Flash Fiction Ghana, African Digital Literature, and Imagining Domestic Relationships

Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang
University of Ghana

"Mama is in The Box," written by Myers Hansen and published in December 2015, is a flash fiction piece of 949 words in which an unnamed young girl comes to terms with the death of her mother during her funeral. The funeral scene sandwiches flashbacks of experiences that take place mainly at home and revolve around the girl's mother falling sick. Her mother's infirmity renders her unable to braid her daughter's hair and generally take care of her, leading to the need for Yaa, a formally illiterate young woman with a rural background. Yaa, who is less caring than her mother, works as a maid, sleeping on a mat on the floor and supporting the running of the domestic space. Told from the first person, the narrator hints at her father's infidelity with Yaa, which causes friction between her mother and the house-help. The young girl recalls other incidents at school and in the hospital, which make her want to become a doctor. The story ends with an Auntie crying with her as her mother lies in a coffin. While the settings, themes, characters, and other literary aspects of the story are similar to equivalents in print literature, the brevity of the story signals the ephemerality of digital literature. The domestic space as captured in the story is thus a way of understanding the evolution of African literature in the digital space.

"Mama is in The Box" is found on *Flash Fiction Ghana* (https://flashfictionghana.com), a website which, in its own words, is home to "very short stories" by Ghanaian writers. Created by Daniel Dzah, the website was launched in June 2012 and took off in the following month with three successful submissions. The "About" section of the website clearly delineates its purpose, audience, and content by stating: "This blog was created for lovers and admirers of this classic genre of story-telling. We bring you the best Flash Fiction from Ghana." The submission guidelines are also concise: stories are recommended to range between 500 and 1,000 words and should not contain "intense explicit language and imagery bordering on extraneous profanity and vile erotica." From its inception until January 2018 when it went on an indefinite break, it was home to more than a hundred works of short prose fiction that fall under categories such as Children, Romance, Young Adult, and Drama, with various literary styles.[1] A number of these stories treat domestic themes, which primarily revolve around

familial relationships. While domesticity is stereotypically associated with women writers, I am interested in how three young men writers imagine domestic relationships through contemporary lenses in digital spaces.

I explore the ways in which stories by Myers Hansen and by two other male authors on *Flash Fiction Ghana* – "Underneath the Stars" by Fui Can-Tamakloe and Kojo Nyatepe's "Flesh and Blood" – use this digital platform to construct, imagine, and critique relationships in order to simultaneously signal a convergence with and a departure from traditional notions of domestic spaces in Ghanaian – and for that matter – African literature. These traditional notions of domestic relationships have been examined in oral and print African literature. Even though the texts under scrutiny are created through electronic means, their engagement with the domestic space is informed not only by markers of the digital period, such as multimodality and the digital interface, but also by features of oral and modern African literature as defined by Abiola Irele (2001). This blend leads to an understanding of African digital literature as simultaneously an amalgamation and extension of print literature. This argument thus strengthens the position of African digital literature as the next frontier for African literature with an identity that transitions seamlessly from oral literature and print literature through its adoption of their features in its imagining of domestic relationships. The examples utilized in this article suggest that domestic relationships in African digital literature tend to be fractured, under pressure from blatant transgressions, or reflective of a feature that underlines the importance of thinking about the domestic space as located within a range of lived experiences that are informed by contemporary situations.

For the purposes of this argument, the domestic relationships within the scope of the study refer to familial relationships between parents and their children, heterosexual relationships between romantic partners, and class-based relationships between domestic workers and their employers that connect with the modes of organization that provide structure, direction, and identity to families in ways that eventually critique society. These domestic connections are mainly constructed through personal relationships, and in the stories chosen, I consider the nature of these relationships to speak to how these writers view Ghanaian family systems.

African literature, and for that matter Ghanaian literature, is heavily marked by scholarship that examines its domestic relationships.[2] This research has largely been limited to oral literature and modern African literature; with the advent of African digital literature, there is a new category which differs from these two major forms of creative expression. The basic differences in terms of mediation, production, and engagement for instance thus render simplistic the contention by Achille Mbembe that Africa has always

been digital. To be fair, Mbembe admits that this assertion is essentialist; additionally, in terms of African literature, there are parallels between oral literature, print literature, and digital literature - mainly due to shared aesthetic concerns. However, these similarities at best serve as entry points for comparative analyses between these forms of creative expression.[3] Thus, following on from Abiola Irele's universally accepted division of African literature into oral and print (the latter which he termed "modern"), the digital presents itself as a third category. In this straightforward regard, scholarship on the construction of and engagement with domestic relationships in African literature will benefit from understanding what happens to the domestic in digital environments and contexts.

In other words, the question that drives this article is: how are domestic relationships imagined, created, and sustained in African digital literature? While answering such a question should require an ambitious scope, for the purposes of this article it is perhaps more profitable and realistic to approach such a query using a small fragment of the existing corpus of African digital creative expression. African digital literature is a vibrant field with Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, and Ghana among the countries that serve as reference points for this vibrancy.[4] My research focuses on Ghana, and out of the numerous genres and examples, I employ the three stories to better understand the relationship between short forms and domestic relationships as constructed in digital environments. Hence, the focus on a single country, while different from inter-regional approaches that scholars like Shola Adenekan (Nigeria and Kenya) employ, is similar to what has been done by Yeku, for example, whose work revolves around Nigeria. An analysis of these stories helps to eventually broach a larger question that concerns the ways in which African digital literature imagines domestic relationships in different ways.

Short forms have a history that traverses different modes of technology and touch on themes related to domestic relationships in Ghana. Proverbs, music, and folktales dominate oral literature, while written short stories are a familiar staple in print literature. Countless examples of these deal with domestic relationships and shed light on how society views domestic spaces: marriages, parenting, and servant-employer relationships underline the fact that creative artists have been interested in the domestic space. The ubiquitous nature of short forms in African literature demand further engagement with such texts, especially in a digital age when the popularity of constrictive social media spaces such as Twitter highlight the gravitation to short forms. Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins have explored the implications of African writers being able to write on their own terms due to the absence of the gatekeeping mechanisms that characterize the era of print literature.[5] Through its harnessing of digital technology, Ghana's literary landscape has been augmented by *Flash Fiction Ghana*.

While the essay looks closely at only three stories, these representatives of *Flash Fiction Ghana* serve as a platform on which to build tentative reflections on the treatment of domestic relationships in African digital literature. Further scholarship from other genres and countries can complement this research to build a more comprehensive picture of how African digital literature imagines the domestic.

According to Dzah, the submissions to *Flash Fiction Ghana* required an incorporation of a "Ghanaian context" – he connected this requirement to the obvious fact that the story would be published on a website whose name included "Ghana." This consideration of a Ghanaian identity hearkens to now classic debates about the authenticity of African literature.[6] Narrowed down to Ghana then, it is not always clear or universally accepted whether a historical novel like *Ama* (2000), which is set in Ghana and written by the white South African author Manu Herbstein (who is married to a Ghanaian woman and is a member of the Ghana Association of Writers), qualifies as Ghanaian literature or not; similarly, Taiye Selasi, author of the famous "Bye Bye Barbar" (2005) essay that triggered the Afropolitan debate, might not necessarily circumscribe her identity or her novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013) as Ghanaian, not least considering her Nigerian ancestry, her cosmopolitan upbringing, and her arguments about space, identity, and displacement in multiple essays and interviews.[7] For Dzah and his team, the setting and/or characters in the submissions had to display connections to Ghana in order to qualify as a Ghanaian piece. Again, a casual perusal of the authors' names on the website implies that at the very least, the majority are of Ghanaian heritage. With these parameters in mind, the "About" section confidently concludes: "Here you'll find the largest variety of originally Ghanaian flash fiction stories." Dzah had a vision to make *Flash Fiction Ghana* the most important venue for extremely short Ghanaian fiction. Using the popular *WordPress* engine, he found *Flash Fiction Ghana* to be a convenient way of attracting largely amateur writers who were in turn looking for an audience to share their work with. In housing submissions from writers, *Flash Fiction Ghana* continues a convention of creative writing appearing in various Ghanaian media as popularized by newspapers such as the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and the weekly *Mirror*.

The domestic relationships that are constructed and critiqued in these stories not only extend from older forms of Ghanaian literature but are also a reflection of the digital age, which is a period that Shola Adenekan argues eradicates certain publishing barriers that existed for print literature.[8] Unlike the relative lack of options that African writers struggled with in the twentieth century's printing age – which included the gate-keeping Heinemann (that published the African Writers Series) on a larger scale, and local printing houses such as state media and private printing presses on a minor scale – these writers go

through a relatively simple process that includes the aforementioned deliberations over the content of their stories. And at a time when the Internet has spread quickly and widely in Ghana, these writers produce and edit their stories on accessible devices such as mobile phones and laptops. In other words, they only require an Internet connection and approval from Dzah and his team to reach their intended audience, which stood at just over 25,000 by December 2018. The process to publish in *Flash Fiction Ghana* is therefore also less cumbersome than publishing in the *Daily Graphic*, which has the widest newspaper readership in Ghana. Since its inception in 1950, the *Graphic*'s long history of publishing stories includes the period from 2008 to 2009 when it dedicated a page for literary submissions edited by Mbaasem, a non-governmental organization founded and directed by the celebrated writer Ama Ata Aidoo. Despite the generosity of the newspaper to allow for the stories and poems to be published for free on a weekly basis, the relative lack of space meant that typically, only one piece was printed per week.[9] *Flash Fiction Ghana*, like other Internet portals such as the Kenya-based *Jalada* and the Nigerian website *Saraba*, experiences no such spatial limitations. Beyond the absence of restrictions in terms of space, these writers also enjoy working in an era of enhanced freedom of speech.

It is worth noting the political context of writing in a time when Ghana has enjoyed two decades of stable democratic governance.[10] One of the markers of this situation is the absence of the criminal libel law, which was repealed at the turn of the millennium.[11] This watershed moment enhanced freedom of speech in Ghana, mainly because writers and journalists have been granted license to traverse hitherto existing restrictions without the fear of legally backed punishment. Coupled with this event is the fact that the majority of the writers who submit their work to *Flash Fiction Ghana* are in their twenties and thirties, implying that they avoided living under military rule in Ghana for most of their lives.[12] They feel free to explore themes in direct ways unlike other creative artists in Ghana's past, which was fraught with military rule and coups.[13] Accordingly, their stories are reflective of this dispensation.

The most defining feature of flash fiction is its length, or lack of it. Robert Shapard calls the genre "very short fiction," measuring it as ten times shorter than a traditional story. In her introduction to *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*, Luisa Valenzuela supplements this definition by using an extended animal metaphor, comparing "… the novel to a mammal, be it wild as a tiger or tame as a cow; the short story to a bird or a fish; the micro story to an insect (iridescent in the best cases)" (20). The emphasis on a lack of writing space associated with the genre allows the creative artists to briefly touch on the literary aspects of their work; the writer of flash fiction does not delve deeply into a theme, develop a

character fully, or explore a plot thoroughly.[14] This strategy in turn provides a platform for an explosion of meaning and, by extension, a multiplicity of interpretation. Accordingly, what may be initially perceived as a constraint is the catalyst through which the story extends itself; this is due to the speculation that ensues from reading the text.[15] *Flash Fiction Ghana* allows an additional layer of engagement through the addition of thoughts, which are the comments that users make in response to the stories. The speculation is thus sometimes addressed in the thoughts and provides grounds to investigate the aspects of the story that readers find interesting. The extreme lack of space as highlighted by both Shapard and Valenzuela, rather than pose a restrictive challenge for the writer when transposed online, functions as a guiding mechanism to provide structure and responses to the story. This is seen in "Mama is in the Box."

The young narrator-protagonist processes domestic relationships through a combination of reflection (through flashbacks) and observation (of the funeral) to appreciate situations that she is involved in either directly or indirectly. This childlike perspective is stylistically enhanced through the flashbacks, which are rendered in a series of paragraphs that appear as random memories that impact the sequence of events. The plot is therefore choppy and could again be understood not only as reflecting an immature perspective, but also as hampered by the trauma of losing a parent. This trauma again gestures to the fracturing of the domestic sphere. Through these lenses, the recollections provide snapshots of different types of domestic relationships that color contemporary urban Ghana.

The protagonist's understanding of events that occur around her recalls the beginning of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, where the ten-year-old protagonist Darling introduces the reader to activities that she and her band of friends engage in both in their slum known as Paradise and in more affluent urban areas. Robyn Wilkinson finds that Bulawayo allows Darling to straddle liminal spaces in order to critique contemporary issues in Zimbabwe.[16] Liminality in this sense is tied to the fact that even though she has a measure of understanding of her external environment, she is not yet fully socialized as an adult. Even though this point could be stronger if Darling were an adolescent, one could argue that her rough upbringing makes her mature faster than she should. In comparison to Darling, the middle-class background of the protagonist in Hansen's piece makes her less liminal in the ways through which she demonstrates her awareness of her social environment, which has consequences for the way that she processes difficult situations. Darling and her friends on the other hand consistently use games and playful exchanges to understand their world in different ways. Employing these hermeneutics of play, they manage to negotiate difficult experiences.

For instance, Darling's eleven-year-old friend Chipo is pregnant, an obvious victim of child rape in the slums that they call home. Her condition is casually introduced and is consistently referred to as the children explore different parts of Paradise and subsequently the upscale Budapest district. Of course, Darling is not mature or aware enough to understand the problem. Similarly, in "Mama is in the Box," we understand that the protagonist's father makes advances at Yaa. The narrator reveals this by contrasting the abrasive relationship between Yaa and her mother with the more positive relationship that she enjoys with her father. She might not be as old or "streetwise" as Darling; nevertheless, these observations lead to innocent slips that suggest that Yaa is the (potential) victim of sexual abuse by her employer. Regardless of the vast difference in terms of length of the flash fiction piece and the novel, the inability of the children to directly confront these issues speak to the larger problem of sexual violence against children.

The protagonist's father enquires about Yaa's wellbeing, buys her nice clothes, and gives her gifts. These overtures echo a long tradition in African literature where richer older men use material wealth as a means to entice younger women into adulterous relationships. There is an example in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* where the character Auntie Uju is given gifts by her lover, who is a prominent member of the Nigerian military junta. The gifts enable her to help her brother and his family survive their being in dire financial straits. In Ama Ata Aidoo's "Two Sisters," another government official known as Mensar Arthur uses money and materialism to maintain a relationship with the protagonist Mercy. Mercy, in a similar manner, passes some of the money to her sister Martha and her family to deal with economic challenges.[17] Even though in Hansen's story the economic background of the male figure is not provided, he does not have to be a high-ranking public official in order to engage in such relationships; being in a higher socio-economic bracket is enough to create and maintain the relationship. Regardless of the possibility of Yaa making money and sending some of it back to her family in her village, she is, in all likelihood, in the relationship because she is a victim of the power dynamics.

Understandably, the mother of the house is unhappy with the relationship but reacts by being harsh on Yaa. This decision to displace her anger from her husband to her maid lets her husband off the hook and probably emboldens him to continue in the act. Her decision to ignore the role of her husband could also be tied to the possibility of him being the one in charge of the household due to prevailing gendered dynamics. In other words, she targets the actor whom she has power over. In literary terms, her choice echoes the opening and closing of Adichie's short story "Birdsong," where a young female who is in an adulterous relationship with an older richer man feels like

his wife is watching her while in traffic. Even though the reader is never certain that the woman observing her is her lover's wife, the story makes it clear that such adulterous relationships combined with the attendant antagonistic attacks by married women on the single women are common in Lagos, where the story is set. Of course, Adichie's story revolves around two consenting adults, which makes the dynamics less (but still) problematic than a case where the female partner is under the direct control of the older male.[18] The pressure from the protagonist's mother leads to verbal abuse and combines with the sexual abuse from the father to put pressure on Yaa.

Young female rural migrants in urban Accra tend to fall under the most vulnerable demographic and work opportunities due to unfavorable conditions in their villages.[19] While many of them join the head porter business (popularly known as kayayoo), as they stay in slums, carrying goods in the various markets for a pittance, Yaa is one of those who end up in the domestic space.[20] House-helps are usually unrelated to their employer families and tend to be children or under-age without formal skills in household management.[21] These workers are usually known as houseboys or housegirls, terms that are carried over from the colonial period when adult African workers were employed in the homes of colonial officers and lived in "boys quarters."[22] The poverty that informs their backgrounds means that they form a socio-economic bridge between their workplace and their original rural homes.

The protagonist talks about her father promising a visit to Yaa's parents in the village, and her excitement is understood from the viewpoint of an urban-based person who wants to experience a different aspect of Ghanaian culture, this being rural. This excitement also recalls another Adichie piece, this time her viral TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story," where she remembers her relatively privileged childhood in Nigeria. Her family also employed Fide, a young house-help who came from the village and struggled to adjust to living in an urban space. Adichie, like Hansen, situates the rural person outside of the scope of familiarity and underlines the class divisions that underpin domestic relationships within the context of labor. Yaa's experience highlights the problems that vulnerable rural folks face when they are displaced into urban spaces. The story is not told from her perspective; still, using a middle-class child to touch on these themes highlights latent fractures in Ghanaian urban society.

As Elizabeth Odhiambo notes, in a story told from the perspective of a child narrator, "the setting, events and choice of characters all result to the creation of a hybrid text that though labeled children's literature actually addresses very mature issues" (267). Such representational politics in African literature run through different forms such as race (Dave Eggers' *What is the What*), gender (*Diary of a Zulu Girl* by Mike Maphoto), and even nationality (Boubacar Boris

Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones*) and need to be acknowledged, even if tangentially.[23] This adult-child appropriation is an evolution of the obviously more dramatic scenario in oral literature where artists assume personae through gestures and voice change for example; the audience tends to give these performers the benefit of the doubt to allow for interesting performances. Transposed back to print literature, the fact that a young adult male writes a story from the perspective of a female child does not necessarily deflect from the themes addressed. The digital age encourages such appropriation not least due to the presence of social media, which as Adichie states in *Americanah*, facilitates parallel lives (458).

In "Underneath the Stars" Can-Tamakloe presents Yao and his unnamed partner, who are relaxing outside their family home in his hometown while having an ordinary conversation about their life together. As they discuss their future, they compare their hectic life in Accra to the peaceful nature of their present setting, which is a village. Yao's partner wants them to ensure that they are never "too busy with life to appreciate the things they appreciated when they first met." Like "Mama is in the Box," a funeral provides the backdrop for this story. The deceased person is not as central to the main characters, however; they have finished participating in the funeral of Yao's uncle and are unwinding together after observing his funeral rites.

It is typical of Ghanaians living in Accra and other urban centers to return to their villages for funerals on weekends. This practice leads to economic progress for the villages and other stakeholders involved in the funerals. As Mazzucato *et al.* demonstrate, funeral spending provides multifaceted economic support (1057) and is an important aspect of Ghana's socio-economic framework. Their study focused on the Ashanti Region, and while Yao's name (and Can-Tamakloe's background) suggests that this story is set in the Volta Region, the importance of the funeral to the rural setting is of similar stature. While the rural folk usually focus on the material gain from the funeral, the urban visitors use the opportunity to detox from the pressured environments in which they live and work.

The pressures that plague urban couples are teased out in this story: as they reflect and enjoy a quiet moment together, Yao thinks of the "hustle and bustle that we knew to be everyday life. The honking and cussing drivers, rude pedestrians, slow traffic, the general noise." The "hectic density" and "increasingly dense and frustrating" Accra traffic that Ato Quayson identifies in *Oxford Street* (18) play out in the spectral interactions of the different actors, underlining the antagonistic atmosphere that typically characterizes African urban spaces.[24]

The rural-urban dynamic is played out in an opposite manner from that in "Mama is in the Box," not least because the story is fully set in the rural setting with mere reference to Accra and the main characters

move from the urban to the rural space. This couple appears to have the ability to oscillate between the two spaces without much trouble. This romantic relationship is more conventional than the suspected illicit relationship between Yaa and her employer in "Mama is in the Box." The relationship also appears to be equal, with both partners being comfortable around each other. This choice is deliberate, for Can-Tamakloe has consciously been pushing progressive gender ideals in his writing.[25]

Can-Tamakloe builds this relationship through a quotidian mode. A couple unwinding after a hectic funeral is an everyday occurrence and does not elicit much attention. Especially when the topic for conversation is avoiding being a couple that is "too busy with life to appreciate the things they appreciated when they first met." The mundaneness of the topic is nevertheless the crux of the comfort that characterizes the scene, especially in a country where domestic violence rates are such that almost 40% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 report various types of sexual violence by a male spouse (Ajayi and Soyinka-Airewele 4097). The story ultimately reads like a banal concern by one partner that is addressed by the other partner. A casual perusal of the stories on the website reveal that the quotidian tends to be commonplace.

If a couple engaging in small chat is an everyday thing, then a father having to deal with a son suspended from school is not as regular. "Flesh and Blood" is about a father who is asked to take his son Junior from school because he has been suspended indefinitely for breaking school rules. It is his third suspension in a year, with the first two having been for destroying school property and then breaking bounds. This time, he goes further to fight with a teacher. The father takes Junior to a local restaurant popularly known as a chop bar where they have lunch as he has his car washed. The son annoys his father, who snaps and physically assaults him until passersby intervene.

Not much has been written on the boarding school system in Ghana particularly in creative writing. This system forms a major aspect of upbringing for young people that fall within the ages of 11 to 13 for junior high school, and 14 to 17 for senior high school. The boarding schools at the senior high level outnumber the junior high ones and are also best known. Due to these reasons, coupled with the type of recalcitrant acts that Junior engages in, it is likely that he is a senior high school student who is negotiating maturity and an awareness of his surroundings. This liminality is different from Wilkinson's example that placed a child between self-awareness and adulthood and highlights pressures that the young man is dealing with, relative to his external environment.

Junior's relationship with his school is cast as problematic, as he moves from being "goofy" to actually fighting back when his teacher attempts to use physical force to "discipline" him. Similar to the first

two stories, “Flesh and Blood” is narrated from the first-person point of view. Since the narrator is the father, Nyatepe does not explore the cause of these problems, and Junior’s father has to deal with the effects. His final resort to violence finds expression in other digital forms.

In April 2020, the African Twitter space was firmly focused on the video of a Zambian man physically and verbally abusing his son for failing an exam at school. From the video, the audience found out that the boy refused to sit for his math and English exams, but passed his music exam with distinction. The boy attended school at the prestigious American International School of Lusaka and paid US $21,000 as tuition. By most parameters, the amount is substantial or even obscene, not least on a continent that is stereotyped as poor. The father was angry at his son ignoring the more prestigious subjects while excelling at a subject that he thought was unnecessary.

The hashtag #21kUSD trended as users debated the content of the video, which went viral and elicited both support and condemnation. While one would have thought that the father would be held responsible for not being more interested in his son’s school activities until it was too late, most tweets condemned the boy as ungrateful and sided with the father. The level of support indicated that a substantial number of people were not averse to parents using corporal punishment to “correct” their children, despite overwhelming evidence that favors more rehabilitative forms of discipline. Yul Edochie, the son of the popular Nollywood actor Peter Edochie, went as far as to share his experience, where his father whipped him with his belt for attempting to abandon school to pursue a business in electronics (see Figure 1). He vindicated his father’s heavy-handed response and largely received praise from his audience.

Figure 1: Yul Edochie's Tweet

This episode reads like an excerpt from a flash fiction piece and underlines the ways in which digital technology extends ideas of creative writing. More to the point however, it is important to note that the substitution of violence for discipline is not foreign to African literature and has characterized the stereotypical African father. There are countless viral memes on social media that parody African Dads as violent, uncaring, and unable or unwilling to form emotional bonds with their children. Perhaps African literature has its most famous

example in Chinua Achebe's seminal *Things Fall Apart*, where the protagonist Okonkwo uses his physical strength to intimidate and raise his son Nwoye as well as his wives. Perhaps inspired by Achebe's portrayal, Adichie's Eugene Achike in *Purple Hibiscus* is similarly brutish in how he disciplines his children and household in general.[26]

The father-son relationship in "Flesh and Blood" is couched as slightly different from this more familiar rendition, as the father initially appears open to being accommodating with his son. He tries to get him to eat and attempts dialogue; both advances are rebuffed by his son. He finally loses his temper and re-echoes the tendency of African fathers to resort to physical violence when asserting authority. Nyatepe's plot structure appears to validate the choice of the father to beat his son, characterizing Junior as not being amenable to dialogue. As such, when onlookers plead on behalf of the boy, they do so without knowledge of the preceding events. Attempting to justify the action to the reader while leaving the public in the story oblivious to the build-up appears to be Nyatepe's way of complicating the relationship and questioning the nature of the relationship.

Similar to the Zambian man, Junior's father does not interrogate the possible culpability that he might have in his son's waywardness. By deflecting away from the part he plays in the problem, he vents his frustration to the extent of drawing blood from Junior as he beats him. By throwing bottles, dragging, and slapping his son, he exhibits an anxiety for control over his son's life. Of course, the brevity of the story makes it impossible for the author to explore various related issues; nevertheless, it is clear that the father-son relationship has not benefited from an emotional connection that could have explained to the father why Junior is consistently opposed to authority.

In providing a glimpse into how men imagine different domestic relationships, the three stories do not differ radically from older forms of creative expression with regards to theme, style, and even approach. The key difference lies in the use of a digital platform that introduces new features to the reading experience. For example, readers have the ability to post comments to the stories; these comments are called "thoughts," a choice that underlines the intention for the responses to the stories to be reflective in nature. While other stories have as many as 33 thoughts, "Mama is in the Box" has seven thoughts, "Underneath the Stars" has no thoughts, and "Flesh and Blood" has a single thought. Hansen has a short conversation with a user who calls the story sad. When he apologizes for her response to the story, she clarifies that she is referring to the emotion, after which she praises him (see figure 2). This type of conversation appears to democratize the reader-writer relationship, and can lead to further research on the types of social communities that are built through such exchanges.[27]

Figure 2

While digital literature in this case thus repeats many features of older forms of technology, there is still potential for newer ways of crafting creative work. Obviously, print examples of flash fiction mean that the departures that culminate in digital versions could understandably not be radical; nevertheless, writers are at liberty to experiment with hypertext, for instance, to interlink stories and chart paths that hearken to the license that allow oral literature artists to proceed on tangents during storytelling. In time, Ghanaian writers should be more comfortable taking creative risks in such ways as to break new ground in terms of experimenting with digital genres.

The three stories examined in this essay are representative of a larger trend in how African users of the Internet appropriate digital tools for creative expression, and open up questions of how digital platforms influence the evolution of themes that have had a tradition in older forms of creative expression. In other words, it is important to think about issues such as the transposition of complex spaces – in "Mama in the Box" for instance, the domestic space is transposed through events at a funeral with flashbacks that run through school and the home with reference to a village; "Underneath the Stars" involves a rural space with reference to Accra; "Flesh and Blood" on the other hand starts in school before ending in a chop bar. Such transpositions underline anxieties that inform contemporary urban life in Ghana while highlighting the complexity of the relationships that constitute such texts. As writers take more creative risks with digital platforms, the scope and diversity of African digital literature will continue to expand, leading to further research into such extensions of the discipline.

Notes

1. The website has taken a break since January 2018, as Dzah produced a flash fiction anthology called *Kenkey for Ewes and Other Very Short Stories* and followed other offline pursuits.

2. Some of this research focuses on domestic labor (Jansen) and women's empowerment (de Hernandez *et al.*), among many others.

3. Stephanie Bosch Santana makes a more lucid claim in this regard in "The Story Club: African Literary Networks Offline."

4. See representative work by Adenekan, Bosch Santana, Arenberg, Yékú, Hosny, and Opoku-Agyemang.

5. See "African Short Stories and the Online Writing Space" by Adenekan and Cousins.

6. See Obi Wali's "The Dead End of African Literature?", *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* by Ngũgĩ, *Myth, Literature and the African World* by Wole Soyinka, or Adélékè Adéèkó's *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature*, for instance.

7. There are many other examples of authors and their texts including Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) that straddle more than one nationality and/or identity. The point being made here is that such questions of identity and authenticity elicit implications of fluidity and tend to be fraught with problematic questions that are not always easily unpacked.

8. See Adenekan's oft-cited "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age."

9. My work as an editorial assistant to Mbaasem in 2009 primarily involved editing submissions that were published in the newspaper and informs my assertion.

10. Since the beginning of Ghana's 4th Republic in 1992, there have been 7 democratic elections which have witnessed a regular change of governments.

11. Olivia Anku-Tsede explores the implications of the repeal of the criminal libel law for the media in "The Media and the Offence of Criminal Libel in Ghana: Sankofa." These implications easily extend to creative writing.

12. Ghana experienced military rule for the majority of its post-independence state between 1966 and 1992, with implications for the state and control. Allison Okuda draws a connection between military regimes in Ghana and control of the female body in "Performing Ghana: the politics of being a black woman on the stage 1966 -1979," for instance.

13. This situation is unlike Ghana's past post-colonial state. In 1967 for example, the musician Nana Kwame Ampadu resorted to using fables and figurative language in order to criticize the rampant corruption spearheaded by the military junta that had overthrown Kwame Nkrumah's government. Four decades later in 2007, the

musician Barima Sidney released "Our Money," a song which was a scathing criticism of rampant corruption under the Kufuor government, which had earlier on repealed the criminal libel law.

14. The website itself defines flash fiction as "very tight and concise … [pulling] the reader into the story with the barest minimum of exposition and [getting] into the … conflict quickly." The post points out that structural elements of a plot occur "in as few words as possible."

15. As John L'Heureux (in Shaphard) notes in *Sudden Fiction, Latino Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*, short-short stories aim at unease, which should "disturb us with its not quite homely or acceptable truths" (228).

16. See Wilkinson's "Broaching 'themes too large for adult fiction': the child narrator in NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names."

17. See Humann's "The Question of Mercy: Gender and Commodification in Ama Ata Aidoo's 'Two Sisters.'"

18. See "Rituals of Distrust" by Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang.

19. See N.A. Apt and M. Grieco's *Listening to Girls on the Street Tell Their Own Story: What will help them most?*

20. See "Bearing the weight: the kayayoo, Ghana's working girl child," Agarwal *et al.* and "Gendered poverty, migration and livelihood strategies of female porters in Accra, Ghana" by Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf for instance."Kayayoo" is an amalgamation of "kaya," which means luggage in Hausa, and "yoo," which means "female" in Ga.

21. See "Househelps in Ghana: A Case Study of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis," by S. Yeboah.

22. See Osasona's "Transformed culture, transforming Builtscape: experiences from Nigeria" (83).

23. See "Towards an Ethics of the Humanitarian Imagination" by Allison Mackey, Stephanie Bosch Santana's "From Nation to Network: Blog and Facebook Fiction from Southern Africa," and Nicki Hitchcott's "Writing on Bones: Commemorating Genocide in Boubacar Boris Diop's '*Murambi*'" respectively.

24. Studies such as Agyapong and Ojo's "Managing traffic congestion in the Accra Central Market, Ghana" confirm the stress that Accra traffic has on its inhabitants.

25. Personal interview, 21 July 2019. This scenario is not limited to digital literature.

26. Niyi Akingbe and Christopher Babatunde Ogunyemi compare the two fathers in "Countering Masculinity: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the Rise of Feminist Assertiveness in the Novels of Nigerian Female Writers."

27. Stephanie Bosch Santana has done similar research, but regarding offline networks in "The Story Club: African Literary Networks Offline."

Works Cited

"About Flash Fiction Ghana." *Flash Fiction From GHANA*, 22 June 2012, https://flashfictionghana.com/about/.

Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*. Anchor, 1975.

Adéèkó, Adélékè. *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature*. UP of Florida, 1998.

Adenekan, Shola. "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age." *Matatu - Journal for African Culture and Society*, no. 45, 2014, pp. 199-213.

Adenekan, Shola, and Helen Cousins. "African Short Stories and the Online Writing Space." *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays*, edited by Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013, pp. 199-213. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137292087_13.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Anchor, 2013.

—. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED*, 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/discussion

—. "Birdsong." *20 Under 40: Stories from The New Yorker*, edited by Deborah Treisman, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2010, pp. 3-19.

Agarwal, Seema, *et al.* "Bearing the weight: the Kayayoo, Ghana's working girl child." *International Social Work,* no. 40, vol.3, 1997, pp. 245-263.

Agyapong, Frances, and Thomas Kolawole Ojo. "Managing traffic congestion in the Accra Central Market, Ghana." *Journal of Urban Management*, no.7, vol.2, 2018, pp. 85-96.

Aidoo, Ama Ata. *"Two Sisters." No Sweetness Here and Other Stories,* Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995 pp. 87–102.

Ajayi, Lady A., and Peyi Soyinka-Airewele. "Key Triggers of domestic violence in Ghana: A victim centered analysis." *African Population Studie*s, no.32, vol.1, 2018, pp. 4097-4108.

Akingbe, Niyi, and Christopher Babatunde Ogunyemi. "Countering Masculinity: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the Rise of Feminist Assertiveness in the Novels of Nigerian Female Writers." *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior-Philologia*, no. 22, 2017.

Apt, Nana A., and Margaret Grieco. *Listening to Girls on the Street Tell Their Own Story: What Will Help Them Most?* Centre for Social Policy Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ghana, 1997.

Arenberg, Meg. "The Digital Ukumbi: New Terrains in Swahili Identity and Poetic Dialogue." *PMLA*, no. 131, vol.5, 2016, pp. 1344-60. doi:10.1632/pmla.2016.131.5.1344.

Awumbila, Mariama, and Elizabeth Ardayfio-Schandorf. "Gendered poverty, migration and livelihood strategies of female porters in Accra, Ghana." *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography*, no. 62, vol.3, 2008, pp. 171-179.

Bosch Santana, Stephanie. "From Nation to Network: Blog and Facebook Fiction from Southern Africa." *Research in African Literatures*, no. 49, vol.1, 2018, pp. 187-208.

—. "The Story Club: African Literary Networks Offline." In *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*, edited by Moradewun Adejunmobi and Carli Coetzee, Taylor & Francis, 2019.

Hernandez, Jennifer B., *et al.*, editors. *African Women Writing Resistance: An Anthology of Contemporary Voices*. U of Wisconsin P, 2010.

Hitchcott, Nicki. "Writing on Bones: Commemorating Genocide in Boubacar Boris Diop's 'Murambi.'" *Research in African Literatures*, no. 40, vol. 3, 2009, pp. 48-61.

Hosny, Reham. "Mapping Electronic Literature in the Arabic Context." *Electronic Book Review*, 2018, doi:10.7273/qsvk-3z16.

Humann, Heather Duerre. "The Question of Mercy: Gender and Commodification in Ama Ata Aidoo's 'Two Sisters.'" *Obsidian III*, no. 5, vol. 2, 2004, pp. 125-136.

Irele, Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford UP, 2001.

Jansen, Ena. *Like Family: Domestic Workers in South African History and Literature*. Witwatersrand UP, 2019.

Mackey, Allison. "Towards an Ethics of the Humanitarian Imagination." *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*, edited by Moradewun Adejunmobi and Carli Coetzee, Taylor & Francis, 2019, pp. 60-71.

Mazzucato, Valentina, Mirjam Kabki, and Lothar Smith. "Transnational migration and the economy of funerals: Changing practices in Ghana." *Development and change,* no. 37, vol. 5, 2006, pp. 1047-1072.

Mbembe, Achille, and Bregtje van der Haak. "The internet is Afropolitan." *New Cartographies*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

Odhiambo, Elizabeth A. "Hybridity in Meja Mwangi's Little White Man." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 4, vol. 6, 2013, p. 267.

Opoku-Agyemang, Kwabena. "Looking Back While Moving Forward: The Case of Concrete Poetry and *Sankofa*." *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures*, 2017. doi:10.20415/hyp/016.e07.

—. "Rituals of Distrust": Illicit Affairs and Metaphors of Transport in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Two Sisters" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Birdsong." *Research in African Literatures*, no. 44, vol. 4, 2013, pp. 69-81.

Osasona, C. O. “Transformed culture, transforming Builtscape: experiences from Nigeria.” *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, no. 7, vol. 1, 2012, pp. 69-100.
Quayson, Ato. *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*. Duke UP, 2014.
Shapard, Robert. “The Remarkable Reinvention of Very Short Fiction.” *World Literature Today*, 2012, https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2012/september/remarkable-reinvention-very-short-fiction-robert-shapard.
Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge UP, 1990.
“Submission Guidelines.” *Flash Fiction From GHANA*, 15 May 2013, https://flashfictionghana.com/submission-guidelines/.
Shapard, Robert, *et al.*, editors. *Sudden Fiction: Latino Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2010. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0119.
Thiong’o, Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. East African Publishers, 1992.
Valenzuela, Luisa. Introduction. *Sudden Fiction: Latino Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*. Edited by Robert Shapard *et al.*, W.W. Norton & Co., 2010.
Wali, Obi. “‘The Dead End of African Literature?’” *Transition*, no. 10, 1963, pp. 13–15.
Wilkinson, Robyn. “Broaching ‘themes too large for adult fiction’: the child narrator in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.” *English Academy Review*, no. 33, vol. 1, 2016, pp. 123-132.
Yeboah, S. “Househelps in Ghana: A Case Study of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis.” Diss. BA Dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Ghana, 1998.
Yékú, James. “Akpos Don Come Again: Nigerian Cyberpop Hero as Trickster.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, no. 28, vol.3, 2016, pp. 245–61. doi:10.1080/13696815.2015.1069735.
@YulEdochie. “In JS2, I told my father I didn’t want to go to school anymore … Thank you Dad!” Twitter, 23 Apr. 2020, 7:31 a.m., https://twitter.com/YulEdochie/status/1253224874233024513.