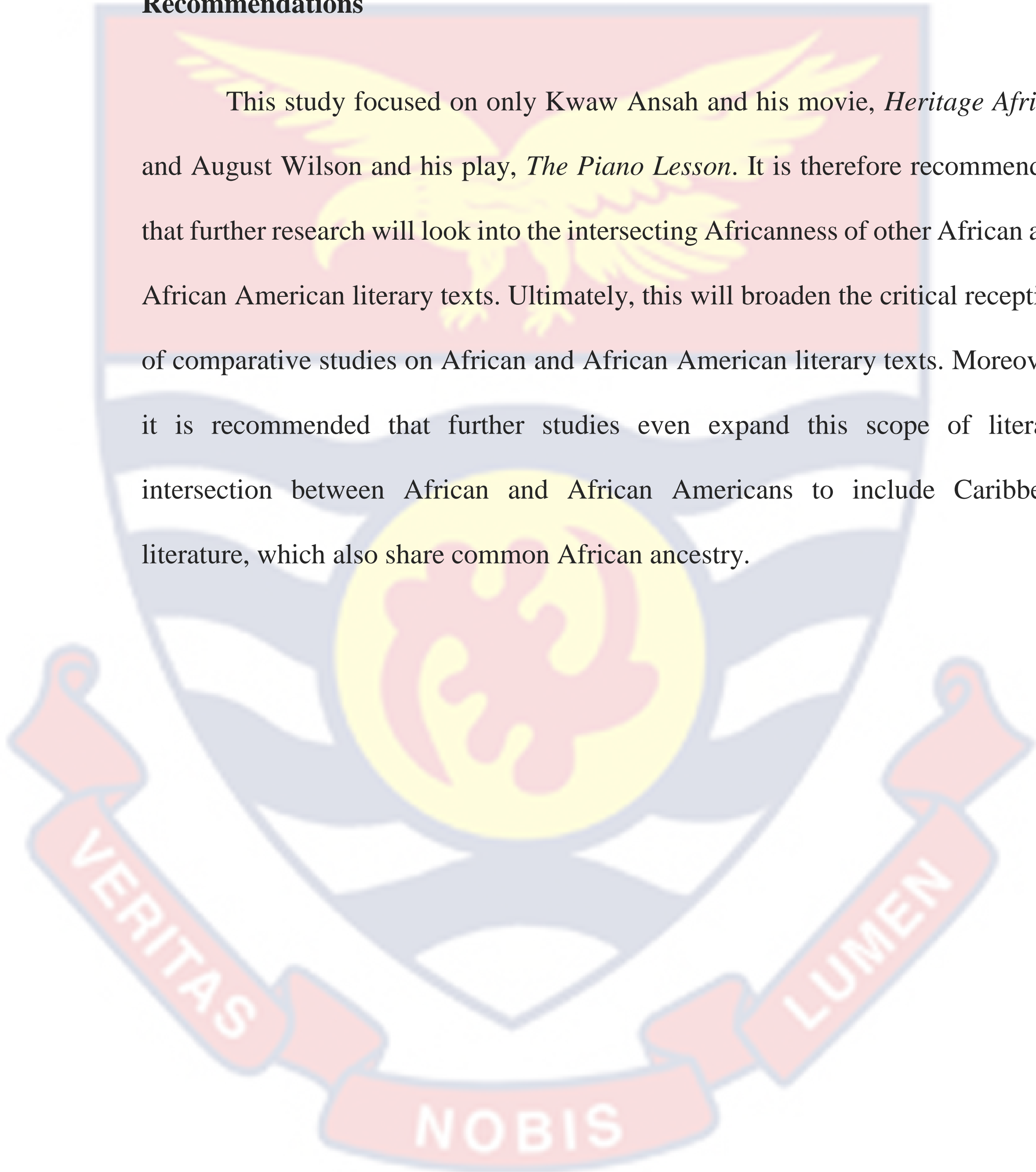
Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

the cultural-revitalisation agenda that Kwaw Ansah, the filmmaker sets to embark on, as Pfaff (1995) reports.

Recommendations

This study focused on only Kwaw Ansah and his movie, *Heritage Africa,* and August Wilson and his play, *The Piano Lesson*. It is therefore recommended that further research will look into the intersecting Africanness of other African and African American literary texts. Ultimately, this will broaden the critical reception of comparative studies on African and African American literary texts. Moreover, it is recommended that further studies even expand this scope of literary intersection between African and African Americans to include Caribbean literature, which also share common African ancestry.



Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

References

Adichie, N. C. (November 23, 2012). Chinua Achebe at 80: We remember differently. *Premium Times, Nigeria*. Retrieved on 23rd September, 2021 from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/108378-chinua-achebe-at-82-we-remember-differently-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie.html

Agyekum, K. (2006). The sociolinguistics of Akan personal names. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *15*(2), 206-235. DOI: https://doi.org/1053228/njas.v15i2.24

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4.4324/9780203349700

Allen, C. (2012). *Trans-indigenous: Methodologies for global native literary studies*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Alexandre, S. (2009). "[The] things what happened *with* our family": Property and inheritance in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *Modern Drama*, *52*(1), 73-98. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.0.0090

Amissah-Arthur, H. W. (2013). *The dilemma and trickster tales as continuities of African folktales in African-American folklore: Toni Morrison's Tar Baby and Beloved*. Unpublished MPhil thesis, Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Ansah, K. (1988). *Heritage Africa*. Ghana: Film Africa Production. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/nRze5uaNpVw

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Anyidoho, K. (2000). The struggle for liberation is not yet won: Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage Africa*. In K. Anyidoho and J. Gibbs (Eds.), *Fontomfrom: Contemporary Ghanaian literature, theatre and film*., (pp. 315-318), Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Aryee, H. T. (2015). *Examining themes and style in Kwaw Ansah's creative works*. Unpublished MPhil thesis, Department of English, University of Ghana, Legon. Retrieved from https://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Asante, M. K. (2020). Afrocentricity. In R. Rabaka (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of Pan-Africanism*, (pp. 147-153). London: Routledge. Retrieved from DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429020193

Asempasah, R., & Saboro, E. (2021). Unsettling the coloniality of power: Form, grievability, and futurity in Opoku-Agyemang's Cape Coast Castle: A collection of poems (1996). *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *8*(1), 1-14. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1993596

Asempasah, R. (2006). *A study of narrative techniques in Achebe's Arrow of God, Anthills of the Savannah, and Morrison's Beloved and Paradise*. Unpublished MPhil thesis, Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Baker, R. L. (2000). Tradition and the individual talent in folklore and literature. *Western Folklore, 59*(2), 105-114. DOI: https://doi.org/10.23017/1500155

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Translated by Vern McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Bascom, W. (1975). *African dilemma tales*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110873535

Bartle, P. F. (1978). Forty days: The Akan calendar. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, *48*(1), 80-84. DOI: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1158712

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London and New York: Routledge Classics.

Bebey, F. (1969). *African music: The people's art*. Translated by Josephine Bennett. Brooklyn, New York: Lawrence Hill Books. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1159409

Ben-Amos, D. (1971). Toward a definition of folklore in context. *The Journal of American Folklore, 84*(331), 1-15. DOI: http://dxx.doi.org/102307/539729

Benesch, K. (1988). Oral narrative and literary text: Afro-American folklore in Their Eyes Were Watching God. *Callaloo*, *36*, 627-635. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2931547

Bentum, S. A. (2021). Framing the problematics of choice and legacy: A reading of August Wilson's The Piano Lesson as a dilemma tale. *Journal of Black Studies*, *53*(1), 76-91. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347211055331

Bissiri, A. (1996). Aspects of Africanness in August Wilson's drama: Reading The Piano Lesson through Wole Soyinka's drama. *African American Review*, *30*(1), 99-113. DOI: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042097

Bruneel, J. (2010). *The engagement between past and present in African American and Caribbean Literature: Orality in the fiction of Toni Morrison, Gayl Jones, Edwidge Danticat, and Olive Senior*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Comparative Literatures, Ghent University.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Boan, D. (1998). Call-and-response: Parallel slave narrative in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *African American Review, 32*(2), 263-271. Retrieved from DOI: https://doi.org/102307/3042123

Champion, E. A. (1995). *Mr. Baldwin, I presume, James Baldwin-Chinua Achebe: A meeting of the minds*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Dauterich, E. (2005). Hybrid expression: Orality and literacy in Jazz and Beloved. *The Midwest Quarterly*, *47*(1), 26-33.

Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203821619

Diawara, M. (1988). Popular culture and oral traditions in African film. *Film Quarterly*, *41*(3), 1-14.

Douglass, F. (1852). *What to the slave is the fourth of July?* Retrieved on 21st September, 2021 from https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1926). Criteria of negro art. *The Crisis*, *32*(6), 290-297.

Du Bois. W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. Chicago: McClurg & Co.

Dvinge, A. (2006). Complex fate—complex vision: The vernacular and identity in Ralph Ellison's Juneteenth. *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, *51*(2), 193-206.

Elam, H. J. (2000). The dialectics of August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *Theatre Journal*, *52*(3), 361-379.

Ellison, R. (1964). *Shadow and act*. New York: Random House.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Eliot, T. S. (1982). Tradition and the individual talent. *Perspecta*, *19*, 36-42.

Ennin, T. (2014). Men, sex, and power in two Ghanaian films. *Drumspeak: International Journal of Research in the Humanities*, *5*(1), 1-27.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Groove Press.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Presence Africaine.

Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral literature in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers. DOI: https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0025

Fishman, J. (1994). Romare Bearden and August Wilson. In A. Nadel (Ed.), *May all your fences have gates: Essays on the drama of August Wilson*, (pp. 133-149). Iowa, USA: University of Iowa Press.

Frazer, G. J. (2011). *Totemism and exogamy: A treatise on certain early forms of superstition and society*. Hamburg: Severus Verlang.

Gates, H. L. (1988). *The signifying monkey: A theory of African American literary criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gordon, A. F. (1997). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Goyal, Y. (2014). Africa and the black Atlantic. *Research in African Literature, 45*(3), v-xxv.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Gramsci, A. (2005). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Translated & edited by Hoare, Q. & Geoffrey, N. S. Italy: Casapenale Speciale Turi.

Gyekye, K. (1995). *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hansberry, L. (1959). *A Raisin in the Sun*. Manhattan: Ethel Barrymore.

Hartman, S. V., and Wilderson, F. B. III. (2003). The position of the unthought. *Qui Parle 13*(2), 183–201.

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

Hurston, Z. N. (1935). *Mules and Men*. New York: Perennial Library.

Iyasere, S. I. (1975). Oral tradition in the criticism of African literature. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *13*(1), 107–119.

Jaji, E. T. (2014). *Africa in stereo: Modernism, music, and Pan-African solidarity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Jennings, C. S. (1992*). Theatre conversations: August Wilson*. The Kennedy Education Digital Centre. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDjnZGI3WiE

Jones, M. D. E. (2002). Jazz prosodies: Orality and textuality. *Callaloo*, *3*(2), 66-91.

Jones, G. (1991). *Liberating voices: Oral tradition in African American literature*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Julien, E. (1992). *African novels and the question of orality*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Lewis, V. C. (1960). African tradition in Toni Morrison's Sula. *Phylon*, *48*(1), 91-97. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/275004

Lovejoy, P. E. (2000). *Transformations in slavery: A history of slavery in Africa* (2nd Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maley, P. (2019). Performing ancestry: Reading August Wilson's The Piano Lesson as a performative neo-slave narrative. *Comparative Drama*, *53*(1), 59-83. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2019.0002

Mbiti, J. (1970). *African traditional religions and philosophy*. London: Longman.

Maulood, N. O., & Barzani, S. S. (2020). Trauma in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *3*(1), 107-122. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14500/kujhss.v3n1y2020.pp107-122

Meyer, B. (1999). Popular Ghanaian cinema and Heritage Africa. *Africa Today, 46*(2)*,* 93-114.

Morrison, T. (1993). Toni Morrison's Nobel prize lecture delivered on December 7, 1993. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/

Morrison, T. (1984). Memory, creation, and writing. *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly*, *59*(4), 385-390.

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1991). *Parables and fables: Exegesis, textuality and politics in central Africa*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin.

Mwinlaaru, I. N., & Nkansah, S. K. (2018). The trickster as a semiotic figure for construing postcolonial experience: Kwakye's The Clothes of Nakedness. *Journal of the*

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

African Literature Association, *12*(3), 250-268. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2018.1526030

Nanbigne, V. (2013). Cultural (mis)representation in Ghanaian video film practice. *The Parnassus*: *University of Uyo Journal of Cultural Research*, *9*(2), 61–79.

Nwankwo, I. K. (2005). *Black cosmopolitanism: Ritual consciousness and the transnational identity in the nineteenth-century Americas*. Philadelphia, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Okonkwo, C. N. (2022). *Kindred spirits: Chinua Achebe and Toni Morrison*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press.

Okonkwo, C. (2008). *A spirit of dialogue: Incarnations of Ogbanje, the born-to-die, in African American literature*. Knoxville, USA: University of Tennessee Press.

Okpewho, I. (1983). Myth and modern fiction: Armah's Two Thousand Seasons. *African Literature Today*, *13*, 1–13.

Okpewho, I. (1977). Principles of traditional African art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 35*(3), 301-313.

Ong, W. (2002). *Orality and literacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Opoku-Agyemang, K. (2017). Looking back while moving forward: The case of concrete poetry and Sankofa. *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures*, *16*, 1-15. Retrieved from https://doi:10.20415/hyp/016.e07

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Opoku-Agyemang, K. (2000). Whack: Two vignettes on color and other pleasantries. *Grand Valley Review*, *21*(1), 75-84. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol21/iss1/24

Opoku-Agyemang, K. (1995). The logic of escape in the Akan trickster tale cycle. *Asemka, 8*, 101-112.

Opoku-Agyemang, K., & Asempasah, R. (2006). Theorising the ambiguous space: The narrative architecture of the dilemma tale as an interpretive framework for reading Morrison's Beloved. *Martin-Luther University Online Working Papers, 1*, 165-178.

Patterson, O. (1982). *Slavery and social death*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Pederson, J. (2014). Speak, trauma: Toward a revised understanding of literary trauma theory. *Narrative*, *22*(3), 333-353.

Peek, P. M., & Yankah, K. (2004). *African folklore: An encyclopedia*. London: Routledge.

Perry, T. (Director). (2018). *Acrimony*. Santa Monica, California: Lionsgate Films.

Pfaff, F., & Ansah, K. (1995). Conversation with Ghanaian filmmaker Kwaw Ansah. *Research in African Literatures*, *26*(3), 186-193.

Philip, M. N. (2008). *Zong!* Hartford, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Pennino, A. (2009). Property, person, and piano: Ownership in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *Academia*, 21-28.

Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the folktale* (Vol. 9). Translated by Lawrence Scott. Austin, USA: University of Texas Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Raj, S. J., & Jose, S. (2014). Recognition and edification of the relic of the past: An inquiry into August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *Journal of Development Management and Communication*, *1*(1), 22-29.

Reagan, D. (1991). Voices of silence: The representation of orality in Arna Bontemps' Black Thunder. *Studies in American Fiction*, *19*(1), 71-83.

Redding, J. S. (1949). American negro literature. *The American Scholar*, *1*, 137-148.

Rutledge, G. E. (2013). *The epic trickster in American literature: From Sunjata to So(u)l*. London: Routledge.

Saboro, E. (2014). *Slavery, memory, and orality: Analysis of song texts from northern Ghana*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE), University of Hull, United Kingdom.

Said, W. E. (1978). *Orientalism*. USA: Pantheon Books.

Severny, A. (2013). The movie theatre of the future will be in your mind. *Tribeca*, 1–5.

Shannon, S. G. (1994). The ground on which I stand: August Wilson's perspective on African American women. In A. Nadel (Ed.), *May all your fences have gates: Essays on the drama of August Wilson*, (pp. 150-164). Iowa, USA: University of Iowa Press.

Sharp, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Shipley, J. W. (2015). *Trickster theatre: The poetics of freedom in urban Africa*. USA: Indiana University Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Singleton, J. (2009). Some losses remain with us: Impossible mourning and the prevalence of ritual in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *College Literature*, *4*, 40-57.

Soyinka, W. (1976). *Myth, literature and the African world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spielberg, S. (Director). (1997). *Amistad:* [*The movie*]. California: Dreams Work Pictures.

Subedi, R. (2020). *Black aesthetics in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipul, Nepal.

Sutherland, E. T. (1967). *Edufa*. Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited.

Thomas, V. D. (2003). 1+ 1= 3 and other dilemmas: Reading vertigo in Invisible Man, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, and Song of Solomon. *African American Review*, *37*(1), 81-94.

Tian, J. & Li, N. (2018). Symbols and functions of two kinds of ghosts in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews, 31*(4), 272-275. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2018.1435252

Tomaselli, K. G., Shepperson, A., & Eke, M. (1995). Towards a theory of orality in African cinema. *Research in African Literatures*, *26*(3), 18-35.

Trouillot, M. R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Ukadike, F. N. (1994). *Black African cinema*. Berkeley, USA: University of California Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

United States vs The Amistad, 40 U.S. 518 (1841). Retrieved on 22nd September, 2021 from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/40/518/

Villaverde, E. L. & Carter, R. A. (2020). Oasis: Reconceptualizing galleries as intentionally pedagogical. In S. R. Steinberg & B. Down (Eds.), *The sage handbook of critical pedagogies* (pp. 1206-1219). London, UK: Sage.

Warner-Lewis, M. (2004). The oral tradition in the African diaspora. In F. Irele & S. Gikandi (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of African and Caribbean literature* (pp.117-136). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521832755.008

Williamson, J. (1986). A rage for order: Black/White relations in the American South since emancipation. New York: Oxford University Press.

Willis, S. (1987). *Specifying: Black women writing the American experience*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press.

Wilson, A. (1997). The ground on which I stand. *Callaloo 20*(3), 493-503. Retrieved from https://doi:10.1353/cal.1998.0096

Wilson, A. (1990). *The Piano Lesson*. New York, NY: Dutton.

Wright, R. (1937). Blueprint for negro writing. *An Anthology of African American Criticism*, *1*, 97-106.

Yankah, K. (2004). The folktale and its extension. In F. Irele & S. Gikandi (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of African and Caribbean literature* (pp.19-34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

Yékú, J. (2021). Tricksters and female warriors: Womanist interweavings from Oríta to Wakanda. *Journal of the African Literature Association*, *15*(1), 107-124. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2020.1815965

Yékú, J. (2016). Akpos don come again: Nigerian cyberpop hero as trickster. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, *28*(3), 245-261. Retrieved from https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1069735

Youssef, L. (2021). Remnants of the past and the quest for identity: Reading August Wilson's The Piano Lesson in the context of collective memory. *The Explicator*, *79*(4), 166-170. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.2021.2005518

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library