

**AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AKAN PROVERBS
IN *DEATH ON TRIAL* BY APPIAH-AGYEI**

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ABSTRACT

The natural environment has increasingly been threatened by the activities of man over the years. Due to this, both creative writers and literary critics have developed an increased commitment to raising awareness and interest in the relationship between man and the natural environment in contemporary times. This study examines the connection between humans and the natural environment in *Death on Trial* by Appiah-Agyei⁵. The paper is a qualitative one as it uses ecocriticism as a literary theory to do a close reading and in-depth analysis of the play. The study reveals that some Akan proverbs constitute a set of reminders about the processes needed to sustain and stimulate a peaceful environment. These proverbs that identify with nature encapsulate both cultural values and communal environmental lifestyle of Akans. The study therefore proposes that the Ghanaian society draws lessons from its cultural values and communal environmental life to ensure environmental sustainability.

Key Words: Akans, Ecocriticism, Environmental Sustainability, Proverbs, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The natural environment has increasingly been threatened by human activities and negligence. Ecocriticism, as a recent critical perspective, explains how the living and non-living organisms of the environment relate with one another as presented in the literature. Some literary writers show their devotion to nature through their works. The techniques they employ reveal this commitment to nature and their desire to raise awareness about the human activities that cause destruction in the society. The umbrella term that these literary writings fall under is called ecocriticism.

Some critics have attributed the origin of the term “ecocriticism” to William Rueckett’s critical writing², Ecocritics basically explore how ecological concepts are used to study literature. Thus, ecocriticism can be defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment³. Hence, nature may include the living and non-living things which all happen to affect our evolution directly as a society. Whether there prevails a healthy ecosystem in a society, a country or the world at large depends on the harmony between the living and non-living things.

Previous studies explored the ways different writers engaged this problem about the natural environment through their writings, as Laurence Buell states, “The success of all environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on ‘some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science’ but on ‘a state of mind’: on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives’...,all of which can be found in “acts of environmental imagination”⁴. However, no study has taken into account the ecocentric proverbs in the drama, *Death on Trial*. This study aims at unraveling the connections between the ecocentric proverb in the Akan society and environmental sustainability. This is relevant because it helps in raising awareness about the need for

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² William Rueckett. “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. *Iowa Review*, 9 (1), (1978), 71-86.

³ Glotfelty “The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology.” (Georgia UP)

⁴ Lawrence, Buell. *Writing for an endangered world*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

us as Ghanaians and people of the world to ensure environmental sustainability. The study uses ecocriticism which is a literary theory to do a close reading of literary analysis of the play's proverbs. This study also seeks to add to the literature in this field of study since there is not much available research on the ecocritical analysis of Ashanti proverbs from a literary work.

The study reveals that some Akan proverbs are a set of reminders about the processes needed to sustain and stimulate a peaceful environment. These proverbs that identify with nature and are taken from *Death on Trial* are grouped under Respect and Humility, Ambition, Transparency, Communal Environmental life of Akans, Solidarity, Harmony, Reciprocity and Cultural values. This study also proposes that society looks at sustainability as a means of living harmoniously with our environment since Akans already have a sense of it. Arguments in the paper are presented along the following lines: an introduction, a literature review, proverbs as a source of values and wisdom in the African context, a synopsis of the play, analysis of data from the play, and a conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature, at some point in time, is extolled and other times taken for granted. The word "ecology" was first used by Ernest Haeckel in 1869 as appears in Begon, Townsend, & Harper⁵. According to Kerbs⁶, "Ecology is the scientific study of the interactions that determine the distribution and abundance of organisms." *Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems* explicates this definition by stating that, "the environment of organism consists of all those factors and phenomena outside the organism that influence it, whether these are physical and chemical (abiotic) or other organisms (biotic)"⁷. Ecology has shades, namely: the Shallow Ecology and Deep Ecology. These shades were advanced in the 1960s in a quest to protect nature against disasters.⁸

The Shallow Ecological movement is mainly anthropocentric. They advocate the conservation of nature for use by humans. Thus, they believe that nature has a duty which is solely to serve the advantage of man who is also in charge of nature. As according to Frederick, "the most common measure to tackle environmental crisis is sustainable development."⁹ This requires that natural resources are used without causing destruction to the environment that will harm human beings in the long run. In addition, Mishra observes that, "anthropocentricism assumes the primacy of humans who either sentimentalize or dominate the environment."¹⁰ Thus with this movement, human beings are the center of the environment and everything revolves around them.

On the contrary, the Deep Ecological movement argue for the preservation of nature. Every organism is equal to the other and therefore, no organism on earth is the master of the other, it views the environment as neglected and thus brings consciousness to it for a "spirit of commitment to environmental praxis"¹¹.

The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other. They encourage equality among organisms and man's awareness of harmonious nature in order to create a peaceful living. In the *Ecocriticism Reader*, ecocriticism is defined as an "earth-centered approach to literary studies."¹² Thus to the anthropologist,

⁵ Begon, Townsend, & Harper. "Ecology: From Individuals to ecosystems". (Malden: Blackwell Pub).

⁶ Kerbs C. "Ecology". (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁷ Frederick, "Ecology". (New York: Harper & Row. 2012), 128.

⁸ Mishra, S. K. "Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature". *BRICS Journal of Educational Research*, 6(4), (2016), 168-170.

⁹ Buell, L. "The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the formation of American Culture". (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1995)

¹⁰ Coupe, L. (Ed). *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. (London: Routledge, 2000.),705.

¹¹ Okuyade, O. (Ed). *Ecocritical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes*. (African Heritage Press, 2013)

¹² Pasi, J. S. *Theorising the environment in fiction: Exploring ecocriticism and ecofeminism in selected black female writers' works*. (University of South Africa, 2017)

humans are the most significant organisms in the world. However, the ecocritics considers the environment as a part of the system in which humanity exists and the environment is equal in importance to man in the system.

Glotfelty advances that literary studies have an important role to play in understanding ecocriticism. She brings up questions to be raised in order to define ecocriticism. These are: How is nature represented in (literary works?) What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this (narrative) consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature?

This set of questions reveals that ecocriticism advocates an ecocritical approach in analyzing literary and ecological discourses. Hence, Glotfelty argues for an earth-centered approach in literary studies. There is the need to raise a consciousness of the environment in order to eradicate the issue of environmental crisis. Coupe also defines ecocriticism as “an approach to literature which considers the relationship between human and non-human life represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature against environmental destruction.”¹³ With this, ecocriticism interrogates the role literature plays in advocating against environmental destruction.

Kerridge and Sammel add to Glotfelty’s work by implying that the “Ecocritics want to trace environmental ideas and representation wherever they appear [...] Most of ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness in terms of their responses to environmental crisis”. Hence, ecocritics look into texts to find the “earth-centeredness” and help to advocate against exploitation of the environment. From their perspective, these environmental problems can be solved. The activities of man through technological advancement have contributed to the devastation in the environment. Deforestation, spilling of oil, filthy environment, global warming and the likes are initiated through man’s neglect and carelessness.¹⁴

The perspectives of Glotfelty, Buell and Kerridge and Sammells, are that ecocriticism encompasses the relevance of literature to the environment and how literary ideas about the environment can be transformed into social action to deal with environmental devastation. From this, ecocriticism is an endeavor to bring out the viewpoint of the environmentalist from literary texts. It creates awareness that nature should not be tampered with, especially by man. Mishra expresses that “all organisms have their right to survive in their own way.” This realization promotes a healthy environment for both humans and non-humans. Unlike the anthropocentric approach which makes humans superior to everything, ecocriticism places the ecosphere and the ecosystem at the center of everything.”¹⁵

By analyzing the Akan proverbs in *Death on Trial*, this research reveals that the author has adopted an ecocritical perspective in terms of the themes presented in the play and in his use of Akan proverbs in his work and that he is clearly conscious of the environment. This study is also based on the idea that the continuity of the various aspects of life can be sustained by living harmoniously with the environment itself. Thus, the study generates ideas from sources of environmental criticism and literary studies to examine the ways in which the writer showcases features of ecocriticism in Akan proverbs and how these features might affect readers’ behaviour and attitude towards the environment. This view is meaningful to the study and so, the study looks at the link between literature and nature in the themes identified in Akan proverbs in *Death on Trial*.¹⁶

¹³ Adungna, A. B. (*Exploring Environmental Discourses in Oral Literature: Ecocritical Analysis of Orommo Proverbs. Journal of Languages and Culture*, 2014.), 24-35.

¹⁴ Daniel Appiah-Agyei *Death on Trial*. (Accra: STEPPIA Printing Press, 2016.)

¹⁵ Guma, S. M.. *The Form, Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho*. (Pretoria: Van Schaik J. L, 1967).

¹⁶ Daniel Appiah-Agyei *Death on Trial*.

PROVERBS AS A SOURCE OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE AKAN CONTEXT

Some consider oral literature as a reservoir of cultural wisdom which regulate human behavior towards nature. As Firth posits; “At some notable moment of his life, perhaps at a time of stress, of imminent danger to himself or the tribe, or maybe even when confronted by death itself, a man of rank, preserving his composure, makes some remark which displays such aptness, picturesqueness and facility of phrase that it (proverb) strikes the ear of the bystander and lingers in the memory. This is repeated later in the communal meeting-house, where the details of the whole event are narrated to an eager crowd of listeners-the usual Maori habit. There this remark so appeals by its fitness to the occasion and happy turn of phrase that it is treasured in the mind of the community, is told and retold, becomes adopted to common use,…”¹⁷ It, therefore, guides the attitudes and behavior of the people on how to interact with the environment as well. Proverbs provide an idea about the meaning of life especially by the people of that context. Based on this, African proverbs may encompass the indigenous beliefs of the people, the knowledge and values about nature and the role people play in their interaction with nature.¹⁹

On the contrary, the advancement of science and technology has made man alienated from nature by putting his own survival into question. This is traced to accidents through the senseless use of vehicles in *Death on Trial*. The vehicles used to convey people are in bad conditions and there is the neglect of road safety signs. Daniel Appiah-Agyei mentions that his great affection for the environment, especially the rural areas, after watching news footage on the devastation to our lives through human carelessness, ignorance and recklessness has resulted in him writing about the environmental and health issues.²⁰ Through proverbs, the playwright points the way Akans, especially Ashantis, show some of their wisdom on the need to synchronize human existence with nature. One of the ways through which he portrays this trait is the use of proverbs.

According to Guma, a “Proverb is a pithy sentence with general bearing on life. It serves to express some ‘homely truth’ or moral lesson in such an appropriate manner as to make one feel no better words could be used”.²¹ Proverbs also revolve around the life of both human and non-humans, expressing moral facts which provide instructions to the people. The instructions serve as a didactic teaching to guide the people towards a better path in life and towards a judicious use of natural resources leading to a friendly environment.

Proverbs as pithy sayings of a people have been used to express the composite wisdom and lore of a culture, the world over. They tell of the love, fear, hope, aspirations and ideals and point to the world view of a people. Akans as a people also show their interest in life through proverbs. This interest in life includes the surroundings or environment and it reflects the kind of attitude Akans, especially Ashantis in this particular case, show toward nature -living and non-living things.

As Hagan puts it, Akan proverbs give us images of human / human relationships, human/ nonhuman relationships and nonhuman/nonhuman relationships. The corpus of Akan proverbs exhibits ambiguously that Akan thinkers have always considered the metaphors or images of physical, human , non-human interactions and relationships as being more applicable to nature as a whole.¹⁸ It might be argued that the representation of social facts using natural symbols or images offers a greater potential for a more objectively detached reflection about the issues involved. In addition, the use of natural imagery also helps to concentrate the mind on a potential on a proactive topic without the emotions involved. For example, to make a statement about social conflict, Akans use traditional motif of a Siamese twin crocodile with two separate heads and a common stomach. And the motif says: “Though they have one stomach they fight when they eat. This makes it clear that even human beings who seek to attain a common objective can fight”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Firth. Proverbs in Native life with special reference to the Moari. In. Folklore, xxvi (1976), pp. 260-275

¹⁸ George P. Hagan. Ghana Changing Values/ Changing Technologies, Ghanaian Philosophical Studies II: *Modern Technology, Traditional Mysticism and Ethics in Akan Culture*, 2000), 29.

¹⁹ George P. Hagan. Ghana Changing Values, 29.

Proverbs about nature in the language of the Ashantis succeed in showing that the Ashantis as a people, are interested in and associate themselves with the flora and fauna local to them. They believe in the promotion of sustainability and balance in co-existence of humans, animals and plants in one cosmic sphere. Fiction writers as part of the literary world also play a part in alerting the world as to the concerns of the day. In presenting works of fiction, Kofi Agyekum observes this about drama in the foreword of the play *Death on Trial*,

Drama is the next step for consideration, which can be used as a tool for guidance, and for setting a higher standard in our society today. This can be used by anyone, from any background or culture, and easily suites an interfaith dialogue, to propel humanity at large, toward a closer spiritual and social unity, with each other and with God...Drama expects and directs us toward a change in our social awareness and spiritual consciousness. It is conceived, formulated, and now provided to assist humanity in reaching its true destiny...Drama holds the key which unlocks the answer to man's quest for peace and happiness, the next step for spiritual growth, on a dynamic and all-inclusive social level.²⁰

In effect, drama is one of the main means through which humans can find peace in today's world by staging our problems and possible solutions to those problems. Thus problems and solutions of our lives presented in a condensed form are hypothetically solved. When this is done, lessons are learned and solutions are brought to the main stream.

Again Agyekum says this about the play *Death on Trial* in its foreword:

This play is a ground-breaking new code to bring humanity to a higher level of consciousness, and to increase the spiritual awareness of society. When taken to heart, it can change the way we see and interact with each other on numerous levels. It brings us to the stage of understanding, that humanity is responsible for its own spiritual maturity. It provides the insight for us to reflect that, it is time to manifest a more elevated civilization.²¹

The play is seen as an eye opener for society to move from our present state to a better sensitive world. This is to help society live better in order to achieve fulfilment and satisfaction in our areas of endeavour. The play is deliberately infused with proverbs to give it a local colour and also show that Akans, among other things, are interested in their environment through their use of some of their proverbs. Some of the ideas about nature are better captured in these local proverbs than their English counterparts and hence their use in the play. The proverbs in *Death on Trial* have been categorized into various sections such as cultural values and communal environmental life style of Akans among others.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE OF THE PLAY

The play *Death On Trial* shows us our environmental faults and helps find solutions. One of the ways the play does this is to deliberately infuse the work with proverbs about nature that show the Ashantis interest in the environment.

This paper examines the literary convention and personal creativity in the play, *Death on Trial*, through which Ashanti proverbs identified with the natural environment are foregrounded. Thus, one is able to establish the view that Akans have an affinity with nature and are traditionally interested in promoting co-existence of human and non-human aspects of the world. Daniel Appiah-Adjei prompts his audience about the devastation in the natural environment as a phenomenon associated with man's actions. He also introduces different sets of characters in the second movement of the play. Although these characters evidently demonstrate the myth and legends in the typical African society, they are also made to use ecocritical proverbs in their utterances. Thus, through the play, one realizes that a lot of Ashanti proverbs are a source of reminders about the processes needed to sustain and stimulate a peaceful environment.

²⁰ Kofi Agyekum *Death on Trial* (Accra: STEPPPIA Printing Press, 2016.), vi

²¹ Agyekum, *Death on Trial*, viii

He indicates the means to creating harmony between people and cultures in his observation. To him, the world is in need of a new direction in its spiritual and social development.

Death on Trial is an ecologically oriented literature that pleads for a better understanding of nature in its wider significance. As a result of filth in the environment, choked water ways, deforestation and fire outbreaks from faulty electrical connections, fire crackers and candle lights, there is increase in the destruction of lives and properties. This is a Ghanaian play by a playwright of the new generation in Ghana. It adds up to a number of other plays he has written, which have always challenged and left the audiences to wonder, finding answers to topical and relevant issues affecting humankind. Daniel Appiah-Adjei raises awareness of the environmental disasters through his work. He probes the readers to find solutions to the issues that affect man and the environment. As long as man lives in peace with nature, there will be no ecological threat. The proverbs have been grouped under these themes: Respect and Humility, Ambition, Transparency, Communal Life and African Solidarity, Harmony, Reciprocity and Cultural Values.

RESPECT AND HUMILITY

With respect and humility, the author advises the readers to respect the environment at all times and to desist from contributing to obliteration of the environment. This is seen in the proverb:

“He who defecates along the way will surely meet flies on his way back”²²

Gyamfi, a character in the play uses this proverb to defend himself against Bediako’s accusation that he is part of the reason Death has rejected them. He claims to be innocent and that Akosua Obiaa is indeed the one who started it all. Ecologically, pollution of the environment will go a long way to affect human health. Hence, the careless attitude of humans towards the environment will not only destroy the environment with time but destroy mankind because there is a reciprocal relationship that exists between organisms and their environment. When the wellbeing of the environment is respected the interest of mankind is preserved in totality. Therefore, cutting of trees without planting them will, in the long run, deprive the living organisms of food crops, oxygen and shade in the environment. Practicing reforestation will provide organisms with all the vital resources needed for survival.

The next proverb also has this to say:

“The lizard does not eat pepper and ask the frog to fan its mouth”²³

Akosua Obiaa uses this proverb to tell Bediako to narrate their story to Tiwaa since he is the cause of everything; that is, death’s refusal to take them from this world is because of Bediako’s fight with death. Animals have equal rights to live. A lizard is responsible for whatever action it deliberately performs in life and it is not the toad that will endure the consequences. Similarly, refusal to observe the security of the environment will cause calamities that humans will end up answering for. When bushes are continuously burnt and there is pollution and disruption of the ozone layer, no one else is to be blamed for the action’s humans committed. This will introduce harmful effects such as skin cancers and eye damage as a result of exposure to the Ultra Violet (UV) rays. Some common skin cancers are malignant melanoma and basal and squamous cell carcinoma. Therefore, the indiscriminate burning of bushes and trees must be halted to improve a sustainable and harmonious lifestyle in the natural environment.

AMBITION

To Appiah-Agyei, ambition will create the desired goal of achieving a sustainable environment. The proverb below illustrates Akan sensitivity in the use of ambition towards a sustainable environment. The natural limitless space of the sky and the seeming endlessness of the ocean is powerfully alluded to depict the very nature of ambition in the proverb mentioned below. Ambition is made easy in the proverb because when one has life one can look up in the sky anytime. This presupposes that when one has life one can achieve anything. The proverb is as follows:

²² Appiah-Agyei, 10.

²³ Appiah-Agyei, 10

“He, who sees the sky, has seen the ocean...”²⁴

Gyeabour uses this proverb after he suggests to Akosua Obiaa that they should elope together. To him, that is the best suggestion he had ever made. Just as Gyeabour is ambitious enough to elope from the village with Akosua, humans should develop a goal of creating and practicing measures to sustain the environment. Developing more environmental strategies serves as backup plans for reducing impending crisis towards the environment. When one sets up a crisis plan before the actual crisis occurs, the risk of losing everything is minimized due to the fact that the precaution set up enables us to see a larger picture of the whole destruction processes.

Additionally, Appiah-Agyei uses this Akan-based environmental proverb to caution people about the penalties of being reckless in keeping the environment safe. This view is expressed in the proverb below:

“When the goat is tired of life it invites the lion for dinner”²⁵

Akosua Obiaa uses this proverb to warn Tiwaa after the latter accuses Bediako, Gyamfi and Akosua of witchcraft because of their longevity in life.

Tiwaa declares that she is fed up with serving the three old people from her infancy and would prefer to expose them and die. Tiwaa appears to be without a vision of future possibilities, thus her life seems meaningless. This proverb warns of the effects of destroying the environment. Dirty surroundings as a result of littering of waste into gutters and alongside roads eventually lead to diseases that are deadly to man. Hence, the need to develop ideas that are purposeful enough to reduce harmful activities humans indulge in. If man makes the environment unclean, he lays his own death bed. This is analagous to the goat who wants to be friends with a lion and invites it to dinner because goat seems tired of life. After all, those on the lower ranks on the food chain who are herbivorous serve as prey to those higher on the food chain who are carnivorous and not bed fellows.

TRANSPARENCY

Another vital part of Akan cultural value is to exercise transparency at all times. Being blunt and truthful make the people aware about the depth of their problems and helps them to find possible solutions to control it. The following proverb illustrates this:

“He has placed the cutlass at the right place”²⁶

Okyeame uses this proverb to affirm Obibini’s statement that Bediako, the warrior and protector of the village, has returned from his self-imposed exile. After Bediako left Mpiti, Akosua was raped and it is clear to the readers that Bediako would have protected her if he had not left. Moving to the relevance of this proverb to the natural environment, the causes of environmental destruction should be pointed out. The government of the Ghanaian society has failed to put in place codes and standards to ensure that the construction of buildings along waterlogged areas is prohibited. As a result, the media or press in the country must highlight this negligence on the part of the government. The media must advocate an effective code and standard way of building along water ways. This will ensure that deadly events such as the June 3, 2015 disaster does not recur since human and animal lives, housing and property were destroyed on that inauspicious day.

COMMUNAL LIFE OF AFRICANS AND SOLIDARITY

A community may contain a group of people linked by social ties and who also share common values, interests and goals. A basic requirement needed for existence has always come from the social bonds that unite humans to other entities in the human and non-human community. In the African community, principles such as social solidarity, harmony, and reciprocity are classified as important and hence the success or failure of the individual on environment affects the community as a whole. This is because a unified community stands undefeated against problems during crises. Consequently, a well maintained and

²⁴ Appiah-Agyei, Death on Trial, 11

²⁵ Appiah-Agyei, 31

²⁶ Appiah-Agyei, 9

sustained environment together with healthy individuals is able to withstand any calamity directed at it. This communal solidarity is expressed in the proverb below:

“White ants can do no harm to the stone” ...²⁷

To Gyamfi, if Bediako the protector and savior of the people continues to guard them, they will be untouchable. The strong and impermeable stone is likened to the unified community. When the people continue to recycle waste, plant trees and abstain from using harmful chemicals in water bodies, the environment will be conserved, and the people will also be healthy and safe. This will prevent any fatal or vicious disease from wiping out the entire ecosystem; just as the white ants which are the deadly disasters or occurrences can do no harm to the impervious stone. Hence, practices and measures to maintain a harmonious environment must be followed accurately to reduce or prevent environmental crises from seeping through the whole community.

HARMONY

The environment needs to be in balance with the humans and non-humans. Sustainability of nature only occurs when destructive ways towards the environment are eradicated. This is reflected in the proverb:

“A person who sells eggs does not start a fight in the market”³³

Akosua Obiaa cautions Tiwaa to stop devising a means for her own destruction since respecting the aged in the African society is seen as a pathway to long life. Similarly, it is advisable to know your limits before engaging in anything harmful capable of causing destruction. Humans can easily die from common mishaps hence, as fragile as lives are as eggs, the environment must be protected at all costs. For instance, DDT used for fishing and also defecating in water bodies must cease since it is this same water used for basic needs. The harmful fishing chemicals may destroy aquatic lives and also harm people who reside by the water who depend on it for survival. Again, defecating in water bodies may breed mosquitoes, cholera, typhoid and diarrhea which are deadly to the lives of living organisms. Therefore, harmful practices that put the natural environment and the life of the organisms in jeopardy must cease.

RECIPROCITY

The environment and the living and non-living things are in a relationship where they have a mutual dependence on one another. Hence whatever happens to the environment affect humans and vice versa. This symbiotic relationship is reflected in the proverb:

“Whatever goes up must come down one day”²⁸

This proverb is contextualized by the narrator to give the audience a foreboding sign of what is yet to happen because of Gyeabour’s defiling Akosua Obiaa. In a similar vein, people indiscriminately indulge in the violent raping of nature through many avenues: the felling of trees, practicing illegal mining, bush burning, spilling of oils into water bodies, dumping waste in water bodies, killing of endangered species of animals, catching fingerlings with small nets without an interest to the sustenance of the environment.

These disparaging actions towards the environment will also lead the environment to produce toxic conditions for humans and non-humans. Dumping refuse in the gutters and drainage systems will also introduce various diseases like cholera, diarrhea, malaria and deadly floods. A typical example is the Accra floods which occurred as a result of blocked drainage systems and gutters at the Accra Circle subsequently killing several people.²⁹ Hence, attitudes that sustain the environment must be developed since harming the natural environment comes back to harm living organisms within it.

Again, in the next proverb, the idea of reciprocity is shown as ‘place’ representing space and directions in nature:

²⁷ Appiah-Agyei, 42.

²⁸ Appiah-Agyei Death on Trial, 63.

²⁹ Samuel, Asumadu-Kodie et al, “Impact Analysis of Flood in Accra, Ghana”. *Advances in Applied Science*. Vol. 6 (9), (2015), 53-78

“The left washes the right and the right also washes the left”³⁰

Yaa Kroama expresses this adage after Afua Nipanka thankfully states that it is Yaa who always comes to her aid. To Yaa, helping her friend find the thread is a good deed that Afua will return whenever she needs a favour. Environmentally, just as nature sustains man, humans must also return the favour of conserving the environment, plant more trees, and avoid bush burning or end using harmful chemicals to fish since proper care of the environment promotes healthy living of the organisms within it. Naturally, the environment and organisms within it have a kind of symbiosis. For instance, cattle egrets follow grazing cows and eat the flies and bugs that constitute a nuisance to the cow. Again, the remora fish feeds off the algae of the shark. Therefore, human beings can learn from this symbiotic relationship between animals to be able to coexist with the environment and other organisms within it.

CULTURAL VALUES

Values have been incorporated in the culture of people from time immemorial. Everyone possesses some values thus there is no society without some value system. “Values give meaning. Living up to one’s values or joining a group of people successfully following these values helps an individual feel a sense of transcendence”³¹. They help in the pattern of conduct of the actions of the people, in this case towards the environment. These values such as hard work and diligence, respect and humility, ambition and transparency are not only principles of behavior but also goals of social and environmental action.

Daniel Appiah-Adjei advises the audience through Ashanti proverbs to encourage humans to put up an attitude of protection toward the environment. The proverbs presented shows how the Akans counsel and instruct their members on the need for hard work in any endeavour. This is exemplified in the following proverb which depicts a sick person doing something about his condition:

“One does not swallow medicine on behalf of the sick person”³²

Oboadee uses this to give Death a chance to defend itself after Life blames Death of being cruel to man. Oboadee presents this chance to Death because it is only Death who can give a valid reason as to why it is cruel to man.

An ecocritical view of this proverb shows that necessary measures have to be used to conserve the environment and other organisms by humans. This is because no other organism will be able to follow these procedures. Humans must be accountable for their own activities and as a result take responsibility for their actions. Therefore, it is advisable to adopt activities like afforestation, recycling, cleaning and the like. Once a tree is cut, it must be replanted because survival depends on breathing oxygen from the trees into the body. In effect all habitations must be clean at all times to prevent the outbreak of certain deadly and contagious diseases. Thus, just as the sick person must consume his/her own medicine to get better in health, so must humans clean their surroundings to promote a safe living environment.

Again, in the next proverb:

“The determined hunter is never frightened in the jungle” ...³³

Tiwaa uses this saying to tell Akosua Obiaa that she will not stop accusing them of witchcraft and how they have teamed up to destroy the youth in their family. To Tiwaa, even if they curse her to die, she knows that it was her determination to expose them that killed her, and this will make her happy. Again, the author provides a kind of motivation for conservationists to promote their agenda in pushing for a safe environment although there will always be challenging matters that come with this. Thus like the jungle, a lot of entanglements may occur but they can be overcome with skill and thinking. Some problems that may arise may be non-cooperation of the individuals in the society to partake in the cleaning of the community, practicing of bush burning and threatening the lives of aquatic animals by fishing with DDT and other

³⁰ Appiah-Agyei, 44

³¹ Cambell, Andrew and Sally, Yeung. “Creating a sense of mission”. *Long Range Planing*. 24 (4). (1991), pp.10-20.

³² Appiah-Agyei Death on Trial, 80.

³³ Appiah-Agyei, 114.

harmful chemicals. Conservationists may take up the responsibility of teaching the young ones at the educational institutions about the danger and repercussions involved in the destruction of the natural³⁴ environment. They may also insist that the government should set up enforceable measures on the sanitation in the environment and mete out punishment to the law breakers. These few actions if taken into consideration limit the destruction of the environment and make the people more conscious about their surroundings.

Moreover, the following proverb uses an object from the natural environment (wood) as a metaphor:

“... when one door closes, the other one opens”³⁵

Gyeabour uses this proverb when he tries to convince Akosua Obiaa to be his wife after Bediako leaves Mpiti. He tells Akosua that being alone provokes devilish thoughts. To Gyeabour, an opportunity to impregnate Akosua Obiaa becomes available when Bediako who protects her, leaves the village. Appiah-Agyei draws attention to the fact that when a measure for curbing environmental devastation fails, there is another measure available to adopt.³⁶ Hence, hard work and persistence to discover a way to cure the environment of its diseases will open up other various ways to control the defects. As such, if the people do not adhere to the set rules on sanitation, offenders must be punished in order to limit their actions.

CONCLUSION

Some Akan proverbs have been identified with nature in *Death on Trial*. The analysis of such proverbs in *Death on Trial* revealed significant portions of the traditional wisdom of Africans related to the natural environment, which are not pointed out by scholars that produce works such as this. The natural environment still succeeds, to some extent, in sustaining organisms despite the careless attitude of humankind towards it. This is because humans have moved away from preserving and conserving nature even though their survival is completely dependent on it. Ecocritics, therefore, advocate reconnection with nature. Consequently, this study explored deep ecologists' target to reconnect with the natural environment through Akan proverbs.

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³⁴ Appiah-Agyei, *Death on Trial*, 3

³⁵ Appiah-Agyei, 9

³⁶ Appiah-Agyei, 21

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