

Defining the Idiot for Africa's Political Advancement: A Literary Analysis of the Title of Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*

¹Confidence Gbolo Sanka, ¹Ofori Amanfo Boateng, ¹Alhassan Yakubu, ¹Portia Oppong Siaw

¹Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana

Corresponding Author e-Mail: fikoff75@gmail.com

Received: April 2024; Revised: May 2024; Published: June 2024

Abstract

The study of literary titles in literature is not new but has become prominent in modern space of literary analysis. People no longer see literary titles as mere appendages with which they identify a literary work, but rather, they look at it as a roadmap to the consumption of the text. A careful analysis of a literary title as a paratext, provides a clear picture of the narrative and highlights expectations for reading such a text. This is what has made the study of titiology relevant in literary studies and literary stylistics. The objective of this paper is to examine how Asare uses the title: *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* to portray the characters and their actions in the play; to establish a relationship between the title of the play and its meaning; and to add style with meaning to the overall understanding of the play. The research involved here is qualitative in nature and a close reading method of the primary source and ideas from Genette and other leading critics on the theory of titiology are used to study how the title reflects the actions of the characters throughout the play. After a careful analysis of the play in relation to its title, it is revealed that the title does not just identify the drama work. Rather, the title is reflected throughout the plot of the play and adds a metaphorical meaning as well as style to the drama piece. It is concluded established that Asare coins this title stylistically to prompt African leaders and their citizenry about their actions and inactions that facilitate the manipulation of Africa by the West. This implies that a titological approach to literary titles holds the potential of revealing hidden meanings in literary works which are often overlooked.

Keywords: Titiology; Paratext; Idiot; Characterisation; Meaning

How to Cite: Sanka, C.G.S., Boateng, O.A., Yakubu, A., & Siaw, P.O. (2024). Defining the Idiot for Africa's Political Advancement: A Literary Analysis of the Title of Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 4(2), 346-360. doi: <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v4i2.1777>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v4i2.1777>

Copyright© 2024, Sanka et al
This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA](#) License.



INTRODUCTION

According to the *Oxford Reference*, the word idiot is “an obsolete term for a person with profound mental retardation; also an abusive term for a fool... [From French *idiot* an idiot, from Latin *idiota* an ignorant person]” (www.oxfordreference.com). The Latin definition of the term which has to do with ignorance and naivety is what is implied in this paper. From time immemorial, societies have endeavored to instill intelligence in their young ones so that they can apply it in their life to advance their societies. The Akan people of Ghana, for instance, created Ananse phenomenon for their children to emulate his art of living and for the children to be proactive and circumspect in life. They therefore instituted *Anansesem* narrative as an educational means of training their children and as an instrument to test the

intelligence of the people. This is because, among the Akans, thinking right is highly prized; the failure to be able to do so does not only bring about the doom of the perpetrator but that of the entire community (Arthur, 2020).

Asare uses *Anansegoro*, a tradition that Efua Sutherland has adapted and evolved for the purposes of modern drama practice from the Akan tradition, to dramatise the significance of being intelligent as a people in a society and to guard against any external control. Ananse, with a generous dose of craftiness, cunningness, selfishness, greed, deceitfulness and conceit is used stylistically to test intelligence in the play. The art of Ananse as an embodiment of the thematic concern of the play, represents the Whiteman's approach to swindling Africa, and the title clarifies this theme with the two major words: *Ananse* and *Idiots*. The two words in the title provide the roadmap to the interpretation of the play, as the mention of 'Ananse' foreshadows intelligence in the Akan and Ghanaian tradition.

Titology, as a literary field of study, focuses on the significance of the title in establishing the thematic development of the text and that, the title is the foundation for scholarly criticism because it connects to the thematic thrust of the text (Levin, 1977). In the title, *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, Asare juxtaposes knowledge against ignorance where knowledge outwitted ignorance in every aspect. The play appears to many readers as a normal traditional Ananse narrative in which Ananse tries his usual tricks on his victims in the land of the idiots.

This paper applies the theory of titology to *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* to unearth the metaphorical argument of Asare in the play: the ignorance of the African political and traditional leaders and their citizenry and their failure to learn from their mistakes are adversely retarding the economic, political and social growth of the African continent. Thus, research questions used to shape arguments in the paper include: (i) How does the title reflect the portrayal of characters and their actions in the play? (ii) How does the title contribute to the overall meaning of the play and (iii) What does the title add in terms of style to the work of the dramatist? These questions have been used to guide arguments in order for the authors to establish that the title of the drama piece does not only reflect the behaviour and actions of the characters in the play but that it contributes to the overall meaning and style embedded in the drama work. This approach is a new angle from which the drama piece has been studied since the empirical literature in another part of this paper will reveal that such an approach has not been used in subjecting the play to a rigorous analysis despite the great potential it holds in revealing both the meaning and style of the play. Arguments in this article have therefore been presented in the form of an introduction, methodology, theory, empirical literature review, analysis and a conclusion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative one as it uses close reading method to analyse a literary text. Qualitative research is an "iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied" (Aspers & Carte, 2019, p.139). The phenomenon that is studied in this paper is the gullibility of African leaders as against the intelligence and deceptive attitude Westerners as dramatized in Asare's play. Qualitative research has a "rich tradition in the study of human-social behaviour and culture" (Agius, 2013, p.204). Qualitative research is appropriate for the study of this nature since the study is grounded in the humanities. Qualitative method provides "deeper insights into real-world problems" and also has the advantage of being able to answer questions on "hows and whys instead of how

many and how much" (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2022). The "hows and the whys" of the play as presented by Asare are what this paper is all about. Besides these positive qualities of qualitative research, it also has the advantages of being "flexible, offered in-depth and detailed information, allowed the use of multiple collection data collection methods and minimized the chance of having missing data" (Mwita, 2022, p.618). Indeed, qualitative researchers aim "to learn more about people's motivations, thinking and attitudes" or their "feelings, ideas and experiences" (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023, pp. 20&33).

The primary data for the presentation of arguments in this paper is drawn from Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. The data is then subjected to analysis and discussion using perspective from titiology and a close reading of the primary text. According to Greenham (2019. p.3), "Close reading is the most essential skill literature students continue to develop across the full length of their studies." It is a method of reading and interpretation that is defined as a "sustained and careful interpretation of a text". Close reading as a method of interpretation allows literary critics and students to pay attention to the semantic, syntactic, thematic, iterative, generic and adversarial aspects of a text. The centrality of close reading, which started during the period of formalism, to literary studies, is undergirded by findings from many researchers (Smith, 2015; Eppley, 2019; Powell & Robert, 2019; Birkholz & Budke, 2021; & Carter et al., 2022). Indeed, the benefit of using close reading in analyzing any text is that it "helps readers get from literal to inferential understanding of a text" (weareteachers.com). This what makes this method of interpreting the text more relevant and appropriate. The paper aims at revealing more than what meets the eye in the play through a deeper analysis of the meaning of its title and how the title embed the meaning of the content of the play. Some of the data is also drawn from secondary source materials to ground the argument in this research. The study uses Genette's theory of titiology and ideas from other leading critics in the area of titiology as a perspective to look at how the title, *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, defines king Dosey and his entire political cohorts in the play. This title is purposively selected for the study because of its relevance to the meaning of the play and the way it reflects modern African politics; both traditional and western adopted democratic politics in Africa. As part of the method, the theory of titiology and empirical literature review on the play have been used to support arguments and identity the gap in the literature that justify the conduct of research in this area.

The Theory of Titiology

This study uses Genette's theory of titiology as a perspective to look at how the title *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* is reflected in the play and how it provides direction to its interpretation. Genette's theory gives some parameters for titling and it states that the title can be coined out of semiotics in style and it should have a rhetorical effect. The title has obvious or concealed relationship with the text and that paratextual elements of title means it is inside and outside the text.

Genette (1997) states four major functions of title: titles identify the work; they describe the work, thus they raise thematic and thematic issues and pose ambiguity; they have a connotative meaning; and then they lure readers to the text (temptation effect). After these functions, the title also has commercial and legal implications. According to Levin (1977), titiology focuses on the significance of the title in establishing the thematic development of the text and that the title is the foundation for scholarly criticism since it connects to the thematic thrust of the text. He further asserts that the title is a genre and that modern writers carefully

craft titles to tell a story on its own. Prior to the text, the reader or a literary critic would digest the title alone as a text to get an insight. The title serves as a key to the wider interpretation of the text. Comparing the pre-modern titles to the modern ones, titological criticism indicates that the old titles were weak, not standardised, incomprehensible and incoherent. They became problematic because they did not constitute titles in modern sense. However, they represented an early stage in the development of literary titles.

Kellman (1975), remarks that some titles are deemed non-literary works of art because they do not meet the modern standards of titling. The title synchronises with the text. Genette gives a guideline for titling and according to him, titles evoke a complex web of expectation, assumptions and ideals. Titles should be relatively short in length; they should be discrete and autonomous. They should occupy a position prior to the text itself. Eco (1984) has also added to the study of titles and he observes that titles should excite the interest of the readers and offer a key to the interpretation of texts. D'Israeli states in his book *Titles of Books* that we must not write to utter neglect of our title and a fair author should have the literary piety of ever having the fear of his title page before his eyes. D'Israeli observes that the title should be descriptive of and appropriate to the work they name. The title is an intrinsic, inseparable part of a literary work.

Maiorino (2008) in *First Pages: A poetics of Titles* also states that titology is an emergent field of literary studies which explores the relationship between the title and the text. All these critics and authorities in the area of titology point to the many and various functions of the title of a literary work. One thing that remains common to all these critics is the undeniable fact that the titles of modern literary texts serve as the door to entering and understanding the content of the works they name, identify or point to. This paper therefore explores the relationship that exists between the title *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* and the play, how the title speaks to content of the play and describes it so that reading the title alone will give an idea about the interpretation of the play.

Previous Works

Asante and Oppong (2021) used post-colonial theory and Afrocentrism in analysing *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. The researchers focused on looking at the various post-colonial and post Afro-centric themes in the play that have been employed by the playwright as representations of the different sectors and institutions in Africa. The authors concluded that colonialism, African leaders and Africans are all responsible for the economic, cultural and political woes of Africa. For if African leaders and Africans themselves were vigilant in "defending the frontiers of African land", colonialism would not have infiltrated into Africa and neo-colonialism in its current state and forms would not have persisted (p.7). In a similar vein, Appiah-Adjei (2010) also studied the mystery of honey, money and mouth in the play. According to him, the analogy between Ananse using honey to seal the mouth of Akpala in the play and corrupt African and western leaders using money to seal people's mouths "when they are bribed with money to keep certain important things secret" is clear (p.8). He concluded that the play's focus is to warn "exploited peoples of the world, especially in Africa, on the premium placed on visitors and strangers who come into our midst and the kind of reception we offer them" (p.9). In Sidi Chabi and Chabi (2022), the blame game is sustained but in this context, foreigners are not at the centre of the criticism. It is African leaders who are blamed entirely for their carelessness in allowing foreigners to turn Africa into the land of idiots. Using the theory of sociocriticism to study the play, the researchers observed that

“carelessness is dangerous for a kingdom or nation, especially when it is perpetrated by the leaders themselves” (p.34).

In Arthur (2020), an ethonographic and stylistic approach has been used in studying *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. According to the researcher, Ananse who has been labelled as a trickster due to his exploits in “anensem” is not really a con man but a philosopher and a cultural hero. He based his this finding on “an Akan philosophical expression of how to survive in a secular world and that among the Akans, thinking right is highly prized” (p. 152). He then concluded that Akan folklore “has a lot to offer in terms of literature if treated as a locally produced text” (p. 152). Contrary to the preceding finding about Ananse as a philosopher and a cultural hero, Asante and Mpotsiah (2021) concluded that Ananse is a deceptive character through and through. Using Buller and Burgoon’s (1996) Interpersonal Deception Theory, the authors studied the character and actions of Ananse in the play. They concluded that “Ananse exhibited various forms of deceptive postures in all his dealings and engagements at different levels” and that Ananse is presented as “the epitome of man in the Ghanaian context” (p. 607).

Brew (2018) looked at “linking characters” as a tool for African playwrights using eight plays, and among them is *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. According to the author, linking characters are given different names by various playwright; but despite such different labels given them, they ultimately function in similar ways. The author therefore looked at the purposes and effectiveness of linking characters in the eight selected plays by using different situations, dialogues and other issues that are extracted from the plays and analysed. The conclusion drawn is that linking characters are crucial to the understanding of plays by serving different purposes in the drama works such as “establishing rapport with audience, describing location and scenes, filling in information vital to the development of the plot and performing many other roles in African plays” (p.20).

Finally, Amissah-Arthur in (2019) devoted his paper to the critical analysis of the trickster’s (Ananse’s) rhetorical indirection and sexual indiscretion in selected oral and written tales. Among the written tales, Efua Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) and Yaw Asare’s *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* (2006) have been included. The non-existent or relative little information on Ananse’s “sexually-oriented verbal traps” is the motivation for the paper and the author used Roland Barthe’s 1971 theory of pornogrammar to ground arguments in the paper (p.54). The conclusion drawn from the study is that Ananse “commands pornogrammar” (p.76), he is erotic and emotional, and finally, his “sexual discourse is full of homological ideation or antithetical pairing”, and “he demonstrates prolific imagination with regard to female sexuality” (p.77).

Throughout the literature that has been reviewed, various approaches have been used by critics to look at Asare’s play in terms of its content and form. The approach that not been used at all by critics to analyse the play is the perspective from titiology. However, looking at the crucial roles that titles play in modern writing, it is important that the play is studied from that angle of titiology in order to add meaning to its interpretation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ananse is a solitary wanderer who appears in Dim-Nyim-Lira_ the land of idiots on his expedition to explore the natural world. He feasts on ritual food meant for the gods of the land to satisfy his hunger but unfortunately, he is caught by Akpala, the royal guard of the land. Ananse is arrested and sent to the palace to face the law for defiling the ritual sacrifice.

The corresponding punishment for this offence is death. He attempts to buy his life by seducing the king and the elders with his handiwork of a beautiful kente head band which got the elders impressed. Ananse then offers to weave Kente cloth for the princess and her prospective groom on their upcoming wedding ceremony. The king immediately accepts the idea and allows Ananse the freedom to do the work in spite of the priestess' insistence on killing Ananse, because according to her, Ananse is a potential threat to the kingdom. Ananse makes some strategic requests he claims will enhance his crafting process. The king quickly grants them and assigns Akpala to guard him as he works. Ananse goes into a deal with Akpala so that he would help him eliminate Potagyiri, the prince and marry the princess in order to possess all the resources of the land. Akpala accepts the proposal and so, he together with Ananse, kill the prince but Ananse betrays Akpala eventually, and runs away with all the resources in the land. The title is the summary of the play and it lures the readers to read the content for details. Titles help in the discussions of a literary work as they are signposts of plots, characters, themes and motifs in the work of art. The title, *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* is a foreshadow that serves as a symbolic representation of the plot, which moves the readers along the reading of the play. Genette's titling process states the title can be coined out of semiotics in style and it should have a rhetorical effect. Asare's title as a paratext, consists of a noun phrase as a syntactic structure in which an adjectival phrase, "in the land of idiots" post-modifies the headword "Ananse".

With regard to the analysis of the title of the play, on the cover page of the play, the headword "Ananse" is written in capital letters sitting on the adjectival phrase that qualifies it. The adjectival qualifier, "in the land of idiots" is, however, written all in lower case in a disorderly manner. This stylistic feature strengthens the emphasis on Ananse as a famous folkloric character with the talent of wisdom to outwit the foolish characters he encounters in stories. "In the land of idiots" which is written in lower case also signifies the inferior nature of the people in the land. Even the nouns "land" and "idiots", which belong to the major word class are not capitalised in the title and that shows that even the top-ranking members of the land: Dosey and his cohorts are intellectually irrelevant. There is a sub-qualifier, "of idiots" within the phrase "in the land of idiots" which qualifies the word "land" in the title. The prepositional genitive or the "of" genitive construction in the title does not show attributive relationship between "land" and "idiots" as in the case of "idiots' land". The two genitive constructions have entirely different semantic meanings and that is why Asare uses the "of" genitive to indicate that some idiots occupy a land. Every author has a prerogative to use the title to provide a direction to their text so that the first interpretation belongs to the author. The use of the possessive case "idiots' land" would have made the title "Ananse in idiots' land", which would have provided a different direction to the interpretation of the play. Asare has therefore coined the title carefully to foreshadow the encounter of Ananse, the folkloric character, with the idiots in the land and this informs the reader about the focus of the play. The drama piece focuses on how African leaders in particular and Africans themselves have allowed the west to turn Africa into a land of idiots.

Also, the definite article "the" is used to denote a referent, "land", and the definiteness presupposes that the referent is so obvious and known to the reader of the play. This means that the writer is pointing to a particular land and directing the reader's mind to it. The definite article is also used for generic reference and strengthens the emphasis on the land, which has a special remark for its unique identity. If Dim-Nyim-Lira is highlighted to represent all the lands of idiots, then the title could be considered as synecdochic (Nsiah and Marfo, 2011).

The term *idiots* in the title is a motif in the play portrayed by the characters whenever Ananse encounters them. Ananse himself acknowledges the relevance of the title to the plot of the play. He exclaims the title on his first appearance on stage as he addresses the audience: "Well, ladies and gentlemen... I suppose we are all here to watch this play... "Ananse in the Land of Idiots" Hmmmmph! That's quite a title, isn't it? "a land of idiots" indeed!" (Asare, 2006, p. 1).

The exclamations in Ananse's expression depict the overwhelming idiotic circumstance of the people in the land. Idiots are occupying a land of rich resources and therefore he would apply his intellect to hoodwink them. Ananse confirms this in this rhetorical question: "Now tell me; what is wrong with a man employing his god-given latent talents to cope with the challenges of a hostile world?" (Asare, 2006, p. 2). The world's economic situation is such that the more intelligent and smarter ones are preying on the ignorant for survival. It could then be asserted that in the play, Africa is symbolically presented as the land of idiots and Ananse is the representative from the west. The relationship between Africa and the West is therefore not for mutual benefit. It is a siege of Africa and a cunning means of preying on the African continent by the Europeans for their survival and they see nothing wrong with it because being smart does not flout any natural order. Like Ananse's study on the land of idiots, the Westerners, through their observations, have a clear view of Africa and its intellectual loopholes. The play is no doubt, the extended metaphor of Africa versus the west. Asare in his note on the play states that the play is meant above all, to sensitise Africa and other exploited peoples of the world on the inherent lusts, perversions and attitudes which have facilitated the processes of their entanglement, dislocation and dispossession.

Another rhetoric is picked from the play that resonates with the following rhetorical question: "Tell me...what man with such intellect as I have, would willingly turn his back on a good life in this land of idiots?" (Asare, 2006, p. 17). Ananse asked this rhetorical question to the audience when he was addressing them after his encounter with the leaders of the land. His encounter with them had exposed their credulity and now, Ananse is full of himself. He is not the Ananse who was condemned to death for defiling the ritual process. The introduction of his kente headband has tested their intellectual level and the results indicate that he can manipulate the entire kingdom. The level of idiocy among even the top-ranking members of the land gives him the comfort and confidence to swindle them. He compares himself as a man of intellect with the idiots and realises the wide gap. This is a motivation enough to continue his stay in the land until he fulfills his ambition. The title of the play, indeed, represents the content and meaning of the play.

In terms of the portrait of selected characters in the play, a string of rhetorical questions is asked by Ananse that reflects the title of the play in the traits of Akpala and Odudu. This event happens at the time when Akpala, the security guard who is watching over Ananse, the criminal, sleeps off on duty, giving Ananse the opportunity to escape smoothly without toil. However, he refuses to run away because a person with such an intellect would be capable of bringing all the people under his feet:

Just look at him! How can such a sleepy scarecrow embody the watchful vigilance of an empire? Tell me somebody. What stops me from picking my things and sneaking off now? With that dunce of messenger gone to fetch the maidens from the palace, and this worthless one lost in another world, what indeed stops me from taking my freedom... on a silver platter... as the politicians say?... But you think I will? No! I

know better than that. I have only this evening to finish these clothes. Then I will be expelled from this empire of idiots... (Asare, 2006, p. 19).

Ananse refers to Akpala as a “scarecrow” that farmers create to scare away and deter birds from eating the seeds and crops planted in the field. Scarecrows are empty figures and present no danger, yet birds get scared of them probably because they (the birds) are not smart enough to detect the emptiness of these dummies. Ananse is smarter than both the farmer (Dosey) and the scarecrow (Akpala) contextually. The metaphor of Akpala as a scarecrow and Odudu as a dunce gives Ananse the motivation to exploit the land effortlessly. These idiots are the designated security force around him, who pose no threat to his scheme. The artlessness of the characters has afforded him the opportunity to convert his “condemned to death” circumstance into wealth creation. Indeed, the land is full of idiots and that is why Ananse constantly gives the derogatory term “idiots” a special mention. He mentions it on stage with exclamation whenever he addresses the audience.

Several other evidences are patent in the play that attest that the play fustigates African political leaders and their citizenry for the ills that stagnate the development of Africa and which trigger and facilitate western manipulations. This is manifested in the the traditional political structure with king Dosey, being at the top on the hierarchy, the queen mother, the elder and the priestess. This portrays the cultural structure of Africa in terms of leadership. The costume of the characters, the mention of Kente cloth and as Dosey goes for a war smock when he realised that his kingdom had been duped of all their natural resources all indicate that the traditional leadership have failed their people.

The setting also depicts Africa with the name of the kingdom being Dim-Nyim-Lira, and the historical period of colonisation when the Europeans encountered Africa. The names of the characters also place the play in the African context. Dosey, Akpala, Pootagyiri among others are African names. The language is also an important feature that sets the play in the context of Africa. Even though the playwright uses English language to communicate his message, he has nativised it in the play since nativisation of the English language has always characterised African writings (Sankoff, & Laberge, 1974, Pandharipande, 1987).

The following metaphors are therefore deduced in the play that reflect the title *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* as a metaphor. Ananse the folkloric character with his usual trait of deceit, represents the Europeans who constantly identify the weaknesses of Africans and swindle us in one way or another for their survival. Ananse’s gestures set the play in the historical context, the coming of the Europeans to Africa using their dexterity and human psychology deliberately to swindle Africans and rape the land of Africa. This is all because they had seen some level of idiocy and greed in the actions of Africans, especially, their leaders. The coming of the Europeans to Africa as a background to the play is juxtaposed against present day Africa in order to explain why the continent still remains as it is after years of independence from the colonial rule. “Ananse” and “land of idiots” in the title are then represented as metaphors and dramatised inside the play.

Ananse as the representative of the West sits back and observes the characteristics of all the inhabitants of this idiotic kingdom, including King Dosey. Ananse mentions this in this proverb: “DIM-NYIM-LIRA!” “The Land of Idiots”. Again, it is said that if at sundown able-bodied customers shun your rotten mushrooms at the centre of the market, carry them to the fringes; the handicapped would buy!” (Asare, 2006, p. 3). Clearly, the play explores intelligence versus stupidity. Indeed, the characters’ stupidity is exposed whenever they

encounter Ananse (Arthur, 2021). The able-bodied customers are people with high intellectual faculty whom Ananse cannot easily manipulate with his wily methods.

Ananse uses the nominal “handicapped” in the proverb as the metaphor of Dosey and his citizenry. This implies that a disabled person is not defined as only a person with some form of physical deformity but also, an intellectually impaired individual could be referred to as handicapped. The success and progress of an individual and the society largely depend on the prowess of the brain. Ananse’s manipulative machinery ensnares the people due to their low intellects because according to the above proverb, he had probably tried the same deceptive formula on some able-bodied people somewhere in the global space and it did not work for him. This attests that western imperialism is widespread in Africa much more than in the other parts of the world because of the global levels of intellect.

King Dosey is the metaphor of the executive arm of African governments (Asante &Oppong, 2021) to whom the citizens have entrusted their hopes and aspirations. Dosey’s stupidity that is borne out of greed lays the foundation for Ananse’s success in his deceptive scheme launched in the land of the idiots. After Ananse’s last strategic request that a certified idiot would be required as a messenger to run the errands between his craft shop and the palace, Dosey deemed this as not a difficult request at all as he retorted: “idiots abound in our land” (Asare, 2006, p. 15). This metaphor is a reflection of the extent of naivety that has engulfed the people in the land of the idiots. With the exception of the priestess, every character in this play showcases an overdose of idiocy. Dosey proudly makes the above statement, suggesting ironically that his people are rather the idiots, excluding himself from the bunch of the idiots. He is oblivious of the fact that he is indeed the king of idiots.

The relationship among Dosey, Dosey’s people and Ananse can also be extended to the relationship between the African politician, the African electorate and the west. The African politician or political elite feel they are smarter and can always deceive the electorate with a litany of promises that they know too well they cannot fulfill and cosmetic gifts such as money during elections. They know too well that what the electorates deserve is true developments, not empty promises; and not money that cannot be used in setting up any viable business. Yet, they the political elite feel they are living in the land of idiots and can always deceive them with empty promises and hollow gifts. And thus, while the African political elite are busy deceiving and taking their own people for a ride, the west, like Ananse, is also busy taking Dosey and the African political leadership for a ride. The few African political leaders who are able to discern the deceiving tactics of the west are quickly shut down like the chief priestess either through internal revolt or Coup D’Estate that may be facilitated by western agencies.

Dosey’s quick approval of Ananse’s strategic requests represents African leaders’ acceptance of foreign policies and the dictates of the West without any scrutiny. They willfully do this after they have received strange gifts from the West. Ananse introduced the Kente band as a ruse to capture the minds of the leaders as Dosey exclaims: “Hey! Let me see that one... yes, yes! The one with the purple fringe!... Ah! This is splendid. Never seen anything so beautiful. Have you, Old one?” The Elder also responds in affirmation to smoothen Ananse’s course of deception: “Never! This is surely the work of a master craftsman” (Asare, 2006, p. 12). The foreign materials overwhelm African leaders and they get excited about them. They no longer assume their authority to defend the sovereignty of the African states. This ignorance perpetuates the colonisation and looting of the African continent by the West.

Neo-colonisation is possible in Africa by the virtue of intellectual deficiency among the populace and the ignorant leaders of Africa. The strategic techniques used by Ananse with the introduction of the Kente headband and the honey imitate the Western strategies applied on Africa. They introduce aids to suppress Africa and wean Africans from self-sufficiency. These aids are not much to empower Africans economically but a little bit of infrastructure to make it possible for raw materials to get to the ports. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank also offer loan facilities to African countries who are raw material producers with “negative ...conditional structural adjustment policies” in order to indebt them to gain absolute control over them (Ryder & Fu, 2021, p.327). . Lending money to Africans is a strategy to trap them and continue to extract their resources. The foreign aids and the loans are therefore used as a spider’s web to trap Africans just as Ananse used Kente and the honey to entrap and control the leaders and all the citizens in the land of the idiots. The constant link of the title to the play suggests that Asare’s first interpretation of the play is a strong message to African leaders and their citizenry.

Apart from the aid and the loan techniques, they incite some African coup plotters to create political turmoil in the African countries. Money and guns are given to the military to motivate and empower them in their war-waging adventures, and as the Africans are busy fighting, the Westerners siphon the natural recourses onto their shores. Ananse instigated the same fight between Apkala and Pootagyiri at his craft shop. Ananse gave honey to Akpala and studies his reaction. He realised that Akpala was so much interested in finding the secret source of the honey. He therefore capitalised on Akpala’s interest in the honey to negotiate the elimination of Pootagyiri for Ananse to take over the princess. He outlines his plan for them:

I shall invite the prince here, to take his own measurement tomorrow. When he arrives, I shall make him leave his bows, arrows, amulets and necklaces here, and then stretch his arms across the cloth. You will be hiding in the bush there. Then when you hear me whistle you will shoot your arrow right through his heart. And that will be all, a very simple task, and you would have won yourself a chieftain and unlimited wealth, pleasure...power (Asare, 2006, p. 32).

Akpala therefore is the metaphor of the African military juntas who get influenced by the West to overthrow their republican governments. As Ananse does it to Akpala, the Westerners give tutorials to the African war leaders, explaining to them the essence of assuming power, and getting wealth out of the power. They make the African soldiers aware of their position as mere security guards who have the duty to protect the interest of the politicians. This would convince the military men and provoke their anger to strike on the civilian government. And the military as a repressive regime will give the West an access to Africa’s natural resources. Ananse incites Akpala by comparing the latter’s position in the kingdom to that of Potaagyiri: “Kinsman? Isn’t he a privileged prince while you’re a servile guard? And... are you not a soldier, to talk of murder when you kill an enemy and claim your booty?” (Asare, 2006, p. 32).

Ananse uses the rhetorical question technique as a persuasive tool to soften Akpala’s heart and wean him of his sense of loyalty to his kingdom and through that, he instantly agrees to Ananse’s negotiation. Now, Ananse has created enmity rather than amity, between the two compatriots who should, under normal circumstances, see themselves as one people. This allegory reveals the carpeted events that cause military interventions in African politics: the ruins of Africa. Now, Ananse has caused Akpala to kill his kinsman with the illusion of access to power and wealth. What facilitates this is the greed, personal interest and corruption

that characterised most African political and military leaders. Most African leaders (both political and military) are not selfless, discerning and patriotic enough and can easily be bought with gifts and money (honey) and Asare sees it as a pitfall that promotes instability in the continent. He therefore levels double criticism against both parties: the politicians and the military using the character of Pootagyiri and Akpala.

Majority of African politicians are power-drunk and would want to always exercise power and control on their fellow countrymen. As a tragic characters' flaws lead them to their sad end in a tragedy, Pootagyiri's temper and his feeling of superiority contributes immensely to his death, paving a way for Ananse's success in Ananse's operation. Pootagyiri's attitude in the play points to the fact that he is so obsessed with power. He considers himself superior to Akpala. This is evident in his rebuke to Akpala at Ananse's craft shop when he suspects that Akpala has taken a lustful glance at the princess, his prospective wife:

You know the custom... you know that no lowly man must take any pleasure – physical or visual – from the spouse of his superior. I will surely remember to reward you when I assume my chieftain. Just you wait! (Asare, 2006, p. 37).

Pootagyiri's character is the metaphor of some African politicians who are so much obsessed with power that they go to the extent of attaching some titles to their names in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the "ordinary" citizens. Mensah, (1993) mentions in the review of *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* that members of parliament in Ghana append the title "Honourable" to their names at all times, even though in its country of origin the term is applied only in the context of a debate on the floor of parliament. Presidents, judges, chiefs, security persons among others also ascribe some distinguished titles to their names to reflect their social status and Asare coins the title to laugh at such power-conscious individuals in the African context. For him to be seen as superior, powerful and fearful, Pootagyiri ascribes a string of appellations to himself. "And I am Pootagyiri – the-Tortoise-that-Feeds-On-Ants-At-The-Tree-Top; One-Who-Wrestles-Seven-Lions-and-Kills-Them-Empty-handed; Son-of-Pootaguo-whose-totem-is-the-prowling-bush-cat! Prince of the Dark forests..." (Asare, 2006, p. 37). Ananse therefore takes advantage of Pootagyiri's obsession with power to achieve his aim. Asare considers all that as foolishness that does not bring any progress to Africa. This is not the first time that Ananse capitalises on African leaders' love for titles and power to deceive them. In Sutherlands' *The Marriage of Anansewa*, (1975) Ananse exploits that weakness in order to deceive and take so much wealth from the various chiefs interested in the hand of his daughter. In real life, leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Joseph Mobutu of DR Congo, Yahaya Jammeh of Gambia, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Idi Amin of Uganda and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe all added a litany of titles to their official names while they were in power.

Odudu shows the subtle form of idiocy (naivety and selfishness) among the people in the land of the idiots. It is no wonder that King Dosey describes him as "brainless" so that among the bunch of the idiots he was earmarked for Ananse when he made a request for an idiot. Dosey is aware of the level of idiocy that is synonymous with Odudu and that is why he constantly refers to him as idiot. "Must you always play the Idiot? Can't you muster little spell of thoughtful sanity?" (Asare, 2006, p. 53). Dosey asked the above rhetorical questions to Odudu when he (Odudu) is stupid (greedy) enough to keep quiet over the killing of the prince Pootagyiri at Ananse's craft shop. The rhetorical questions suggest that Odudu is always out of thought and that he cannot think rationally. His level of idiocy can be equated

to insanity as stated by Dosey. His actions in the play, however, reveal that he is not only selfish but he is also corrupt.

Odudu as a representative of the African citizenry in the play gets excited about any trivial thing offered to him by Ananse, and through that, he serves as an instrument for Ananse's scheme. The honey Ananse gave to Odudu and Akpala is the representation of the sweets that the Europeans brought for the African people in the precolonial days in exchange for gold. In the play, Akpala exchanges Pootagyiri for honey. The same phenomenon is replicated in the neocolonial era when the Europeans offer to Africans the illusion of aid in road construction projects so that the natural resources can get onto the ports.

The unwise decisions that the characters in the play have made are the mirror of most African leaders and their citizenry that facilitate Europeans' deceptive strategies that are executed on Africa. It is a sad occasion for Africa when the ignorant think they are the wisest and for that matter they do not heed to any advice offered by the philosophers. The priestess as a philosopher, advised Dosey on his decision to entertain Ananse. Dosey's greed and tactlessness blind him and screened off his sense of thought. This led the kingdom the ultimate tragedy that befalls it.

The title of this play journeys the readers and audience through the drama work, and as the title reflects almost every event in the play, it occupies a central place in the minds of the audience. According to Ananse, his attempt to manipulate the people is for the purpose of his survival in this hostile world. This prompts the audience on the phenomenon where, some smart people prey on some ignorant ones to survive. As the play dramatises the reality between Africa and the West, it informs African people about their own actions that soften the grounds for foreign influence over them.

African leaders' unwise decisions, greed, and unpatriotic nature make them gullible to deception. It is also a social phenomenon that individuals always look for weak-minded fellows to take advantage of for their survival in life. Ananse tried all means possible to get his way through in the land of the idiots because he needed to survive all the life challenges. He therefore puts the people to test and analysed their reactions. He realised that they are not as intelligent as he is and that motivated him to swindle them singlehandedly. The citizens in the land of the idiots are unintelligent and greedy except the priestess who warned them to stay vigilant. This means that just a negligible fraction of people in the universe of the play represents intelligence and that explains why Ananse is able to get his way through effortlessly. Due to the fact that Africans refuse to learn their lessons and those who decide to learn from the tricks of western powers are the minority, the guard against external manipulations has been lowered. African economy is in a dire state of dilapidation because of greed borne out of foolishness. The play therefore explores intelligence versus stupidity, greed and lack of selflessness where the negative qualities seem to have defeated the positive one. Intelligence versus stupidity therefore, is metaphorically implied in the title as Ananse versus idiots.

CONCLUSION

The overall objective of the paper right from the beginning has been to analyse how Asare uses the title: *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* to reselect the characters and their actions in the play; to establish a relationship between the title of the play and its meaning; and to add style with meaning to the overall understanding of the play. First, in a literal sense, the title actually reflects the nature and actions of the characters in the play as revealed through the

analysis in this paper. Dosey and his people are not only idiots (artless) but they are also greedy and this makes it easier for Ananse to manipulate them and rob them of their resources and their princess whose life is a priceless one. Second, Asare strategically and purposefully crafts the title of this play to highlight the metaphorical meaning of the play as embedded in the failures of African leaders and their citizens. Metaphorically, the land of idiots is Africa and Ananse represents Africa's colonial masters. Due to the gullibility and selfishness of some Africans and our leaders, and due to the greed of western nations, Africa continues to be exploited like the land of idiots even after independence. Most African countries are only independent on paper today while true independence has eluded and continues to elude us up to date (Mlambo, Masuku & Mthambu, 2024; Osuigwe, 2023; and Khisa, 2022). This metaphorical meaning of the play is reflected in the title and it is an interpretation that is sustained throughout the analysis of the play. Finally, in terms of style, Asare as a postcolonial activist, uses satire as a technique in his title and in the content of the play to prompt his people on the internal issues and some of their actions that are deemed unwise and which make them mere stooges in the hands of the West. Satire is used as a style with the aim of correcting the deficiencies identified in nature of African leaders and in the nature of some greedy African individuals. Convincing evidence is provided in the play that the piece of drama is an allegory of the African people versus the West, comparing intelligence and resourcefulness to gullibility, avarice and lack of selflessness in contemporary Africa. The word "idiots" in the title flows throughout the drama, indicating the extent of the artlessness and avarice among the people in the land of the idiots. The theory of titiology therefore qualifies Asare's title as a literary title as it is created to foreshadow the events in the play from the beginning, and at the end of the play, the titles also captures and reflects the essence of the play.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that further studies on other aspects of the style of the play could be conducted by other critics. It is the style that brings out the beauty of the message and style in literary studies is always a non-negotiable aspect of the meaning of literary works. Generally, focus and attention should always be given to the style of literary pieces; be they oral or written. In the case of Asare's play, the style is all the more important because he criticizes African leaders and Africans in general in a very candid but subtle manner. The issues raised in the play are at the heart of the problems that are retarding Africa in terms of development. Finally, using indigenous African wisdom and methods to approach African problems is always the best attitude. Asare draws on the Ananse folktales to talk about an African attitude that is drawing us back in terms of development and these are texts that can be recommended for further studies in African schools.

REFERENCES

Aspers, P. & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative research? *Qualitative Sociology*, 42, 139-160. doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7

Agius, J. A. (2013). Qualitative research: Its value and applicability. *The Psychiatrist*, 37 (6), 204-206. doi:10.1192/pb.bp.113.042770

Adams, H. (1987). Titles, titling, and entitlement to. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46(1), 5-15.

Affiah, U. (2012). From orality to print: An oraliterary examination of Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* and Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(2):13-25.

Amissah-Arthur, J. B. (2019). Theorising pornogrammar in the African folktale tradition: The trickster rhetorical indirection and sexual indiscretion. *Legan Journal of Humanities*, 30(1), 54-81. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v30i1.3>

Appiah-Adjei, D. (2010). The mystery of honey and mouth and the mouth is sealed: A critical appraisal of Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* as a metaphor in the African society. *Journal of Performance Art*, 4(2), 8-14.

Arthur, P. (2020). Philosophy and heroism: The literary perspective of Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of the Idiots*. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 1(5), 152–164. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2020094>

Asante, E. & Mpotsiah, M. (2021). The portrayal of Ananse as a deceptive character in "anansesem": Evidence from Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 5(12), 607-616.

Asante, E. & Oppong, S. Y. (2021). Postcolonial theory and African drama: A critical perspective on Ananse in the Land of Idiots. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 9(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0901001>

Asare, Y. (2006). *Ananse in the land of idiots*. Accra: Study Ghana Foundation.

Brew, F. (2018). The 'linking character': A valuable tool for African playwrights. *Journal of African Arts*, 2(2), 1-22.

Birkholz, J. M. & Budke, L. (2021). Distant and close reading in literature: A case of networks in periodical studies. *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties*, 25, 204-217.

Carter, J., Clarke, M. T., Halpern, F., Mason, D., Nicole, J. & Vanek, M. (2022). Too close for context: Where students get stuck when close reading. *Pedagogy*, 22(3), 349-371.

Close reading (2024). *Basmo: A Smart Way to Read*. Retrieved 11 April, 2024, from <https://basmo.app/what-is-close-reading>

D'Israeli, I. (1881) *Titles of books in curiosities of literature*. ed. Benjamin D'Israeli, London: Wame

Eco, U. (1984). The title and the meaning, in *Reflections on 'The Name of the Rose'*, trans. William Weaver, London: Secker and Warburg, pp. 1-8.

Eppley, K. (2019). Close reading: What is reading for? *Curriculum Inquiry*, 49(3), 338-355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1631701>

Genette, G. (1988). The structure and functions of literary titles. trans. Bernard Crampe, in *Critical Inquiry*, 14(4), 692-720.

Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. trans. Jane E. Lewin Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Greenham, D. (2019). *Close Reading: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.

idiot. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 9 Jan. 2024, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095956798>.

Kellman, S. G. (1975). Dropping names: The poetics of titles. *Criticism*, 17, 152-67.

Levin, H. (1977). The title as a literary genre. *The Modern Language Review*, 72(4), xxiii–xxxvi. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3724776>

Khisa, M. (2022). Rethinking the Pan-African agenda: Africa, the African Diaspora and the agenda for liberation. *Africa Development*, XLVII(4), 1-23. doi.org/10.57054/ad.v47i4.2975

Maiorino, G. (2008). *First pages: A poetics of titles*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Mlambo, V.H., Masuku, M.M. & Mthambu, Z. (2024). The new scramble Africa in a post-colonial era and the challenges of inclusive development: A semi-systematic literature review. *Development Studies Research*, 11 (1), 1-12. doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2024.2306387.

Mwita, K. M. (2022). Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research in social sciences studies. *Research in Business and Social Science*, 11(6), 618-625.

Nsiah, J. & Marfo, C. (2011). What's in a title? A reading of Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*. Spheres Public and Private: Western Genres in African Literature, ed. Gordon Collier, *Matatu 39*; Amsterdam & New York: Editions Rodopi.

Osuigwe, C.E. (2023). Post-independence Politics in Africa. In: Leadership and Economic Development Challenges in Post-Colonial Africa. Sustainable Development Goals Series. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-45663-3_3

Pandharipande, R. (1987). On nativization of English. *World Englishes* 6(2), 149–158.

Ryder, H. & Fu, Y. (2021). Africa's "too little debt" crisis: Why finance from China to African countries is more critical than ever in the wake of COVID-19. *China International Strategy Review*, 3, 325-341. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-02-0083-x

Sankoff, D., & Laberge, W. (1974). *Language in society*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Sidi Chabi, M. & Chabi, O. R. (2022). Carelessness and its drawbacks as seen through Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 10(4), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1004005>

Smith, B. H. (2015). What was "Close Reading"? : A century of method in literary studies. *The Minnesota Review*, 87, 57-75. doi.org/10.1215/00265667-3630844

Sutherland, Efua. (1975). *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd.

Ugwu, C. & Eze Val, H. U. (2023). Qualitative research. *IDOSR Journal of Computer and Applied Sciences*. 8(1), 20-35.

Welsch, J. G., Powell, J. J. & Robnolt, V. (2019). Getting to the core of close reading: What do we really know and what remains to be seen? *Reading Psychology*, 40, 95-116, doi: 10.1080/02702711.2019.1571544

Tenny, S., Brannan, J. M. & Brannan, G. D. (2022). Qualitative research. Last updated on September 18. Retrieved from (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/), on 26/04/2024.