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## MAN, KNOW THYSELF: THE ROLE OF ANANSE STORIES IN GHANAIAN PEDAGOGY

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### ABSTRACT

The Akans in West Africa have their own approach towards the structures of the narrative, and they make a very meaningful contribution towards the beauty of the universal concept of narratology. Using a qualitative approach, ethnographic instruments, to be precise, and using literary stylistics as a means of analysing the text, the author found out that the Akans use *anansesem*, a story telling technique, as means of indirection in social communication; also that apart from the fact that it brings the past and the present together in performance, thus creating a homology between the living and the dead and serving as a means of production for local knowledge, *anansesem* is a powerful tool for serving as Akan collective consciousness and for constructing the Akan identity. The author recommends that based upon the powerful influence of *anansesem* on the behaviour of the Akans, it should be considered a serious component of pedagogy in Ghanaian schools.

### INTRODUCTION

*Ananse* stories are very popular in Ghana. They are also popular in some West Indian countries as well. *Ananse* is an Akan word that means spider and indeed the spider is the main character which behaves like a human being in such stories. There are other supporting characters which are also animals and behave like human beings<sup>2</sup>. According J.B. Danquah<sup>3</sup>, the Akans used to call such stories *Nyankosem* before the name was changed to *Anansesem*. Kofi Agyekum, an Akan academic who has done a lot of writings on Ananse stories defines, in Akan, Ananse stories as “asetena ne abrabɔ mu nsem a ɛfa onipa ho na yede mmoa, nnua ne abodeɛ ahodoɛ agyinagyina nnipa anan mu de tu fo wɔ bere a ye rennya amane” (lived experience of human beings expressed through the representations of animals, trees and various creatures which tell us realities in life without offending anybody). It is not only because his definition has similarities with that of Ruth Finnegan, one of the most significant pioneers in Oral literature in Africa, but also the fact that his definition comes from the very language the stories come from, and that this definition pays attention to the cultural cognition that produces the cultural conceptualization we call Ananse stories and speaks to issues of the stories being a mirror to the society, an expression of social realities. This Akan definition finds locatedness in Akan discourses that rely on indirection and that makes it impossible for the narrator to be held responsible for what he says because of the intricacy with which he weaves his words is like that of the web of the spider. The concept of indirection in *Anansesem*, thanks to a crafty approach of intertextuality by its creators, the Akans, allows two of their most significant worlds, the past and the present, merge into one in a performance. Again, this approach which engages us in this academic discourse, it must be pointed out, has not enjoyed enough academic treatment, both in writings and in Ghanaian pedagogy. This lacuna occasioned Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, to tell J. H. Nketia, the renowned Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, to start a creative project which Nketia calls ‘the restoration in writing of our “African Classics”<sup>4</sup>. And by “African Classics”, Nkrumah was referring to African folktales. That seemingly may sound overly weighty if not exaggerating for those who are products of the current Ghanaian education but any literary student of or connoisseur of African folktales, or Ghanaian folktales

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Finnegan. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Niarobi: Oxford University Press

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Danquah. 1969. *Nyankonse*. Accra: Accra Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Christine Owusu-Sarpong, 1998. *Trilingual Anthology of Akan Folktales*. Kumasi: Department of Book Industry, KNUST

for that matter, will tell you these tales are equally as literary meritorious as their European and American counterparts.

The fact is that the Ghanaian pedagogy is almost completely silent on these “African Classics”. Apart from anthologies by Ratray and few obscure ones, literature on Ghanaian folktales is very scanty. Studies in prose work in literature in Ghanaian schools are replete with European and American writings all because they follow literary canons accepted by the world community of literary studies. Today, it is not uncommon for many students, products of the Ghanaian education, to say they do not know Ghanaian folktales. In fact, most of these students even associate these tales with backwardness and would have nothing to do with them. Admittedly, few of the passages read in the lower primary may be Ghanaian folktales, but the preponderance of the reading materials in Ghanaian schools are either Eurocentric or have European orientation, leaving the Ghanaian students to consider reading materials from the West superior and those of his own land inferior. This is rather unfortunate because as Nketia puts it “what the younger generation of Ghanaians need is not just literacy but *cultural* literacy that grounds them in their own traditions and history as they explore other frontiers of knowledge and experience”<sup>5</sup>. It is common knowledge that the present Ghanaian education pays very little attention to Afro centric philosophical and conceptual thinking. Of course, the role this unfortunate situation has played in the national development of Ghana is a discussion for another academic consideration that will certainly not find enough space in this paper but the point being raised here is that the time has come for Ghana to consider the comments made early on by J. H. Nketia, the need for the restoration of “African Classics”. Such academic exercises will help the educated Ghanaian to be able to see in the right perspective what the Ghanaian world view, as studied in the classroom, is and how Ghanaians can use such epistemics to inform their development agenda. Certainly, the definition of *Anansesem* as offered by Kofi Agyekum, categorizes it as a verbal art that requires the needed academic investigation for national development.

This paper therefore aims at making a case for the study of *Anansesem* as an integral part of Ghanaian pedagogy, from class one to the university level and to encourage Ghanaian academics to direct their energy in investigating and publishing works on local materials like the *Anansesem* that have the potential of enriching creativity, a vital ingredient for national development.

## Literature Review

These stories have also attracted a lot of attention from anthropologists and sociologists from the West. Intellectuals like Branislav Malinoski, A. A. Radcliff-Brown and Franz Boaz were a lot more interested in both the anthropological and the sociological significance of these stories and similar stories are found in other parts of Africa like Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Luo and Zande ethnic groups in Central Africa. They saw them more as expression of folk mind rather than literary pieces<sup>6</sup>. The stories were told by the local people and translated by the local people, a practice which gave foreign collectors some anxious moments regarding the genuineness of the texts and that in some cases it was “quite impossible... to check the basic trustworthiness of the translations”<sup>7</sup>. It was also difficult to establish the text were “the original texts or whether, as perhaps happens rather often, they are only paraphrases or even touched-up and re-written versions”<sup>8</sup>. This is a clear admission that the original meanings of these stories always found in the context of the owners of the stories who understand their proper symbolic or the indexical communications. We are in no way suggesting that foreign collectors do not have what it takes to interpret these stories but we are saying that the context for interpreting these stories are always found within the world of the owners of the stories and that without this world, the stories are meaningless.

The connection between stories and the world of the owners of these stories have been a huge academic preoccupation not only for anthropologists and sociologists as seen above but for several disciplines including folkloristics, literature, linguistic anthropology, ethno-poetics, cultural linguistics,

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Christine Owusu-Sarpong, 1998. *Trilingual Anthology of Akan Folktales*. Kumasi: Department of Book Industry, KNUST

<sup>6</sup> Isodore Okpewho.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Finnegan. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Niarobi: Oxford University Press. p. 336

<sup>8</sup> See Finnegan. 1970

political science and so forth. That clearly indicates that folktales, of which *Anansesem* is part, has a huge potential for academic consideration. But this is not the thinking of some intellectuals who started looking at folktales in general. The first is Taylor, one of the early intellectuals to doubt the literary merits of folktales. He is more concerned about context rather than text and this bias leads him to see a “problem connecting folklore with literature”<sup>9</sup>. Other intellectuals are even more cynical: they opine that the folk, from which we get the folktale or *Anansesem* is from the uneducated and simple-minded people and deserve no attention in the world of academia. Indeed, they make very interesting inference here; the folk, which according to them is defined as “fallacy, untruth, error”<sup>10</sup> is about quaint customs that promote unacceptable cultures like superstition and rituals like ritual murders which stand in the way of development and should be in the past. Indeed, Brian Street<sup>11</sup> makes the same observation that depending on where you are coming from, culture or folk knowledge can serve as a barrier to development. And some development planners still hold the view that culture or folk knowledge, and for the purpose of this paper, folktales, hold back development because they generate ideas that make it difficult for the owners of such knowledge to change to modern ideas<sup>12</sup>. The anti-folktale intellectuals further postulate that traditions like the folktales must be suppressed to the advantage of works of “civilized” writers like William Shakespeare, Milton and others who are seen as great proponents of literature and modern civilization. Indeed, folklore, of which the folktale is an organic part, is seen as the antithesis to intellectualism and rationality, values that run counter to those in writing cultures which the West see as central to their identity.

There are however many intellectuals, Western, African and even Asian, who simply do not agree with the position of Taylor and other anti-folklore intellectuals seen above. Right from the 1920s, the work of Milman Parry, continued by his student Albert Bates Lord, and refined by the likes of Eric Havelock, Vladimir Propp, Alan Dundes and others sought to bring verbal arts or oral performance into the domain of academic exercise. The term oral literature came into use right from the time of Milman Parry. In Africa, it was 1970 when Ruth Finnegan came out with her seminal work *Oral Literature in Africa* in which she provided striking clarity on the literary merits of African tales and why they deserved academic attention. She maintains that “it is misleading as well as unfruitful to attempt to draw a strict line between the verbal art to literate and of non-literate cultural traditions”<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, A. B. Lord had comprehensively defended the poetics of orality, putting it at par with writing. Of course, this is still an on-going debate<sup>14</sup>. Richard Bauman, after studying American folklore for a long time, is however forthright in his condemnation of the ideas of these anti-cultures and anti-folklore intellectuals, claiming that it is these “notions, strongly colored by ethnocentric and elitist biases that privilege the classics of Western written literature over oral and oral literature”<sup>15</sup>. And the works of African literary giants like Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi, Tabanlo Liang, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola and African literary critics like Okpehwo and Pio Zirimu, even though they are supposed to be in the written form, all take their sources from the African folklore, seriously vindicating the stand of Bauman. The fact is that it is the African folklore in these works that gives them their “Africanness”. Simply put, the stories by these African writers in these novels are based on the cultural cognition of the African and thus ideas or conceptualizations are all based on the African cognition and as said earlier, it is that which gives such works their meaning, identity or taxonomy. Okwonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is characterized within the confines of the Ibo worldview and therefore he is read and felt like being Ibo. The implication of this development in African literature is that even though African might not be too keen directly to include its folktales in academic studies, the philosophy of these tales still informs the writings of African literary writers.

<sup>9</sup> Bronner. 2007. quoting Taylor, Archer. 1940. Some Trends and Problems in Studies of the Folk-Tale. *Studies in Philology* 37:1–25. p.68

<sup>10</sup> Bronner, S. J. ed. 2007. *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Allan Dundes*. Utah: Utah University Press. p. 55

<sup>11</sup> See Brian Street, 1999.p. 6

<sup>12</sup> See Hulscher, 1997.p. 12 and Hayward, 1987. p. 3

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Finnegan. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> See Lord, 1960; Finnegan, 1970, 1977; Havelock, 1963; Goody, 1977; Tonking, 1992; Ong, 1982, 2000; Bauman, 1977, 1986, 2001; Eugenio, 2007

<sup>15</sup> See Bauman, 2001. P. 7

## Methodology

This is a qualitative study that creates a bigger room for the respondents and participants to “set the agenda with the parameters of the topic”<sup>16</sup>. Such an assumption premised on the fact that this study is of the cosmology and the world view of a group of people, a phenomenon that cannot be put on a scale for simple measurement. Since we are dealing with beliefs and values and other cultural intangibles, the question is: how do we measure what goes on in the mind of the people who express the lived experience being studied in this research? This study therefore develops a very rich textual data by allowing the people who express this lived experience, that is, whose culture produce and consume *ananse* stories in Ghana, to tell their own story by performing and providing interpretations to the extent which their culture will allow them to. The basis for analysis is therefore on what performers say, what the audience say, including the textual construction of both the performers and listeners, as they attempt to explain the meaning of behaviour and what the researcher (from his theoretical point of view) makes out of these two to help us understand the perspective of the individual who represents the whole (the culture) or ways in which Akans participate in the construction of their lives<sup>17</sup>

For the purpose of achieving the results set out above, qualitative instruments used in this methodology are mainly collection of stories, transcription, translation and interview. On the collection of stories, the then Department of Languages of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science Technology, which comprised the Departments of English, French and Akan, sent researchers to the environs of Kumasi, Wenchi and other parts of the Central region to collect the stories. These researchers recorded the performances on tape, transcribed and reduced performance to text. This confirms A. B. Lord’s position that the text of oral performance is another instantiation of series of performances, just that the oral converted to text achieves the state of fixity, unlike the original oral performance. The text was originally transcribed in Twi and had to be translated into English. And as if the problem of transcription which strips the performance of very important expressions like facial expressions, gesticulations, body languages, oculistics, chronemics and other non-verbal cues which provide complete validation to the story was not enough, the researchers were also confronted with the problem of accuracy as ideas were translated from Twi to English and French. This problem is an old one and practised and renowned researchers like Bascom and Heskovitz tell of similar experience.<sup>18</sup> With regard to interviews, both dyadic and multiple interviews were used. The performer was asked to perform to the researcher and imagine there was a bigger audience. The performer, instead of the usual turn taking in dialogues, or at least between the performer and audience as experienced in African oral performance<sup>19</sup> and as even experienced in other cultures, completely took over the “conversation space”. What this meant was that instead of the usual participation by the audience, which really gave the audience the privilege to interrupt as and when necessary through songs and riddles, especially when the members of the audience had to offer commentary on the story, had to correct or had to add to the performance, there was nothing of that sort and the performer just took the floor from the beginning of performance to the end.

The next stage in this exercise was the text production of this performance. The researchers after transcribing and translating the stories put all their collections in a book titled *The Trilingual Anthology of Akan Folktales*. This book is edited by Professor Christine Owusu-Sarpong and forwarded by J. H. Nketia. “Ananse and the Queen mother Crocodile” is one of such collections and it was randomly selected from the collection because we, the members of the then Department of Languages, believed all the stories in the collection presented peculiar social truths worthy of investigation. These stories have from time to time found their way to the syllabi of the literature course as a service course for KNUST and the story under investigation, which is one of the stories treated in class, have been very well received and enjoyed as an academic material by the students who have even asked for increased local content in our literature syllabus.

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<sup>16</sup> See Elliot, 2005.p. 2

<sup>17</sup> See Gubrium and Holstein, 1997

<sup>18</sup> See Bronner, 2007

<sup>19</sup> See Okpewho, 1992

In this paper, I argue that *anansesem* as prose may appear to share the same generic features with its Western counterpart, that is Western narratives, but a close look reveals that the structures or the narratology are not the same and that the Ghanaian *anansesem*, as a product of oral performance, possess its own narratological and rhetorical structures. The paper further posits that these indigenous structures reveal the Ghanaian theories of knowledge of his world. The study covers the plot, and specifically the beginning of the plot. It dwells on some omissions in the beginning of the folktale under study and deconstructs the real meaning of this beginning in the Akan sense and its epistemological implications in Ghanaian pedagogy. This study also explores *anansesem* as presented by the Akan culture and so, in this context, it is important to know the producers of this tale, the Akans.

### **The Akans**

The Akans are the biggest ethnic group in Ghana. They are basically located at the southern part of the country and belong to the larger Kwa group in Western and East Africa. In Ghana, they form about 40% of the entire population. We have three dialects in Akan: Fante, Twi and Akwapim.

Let us now take a close look at the folktale in question. It was performed by Nana Yaa Tiaka of the royal family of Wenchi.

### **Kweku Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile**

This study is mainly on the beginning of the plot of this folktale but for the sake of contextualizing whatever meaning we are discussing, the full text as produced in the collection is given below:

*Well, I am going to tell you a tale about Kwaku Ananse and different kinds of animals; so let us begin with a song:*

*Scoop up sheep droppings for women to eat;  
For if women eat good soup, they will die...o.  
Scoop up sheep droppings for women to eat;  
For if women eat good soup, they will die...o.  
Scoop up sheep droppings for women to eat;  
For if women eat good soup, they will die...ooo!*

*Well, Kwaku Ananse once lived with his children. One day he decided that he would find a way to lure all animals and kill them.*

*“Kwaku, what plan do you have which will enable you to kill all animals?”, his children wanted to know.*

*“You are not smart,” Ananse laughed at them. “Do you want to bet with, Kwaku Ananse, that I will achieve this feat?”*

*True to his word, Kwaku Ananse, determined to accomplish this task, wove cane rods into an apentennwa – a big cane basket which used to be called akõtwe, and set out for the farm. On his way, he met Kwabena Agyanka, the duyker.*

*“Kwaku my father, why are you sweating under such a heavy load?” the duyker asked Ananse.*

*“Your children, Tikononkono, Nyaakrohweaa and Ntikuma say that you are heavier than I,” Ananse replied. “But I insist that I am heavier than you are.”*

*Kweku put down the load he was carrying. He asked the duyker to lie down in the basket so that he, Ananse, would carry him, supposedly to find out whether he was the heavier of the two. But because Agyanka, the duyker, did not know exactly what to do, Ananse decided to demonstrate it to him. He lay in the contraption and arranged his hands and feet to show the duyker exactly how he would have him do when he got into it.*

*“You will tie me up before you carry,” Kwaku explained to the duyker, knowing very well that when it was his turn, he would want the duyker tied up securely before he killed him. “Then you will untie me so that I also can carry you to see which of us is heavier.”*

*Kwabena Agyanka tied Kwaku up just as he had been told to do and carried him.*

*“Ah, Kwaku, you are not heavy at all”, said the duyker.*

Then he put Kwaku down. Ananse tricked the ducky into the basket and tied up his hands and his feet. He carried the ducky and turned round to return home. On the way, the ducky asked him: "Father Kwaku, why don't you put me down, just as I did?"

"What do you want me to eat if put you down?" Kweku asked the ducky.

It was a very sad situation! True to his word, Kwaku Ananse took the animal home, and called his children to him.

"Now you know what wisdom I have!" he told them. "You can see for yourself that I have brought one animal home."

Kweku Ananse killed the ducky and used it in cooking his soup. Three days after this incident, when there was no more meat, Ananse carried the basket again and set off to find another animal. He met Adowa, the antelope, on the way. He tricked Adowa into the basket, tied him up, and turned to go home. Now listen to the most heart-breaking thing that happened when Kwaku was going home Adowa!

"Father Kwaku, are you really going to use this trickery to kill me?" Adowa asked him. "Why don't you put me down so that I can also do what you demonstrated?"

"Look here," was Kweku's callous reply, "I am going to kill you; then I will use your offal for cocoyam casserole. As for the meat itself, hmmm...I cannot tell you what I am going to do with it!"

The antelope cried all the way to Ananse's house. Once they got there, Ananse, with his children, killed him. All this while, Amoakua the squirrel, in his hide-out on the outskirts of the village, had been watching all that Kwaku had been doing. He had seen everything.

"Soon there was no more meat. Ananse had killed almost all the animals in the forest. So what happened was that he had to go out again to see whether he could find an animal to kill. He picked up his akōtwe again and set off for the outskirts of the village with the knowledge that that was Amoakua's favourite eating place. While Amoakua was eating, he saw Ananse coming towards him with his akōtwe on his head. Immediately, Amoakua came out to meet him. Kwaku Ananse called out to Amoakua, flattering him with appellations:

**Hail Amoakua, the pure one!**

**Hail Amoakua, the pure one!**

**Hail Amoakua, the pure one!**

"Why are you, as old as you are, sweating under such a heavy load?" Amoakua asked Ananse. "Where are you going?"

"It's your children," Ananse replied. "They insist that you are heavier than I; I say, however, that I am heavier than you!"

"Hey, Kwaku, all this is unnecessary," Amoakua told him when he had put the basket down in preparation for his usual demonstration.

"Oh, don't worry," Ananse replied. "I am going to show you how it is done. You will carry me first; after you have put me down, I will carry you."

Amoakua pretended to sit in the basket first. "Hey, Amoakua, this is not how it is done," Ananse protested. "Put your hands and your feet in the basket!"

"You know, Kwaku, that I walk with both hands and feet," Amoakua answered. "You know that when God created me, he did not make me straight. Therefore, come and lie in the basket and show me how I can do it right."

Amoakua had planned that as soon as Ananse sat in the basket, he would tie Ananse up. So when Ananse lay in it, Amoakua quickly tied him up tightly. He also decided to carry Kwaku home and kill him; then Ananse would know what hunger was really like! He set off for home. When Kwaku Ananse realised what was happening to him, he started lamenting out loud.

"Amoakua, why don't you let me down so that I can also do what I showed you?"

"Look here," Amoakua retorted, "you have tricked all the animals and lured them to their death. I alone am left. I am also taking you home to cut your head off so that you will know what hunger is really like."

*Kwaku Ananse cried and cried and cried. On their way, they came to a pond. While they were crossing it, Ananse suddenly had a great idea. He stared into the water, and then lifted up his voice in song:*

***Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
No animal was able to tie Ananse up...to tie Ananse up,  
Amoakua the pure one has tied Ananse up...has tied Ananse up  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he has tied Ananse up,  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he has tied Ananse up,  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, oo!***

*Immediately, the bottom of the pond shook! Kwaku Ananse lifted up his voice in song again:*

***Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
No animal was able to tie Ananse up...to tie Ananse up,  
Amoakua the pure one has tied Ananse up...has tied Ananse up  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he has tied Ananse up,  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he has tied Ananse up,  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, oo!***

*As if on cue, Crocodile rose out of the water and lay down on the edge of the pond.*

*“Hey Amoakua, why what is wrong?” Crocodile asked. “You know that Kwaku Ananse is our leader; why have you tied him up?”*

*“Nana, Kwaku Ananse has triked the elephant and all the toher animals in the forest and lured them to their deaths,” Amoakua explained. “Now I am the only one left in the bush. By the grace of the Creator, I have succeeded in luring him and tying him up. I was just about to take him home and cut off his head so that hetoo will feel hunger in the pit of his stomach!”*

*“Well, you know that I am the queen mother of all the animals,” Crocodile replied. “Since Kwaku has asked me to intercede on his behalf, I ought to be able to help him. “ Cautioned Amoakua. Let me take him away!”*

*“Oh don’t worry,” Crocodile assured Amoakua. “Let us give himanother chance and see what he will do after this.”*

*Kwaku Ananse was untied. You shoud have seen the once-brave man, scared, sweating and feeling quite miserable! For the help she had given him, Kwaku decided to swear an oath to the queenmother Crocodile.*

*“Nana, don’t listen to what Amoakua is saying,” Ananse cut in. “I am going right now, but I promise that I will return to show my appreciation. Kwaku was allowed to leave. In disgrace, he carried his akɔtwe home.*

*“I have seen Crocodile,” Ananse informed his wife when he got home. “You should see her tail; it would be very good in palm nut soup!”*

*“Hey, Kwaku,” his wife exclaimed. “Why are there so many welts on your skin?” He did not tell her the truth about what had happened to him. On the day he promised to return to the queenmother Crocodile, Kwaku Ananse asked his wife to make some white mashed yam with twelve cooked eggs. He was going to call Crocodile and use the food to lure her to her death.*

*His wife did as he had asked. When she had finished, Ananse set out on his way to lure Crocodile out of the pond, and together with his wife, eat her flesh. He carried the food to the pond, and when arrived, he started to sing his song:*

***Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
Queenmother Crocodile lying in the depths of the pond,  
No animal was able to tie Ananse up...to tie Ananse up,  
Amoakua the pure one has tied Ananse up...has tied Ananse up  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he ha s tied Ananse up,***

***Odennee, okudennee, odennee, he has tied Ananse up,  
Odennee, okudennee, odennee, oo!***

*Immediately, the bottom of the pond shook! The crocodile rose out of it.*

*“Nana, here is the promise I made to you,” said Kwaku Ananse, giving the food to Crocodile. When Crocodile started to eat the food, she first took an egg. Kwaku Ananse waited impatiently for an opportunity to kill her, his knife well-sharpened. He had hidden the knife and was trying to persuade Crocodile to eat more eggs.*

*“Kwaku, be patient,” Crocodile said to him. “This is your gift to me; whether I eat it to my children is really none of your business!”*

*Kwaku Ananse was very impatient. He desperately wanted Crocodile to pick up another egg, so that he would have the opportunity, in her unguarded state, to cut her up. Meanwhile, Crocodile had caught on to what Kwaku had up his sleeve. They were still arguing over the egg when Kwaku Ananse took out his knife to cut Crocodile. But Crocodile was quicker; she lifted up her tail, brought it down sharply right into Kwaku Ananse, and cut off his head which got itself reattached to his rear!*

*This is the reason why the spider’s head is attached to his rear, and his rear attached to his head!*

## **DISCUSSION**

Literary generic studies go back to Plato who in a bid to define tragedy ended up giving us the genres and sub-genres of drama. Thus, we technically know the difference between tragedy, comedy and even tragic-comedy. But this is not the end of the story. Since the White man colonized Africa and Ghana for that matter, and the written mode of expression was bequeathed to the African, the delineating line between oral and written genres have been a problem. Indeed while some scholars of oral literature seek to homogenize the written and the oral, other academics like Goody, Ong, Havelock are busy differentiating the written from the oral and it is the latter who provide the background for this study, bearing in mind that the written and the oral have their separate structures that make them what they are.

The first area of differences between narratives common in canonical literature<sup>20</sup>, that is, the kind of literature inherited from the colonial masters and usually learnt in Ghanaian schools, and *anansesem*, is that of genre. As an oral production, *anansesem* best achieves its validity through performance. It must be pointed out once again that the text in question, even though in written form, is structurally oral and fits into any analysis of orality. Richard Bauman defines performance as “a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skills, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out; above and beyond its referential content”<sup>21</sup>. By this definition, *Anansesem*, as oral performance, is different from the canonical narratives in which the participation of the audience in performance is highly restricted. The role of the audience, face-to-face, is more crucial in *anansesem* the reason being that *anansesem*, unlike the canonical narratives, do not have individual authorship. It is community owned and the audience are stakeholders, some of whom know the content and the art more than the narrator and can even challenge the narrator to improve upon his delivery, doing so through a song:

The challenger: *Anansesem asisie* (this *anansesem* is not correct)

The other members of the audience: To no yie (correct it)

And the narrator is obliged, according to the ground rules set by the culture of the Akan people, to improve either the content or the style of narration.

In contrast, canonical narratives, which are not oral in structure, do not go by such conventions. When Guy Maupassant, James Joyce, William Faulkner or any of the African writers of novels and short stories like Ama Atta Aidoo, Chike Unigwe or Theresa Enning, whose works are normally treated in Ghanaian schools write, they are also writing imaginative stories like *anansesem* but apart from the fact that, unlike *anansesem*

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<sup>20</sup> The term canonical literature is used because one may think the difference is between Western and African oral literature, but Richard Bauman makes it clear that we have white folktales in America that follow the same pattern as that of the African oral literary expression. Thus, pitching the West against African in this discourse will be a useless generalization.

<sup>21</sup> See Bauman, 2001.p. 3



that lacks individuals as authors, they are the authors of their work, they do not see their readers face to face, unless they are called to read bits and pieces of their work to a group of literary enthusiasts. For example, those who study Ayi Kwei Armah study more of his works, and even though his works are mostly on Ghana, very little is known of his environment, Senegal, the country he has been living for a long time. The study of Ghana is therefore a product of the thinking of Armah and not a direct product of his environment. The point here is that writers are products of their environment or culture, but they can choose to write on cultures other than where they live. This is not the case with *anansesem*. It is performed to a live audience and where it is written, like what we have in this paper, the imagined audience is still supposed to be the Akans; they own it and understand exactly what is being said. When Ayi Kwei Armah or Wole Soyinka writes, it is for a larger audience other than the ethnic group they represent. *Anansesem*, on the other hand, presents a collective consciousness between the performer or, in our case, the written story, and the audience or the reader.

Collective consciousness in *anansesem* leads to a collective identity, an identity that distinguishes the Akan from other ethnic groups, an identity that teaches the individual what Dundes refers to as “native categories and unstated premises or axioms”<sup>22</sup> peculiar to the people of that particular cultural expression. This paper may not agree with his use of the term, “native” since it sees the word still loaded with some prejudice but, by and large, Dundes is referring to the way in which this group of people see their world from their own point of view. The Akan student who is introduced to this cultural cognition grows up to be like the engineer who can dismantle and re-assemble his engine. He grows up to develop a very critical eye that separates cultural signs in a cultural signification system and put them together with the creative eye of the painter who creates from his mind and constructs with his hand. Unfortunately, due to the kind of Eurocentric education that Ghanaian students go through, they are most likely to reach for European basis of analysis in almost every sphere of life, including the analysis of the folktale. The Ghanaian student is likely to approach literary genres from the perspective of European literary traditions. European literary concepts with regards to characterization, plot, thematics, temporality and mood are most likely to influence the analysis of the Ghanaian literary student. This paper seeks to disagree that the literary structures of Ghanaian folktales should be measured against the background of European literary concepts. We start with the study of the plot of the Akan folktale, using “Kwaku Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile”, as provided above, as a case study. We have already indicated that the plot of the Akan *anansesem* is in three parts; the beginning, the middle and the end and for purpose of our analysis, we will concentrate only on the beginning part of the *anansesem* plot.

### The Plot

For our study of the plot of *anansesem*, we compare its plot structures to what Western literary history and criticism say about the plot to see if indeed the *anansesem* plot lacks literary merit as purported by certain academicians. The known critic to first theorize the plot construction in literature is Aristotle. He proposed the three-act plot; the beginning, the middle and an end (Gilbert, 1967). Then Horace, advocated the five-act plot in his *Ars Poetica*. Henrik Ibsen and the other writers of the Theatre of Absurd also revised the five-act to the three-act plot and, to a greater success, experimented with the four-act plot. Of course, Gustav Freytag imposed his authority in the study of the plot structure both in drama, novel and short stories with his triangle which took us back to the five-act plot. Wayne Booth with his concept of *telling* and *showing* makes the phenomenon of micronarrative so far as the plot is concerned even clearer. Gerard Genette with his structuralist approach to the plot is a popular work on the aesthetics of the plot. The Western literary tradition has a very tall list of writers on the plot<sup>23</sup>. The plot is widely discussed in the Western tradition.

The plot in the African literary tradition, however, presents varieties not known in its European counterpart. “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile” has three main stages in the plot and so do all ananse stories. This is confirmed by Kofi Agyekum, a celebrated Ghanaian linguist who advocates the use of the local languages to disseminate knowledge has its epistemics in the local culture. He has come up with the

<sup>22</sup> See Bronner, 2007.p. 182

<sup>23</sup> See Lubbock, 1921; Pouillon, 1964; Muller, 1965; Todorov, 1966; Ricardou, 1967; Lefebvre, 1971; Barthes, 1975

Akan version of the three stages in the *anansesem* plot: *nhyenmu/mfitiasεε* (beginning), *anansesem no ankasa* (middle) and *anansesem awieεε* (end). You may be right to say that this generic description as offered by Kofi Agyekum goes back to Aristotle, but it could also be that it is a mere coincidence. This is because apart from the fact that the period Aristotle wrote in was a transitional period from the oral to the written culture for the Greeks<sup>24</sup>, which might suggest the universalistic approach to orality, there is nothing else to indicate that the Akan *anansesem* has any relationship with the Greeks at the time of Aristotle. This gives us the locus to discuss *anansesem* as strictly a Ghanaian phenomenon. This is not to discount the fact that the plot of *anansesem* has nothing to do with the Western literary tradition. Indeed, works have been done to draw this link. Mireku Gyima's<sup>25</sup> work on the structure of *anansesem*, ranging from the expression of voice, mood to time, adequately demonstrates how *anansesem* as a universal phenomenon follow certain concepts that are known in the Western literary tradition as well. From her work, however, it is, however, clear the Western literary tradition is silent on the micronarrative of the *anansesem*. This lacuna is what this work seeks to fill by looking at the plot in the details of micronarrative of "Ananse and the Crocodile Queenmother".

In looking at the plot of *anansesem*, we first have to look at how the plot constructs reality in the Akan linguistic community. This takes us to the mimetic theory. Plato sees reality in literary studies in terms of the relationship between the fantasy and the reality and that all ideas start with the abstract, which he believes comes from God and this abstract is imitated by man in an object form and the painter copies the object; the abstract is first removed from reality, the object is second removed from reality and the work of the painter is third removed from reality<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, the narrative, according to Plato, has two sides, the abstract and the real. One critic who has been exhaustive in his treatment of this subject is Gerard Genette, whose brilliant exposition on the micronarrative discourse, treats the relationship between the imagined story and the real story. In doing so, he discusses extensively the mood as an expression of reporting, when the narrative means representation, what has gone before, the degree of affirmation, the expression of point of view, the distance between the teller and the story and how this information is regulated by the teller<sup>27</sup>. It is the latter that enters the orbit of discussion on "Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile" as a case study of *anansesem*.

One way to regulate the information by the teller is by manipulating the plot of *anansesem*. *Anansesem* also uses the concept of temporality, of course, a very important element in plot construction. Time is an important aspect in the pragmatics of a real world and no group of people can claim not to be part of this universal experience. The beginning of "Kweku Ananse and the Queen Crocodile" is an example of how real time is woven into virtual time. The narrator is reporting an incidence that is believed to have happened in the past but the narratology makes the story look very present. What is significant in the use of time in narratives in different cultures is the manner in which the sequence of time is ordered. The concept of the plot itself, as Ong<sup>28</sup> puts it, is structured and appreciated in the sense of creative imagination as used in the West. Again, Peabody who, speaking about oral delivery, using the Greeks as an example, says that in oral performance, unlike what Ong says about the Western concept about the written plot, the performer is more interested in remembered traditional formulaic than organizing the plot of the narrative. Plot, as Genette instructs us, in the Western sense, is an art on its own, imaginatively constructed with all the ingenuity you can think of and appreciated with all the sophistication the art of writing allows. It is fixed and composed at the moment of writing. In "Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile", this pattern of plot as described by Genette is not applicable. Creativity is now of performance and every performance is an instantiation of the detached cultural text<sup>29</sup>. The plot is therefore not necessarily the climactic development of five stages as we see in the Freytag Triangle which is the main menu on the table in the discussion of the

<sup>24</sup> See Havelock, 1982

<sup>25</sup> This is her PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of English, KNUST, 2010

<sup>26</sup> See Allan Gilbert, 1967

<sup>27</sup> See Gerard Genette, 1983.p. 161

<sup>28</sup> See Walter Ong, 2000.p. 143

<sup>29</sup> See also Hanks, 1989; Silverstein, 1989; Silverstein and Urban1996; Urban, 2001; Irvine, 1996; Haviland, 1996; Poveda et al, 2005

plot in the Western tradition. We must however be clear here that the *anansesem* under study, even though in written form, is still considered to be an oral performance, one instantiation of the detached text.

Right from the beginning, the narrator of the ananse story, unlike what happens in the Aristotelian plot, does not hide his intention of regulating and manipulating information. In fact, this is a regular feature in Afua Sutherland's concept of "Anansegoro" which seeks to bring the Akan indigenous narratology to mainstream literary studies. In this concept, the most striking feature is the story-teller who usually begins his story by saying, "Once upon a time"<sup>30</sup>. That seemingly innocent statement sits on top of a very high mountain of traditional meaning so far as the plot is concerned. One of the collectors of the anthology in the book from which we have the above story indicated that the original text of the story under study started with the usual "Abra, abrao" or "Yense Yense". Kofi Agyekum<sup>31</sup> offers a meaning for the opening structure; "anansesim ye ade a yeabra ani" (*anansesem* is a story that hoodwinks its listeners). Fante, a dialect of the Akan language, is blunt, "Kodzi wɔngye ndzi o!" (Stories are not to be believed). The opening structure as seen above should have been the opening words before the thesis statement, "I am going to tell you a tale about Kwaku Ananse and different kinds of animals." The collector added that the editor of the anthology took away this structure because she wanted the story to look more real than the normal *anansesem*. Much as I agree with her for cutting this bit off for the sake reducing the mimetic effect of this story, I believe a lot of harm has been done to this story, considering the role of the role of the story-teller as indicated in the concept of "Anansegoro". In "Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile", as in all *anansesem*, the teller has to tell the listeners that what they are about to hear, about the unpredictability in human nature, is not about an event but about a narrative, that is, it is about the instrument used to bring to life a non-existent story. One Western scholar who comes very close to the concept of the beginning of the *anansesem* is Richard Bauman, an anthropologist who worked on the hunting stories of dogs in Canton, Texas. His contribution to this development is that the story "is narratively constructed by participants out of cultural knowledge of how events are". Why? It is because the story does not exist. Here, *anansesem* is totally borne out of imagination, nothing but fantasy. And because the focus is on the art of storytelling, the response to the beginning structure is "Yesesa soa woara" (the teller has the responsibility to prove that it is reality borne out of imagination), thus confirming Bauman's definition that in performance, the performer bears the "responsibility to an audience for a display of communication skills"<sup>32</sup>. This evaluative role of the audience concerning how the audience can challenge the teller when things go wrong has already been mentioned and we need to repeat that this capability on the part of the listener or the reader is due to a collective consciousness the performer shares with the audience; one mind, one identity, one people. By cutting the beginning structure therefore, notion of collective consciousness is hushed and that is unfortunate because the art is about how the teller and the audience collaborate to construct the narrative.

Another element of the beginning of "Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile" is when the teller proposes to start the narration with a song. Again, Kofi Agyekum<sup>33</sup> makes it very clear that this is the normal practice in *anansesem*. He postulates, "Se ɔpe se ɔhye anansesem no ase na nnipa no ano mmoaɛɛ, ɔfiri mu bɔ mmɔguo de frɛfrɛ dɔm" (When the narrator wants to start performing but does not have enough audience, he starts with song to allow people to join the audience). That is exactly the narrating praxis here, *Well, I am going to tell you a tale about Kwaku Ananse and different kinds of animals; so let us begin with a song.* The thesis statement, "I am going to tell you a tale about Kwaku Ananse and different kinds of animals" usually go together with a call for a song. The song is not only to attract other members of the community but to arouse the interest and the alertness level of the audience. Indeed, the structures for the beginning of the plot are crafted to make the audience forget that the whole exercise is make-believe, a reality that physically happened<sup>34</sup>. That the fact that Ananse, the spider, tricks other animals, is a fact of life. This allows the audience to participate in the story, contributing through songs and sometimes adding more details when necessary. And they do all that because every moment of performance is a fresh performance

<sup>30</sup> See Martin Owusu, 1988

<sup>31</sup> See Agyekum, 2011.p. 39

<sup>32</sup> Richard Bauman, 2001.p. 3

<sup>33</sup> See Agyekum, 2011.p. 39

<sup>34</sup> See Agyakum, 2011.p. 40

and what this means is that what is supposed to be an abstract has now been given a concrete form, re-enacted, actualised and brought back to real life. We therefore have a transition from the abstract past to the concrete present; two worlds conjoined into one<sup>35</sup>.

The function of the beginning of *anansesem* is to establish the smooth transition from the world of the past or the abstract to the world of the present or the concrete. This temporal fusion is having been observed by Walter Benjamin who refers to it as “a simultaneity of the past and future in an instantaneous present”<sup>36</sup>. The temporal boundary between the past, which Anderson calls the interior time, and the present, which he calls the exterior time, collapses. The teller and the audience of the story under study enter an imagined community<sup>37</sup>. The plot of *anansesem* departs from the definition Aristotle gives, not only in the details as suggested by the structure but that the *anansesem* is a platform on which an imagined community is constructed, making *anansesem* “our story”, the ownership of which belongs to the community as a whole, a community which may not even know each other physically but knit together by a common culture. This is a community of people called Akans, belong to different worlds: the world of the dead and living but joined together by the same cosmology and it is this cosmology that makes them unique, a cosmology that “gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, authors and readers”<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, the two worlds do not need to know each other just like the people do not. You only need to belong to the Akan cosmology, and you are part of Akan world of “empty time”, which for the sake of this paper we may call the present time and therefore the real time. Again, in this imagined Akan community, there are ancestors you do not know. You can only imagine they are part of your community. Subsequently, we can conclude that since you share the same “empty time”, a hypnotic time that confirms the solidity of single community with your ancestors, then we can say that you share with them the same cosmology and in this cosmology, “our story” does not belong only to the living but to the dead as well. The temporality of “our story” is therefore not the physical one.

Here too the concept of physical space collapses. There are people all over the world you may not know who belong to this community. They could be in Ghana, in the United States, in the UK or any part of the world. So far as you all belong to the same “empty space” called Akan community, they belong to one another. The Akan who was born in Ghana but lives in the UK still possesses this community knowledge about the story being told. In effect, this manner of plot structure provides a very solid ground for identity for Akans all over the world. The person may be in China and still may count himself to be Akan. It is quite clear that the beginning of the plot itself does not only provide a very significant knowledge about the culture from which it is found but also constructs identity for Akans all over the world.

### **Keying the performance of “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile”**

Quite frankly, collectors of anthologies, set out doing their work with a particular burden which spells out the objectives for that exercise. The objectives guide what they collect and how the collections are presented. In the case of “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile,” we see that the beginning of the plot, which by convention of Akan storytelling, should have been present, was cut off for reasons of reducing the level of fantasy of the story but our discussions has proven that, indeed, the meaning of the story resides in the fact that the story is not a fact and yet is made to look like a fact and the art that brings it to the realm of factual existence is the art of telling. The beginning that was cut therefore contains so much meaning and for *anansesem* lovers, you touch the art and you touch the meaning.

Akans start the performance of their folktales using certain conventions. The absence of any convention as we saw at the beginning of the plot is a grave omission. The reason for this is the fact that this convention is an “interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood”<sup>39</sup>. It is used to key the performance, framing the meaning. The meaning by this convention is like saying, “What I am about to say is a lie but accept it as a fact”. It is a lie insofar as it is an event that

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<sup>35</sup> See Bauman, 2001.p. 3

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Anderson, 2006.p. 24

<sup>37</sup> See Anderson, 2006

<sup>38</sup> See Anderson, 2006.p. 24

<sup>39</sup> Richard Bauman, 1977.p. 9

never occurred but a fact insofar as what the story is presenting is a social fact. To an individual who belongs to the written culture, this may seem absurd because to him, a fact is a fact; it is either empirical or syllogistic, no more, no less. To the oral mind however, the absence of writing, which allows the knower to be separated from the known, restricts all verbal activities to the mind and the mouth. Playing the mind game, that is, creating suggestive images with words, is the usual practice and therefore creating a story that never existed but that has a crucial relationship with social reality is very normal; it is what the story says that matters but not whether it is real or imaginary. Mireku Gyima calls the fact that humanity is unpredictable in the story under study or what the story reveals about the people the deep structure. She calls the story itself a mere surface structure. This does not in any way suggest that the written culture does not play mind games but the difference here is that while the written culture marks out the difference between a fantastic story and a real one, the Akan does not. It is indeed a game borne out of the unconscious, where according to the surrealist movement, reside a lot of contradictions which the conscious mind tidies up. These seeming contradictions, as we have in the narrative under discussion, are facts about life. To the Akan therefore, there may be just a negligible and dispensable thin line between the real and the imaginary and the omission of any convention like “Yense, yense”, that constructs this surrealist treatment of reality, an unlikely juxtaposition of images, just like what we should have in the “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile” seriously undermines the real meaning of story.

Again, the beginning of the plot allows the audience to evaluate the performance as the performer and audience have different roles to play in the construction of the narrative. The roles depend on how the performer keys the performance. Whether it is “Kodzi wɔngye ndzi o” or “Yense, yense”, the moment this convention is introduced, the role of the audience is to evaluate the performance and give a nod to the performer “to discharge his public duty as a role player”<sup>40</sup>. As indicated early on, the narrative is owned by the community and the performer seeks permission from the audience to perform on its behalf and so the audience responds by saying, “Yɛsesa soa woara”, to wit, the burden is on you to prove that you are capable of discharging this public duty. Furthermore, because the performer and the audience share the same culture, this shareability generates “the participation of an audience through the arousal of ‘an attitude of collaborative expectancy... Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation’”<sup>41</sup>. Thus, the audience is drawn to the performer as they participate in what the performer is doing or saying. Again as indicated earlier, it is not only that this convention introduced by the performer is a metacommunication, “a range of explicit or implicit messages which carry instructions on how to interpret other messages”<sup>42</sup> but that this convention allows the audience to evaluate the kind of genre of art at play, judging from conventions that can only be found in a particular genre and not in any other. Through this evaluation, the audience can then name a particular genre, which in our analysis is *anansesem* as opposed to proverbs, incantations, riddles and other verbal performances. It is upon this basis that I do not agree with the collector for cutting away the opening words of the folktale under study.

### ***Anansesem* and Ghanaian Pedagogy**

The “attitude of collaborative expectancy”<sup>43</sup> which invites participation thrives on the platform of cultural shareability. Because the performer and the audience share the same cultural ideology or philosophy that governs this performance, the audience does not only understand the message but the metacommunication as well. From my ethnographic studies of *anansesem* in the Ashanti and Central regions of Ghana, it became clear that this “collaborative expectancy” is even more significant in the training of the youth.

The training of the Ghanaian youth therefore automatically brings to mind Ghanaian pedagogy, the theory and practice of teaching, or the vehicle through which knowledge is imparted to the youth for character building. You mention pedagogy and one’s mind is likely to go to formal education in Ghana; primary, secondary and tertiary education. But the question is: has formal education really trained Ghanaian

<sup>40</sup> See Bauman, 1977

<sup>41</sup> Richard Bauman quoting Burke, 1969.p. 58

<sup>42</sup> See Bauman, 1977.p. 15

<sup>43</sup> Burke, 1969

youth to yield the needed results? Maybe yes. But if we take into consideration the level of development in the country, a so-called middle-income country that mainly survives on hand outs from international donors, we are not far from disputing the fact that formal education has been productive in the country. The reason is that Ghana has not been able to sets its priorities right so that even though the youth might be trained well but because there is no sense of direction, the training comes to naught all because the training is not properly culturally informed. From which ever angle you see it, there seems to be a huge problem with formal education in Ghana. Indeed, Ahmed Bawa Kuyini<sup>44</sup> has these candid words regarding formal education, secondary education to be precise, “policy makers are divided and confused about secondary education, including its structure and content”. Indeed, we are so much engrossed in formal education to the extent that we have forgotten there are other alternatives and even when it is very clear that the system of formal education has failed us, we still hopelessly cling to it. It is against this background that this paper offers additional approach to education: local production of knowledge using *anansesem* as a case study.

I met a nurse of 27 years called Kweku Wusu in Yamoransah, Central region of Ghana. He was of the view that the production of local knowledge like *anansesem* could be a very powerful tool for moulding the behaviour of the youth. This is what he said:

**We used to live with our grandmother at Twifu Ewisem. We would run errands for our grand mum and our grand mum had a unique way of making us happy when she sent us on errands. She would tell us stories. An example of some of the stories she would be telling us was “Abofra a ɔyɛ somakɔ no odzi abodwee dze” (The boy who readily goes on errands receives gifts). She had livestock and would assign you some of the livestock when you readily go on errands to back what she had been saying in the stories. So when she sent you, you were happy and that was how she made us good errand boys.**<sup>45</sup>

Quite clearly, the boys who stayed with their grand mum’s behaviour were influenced by the *anansesem* the old lady was narrating to them. As a researcher, I was curious and wanted to know the context, that was how they met and the how information was dispensed during the narration of the *anansesem*.

**Researcher: When did you meet?**

**Kwaku Wusu: It was mostly in the evening and it was almost every night; only when the weather was okay.**

**Researcher: Where did you meet?**

**Kweku Wusu: In the compound of our house.**

**Researcher: Did she tell you stories for entertainment?**

**Kwaku Wusu: She normally observed the way we behaved, then she picked out a story. Most of the time, the story really talked about some of the things we did.**

**Researcher: You think the stories were powerful enough to influence your behaviour?**

**Kwaku Wusa: We did not want to behave like Kwaku Ananse so that we find ourselves in trouble. So it has impact on our childhood.**

This extract of the conversation I had with Kwaku Wusu provides all the details needed for education, whether formal or informal. First, the curriculum which is supposed to be the academic course content in a school is there. While Ghana contends itself with importing or migrating course contents from developed worlds without any regard to any sense of “attitude of collaborative expectancy” which helps the student to understand better and be part of the knowledge being produced, the old lady in the interview above is very specific; observes the needs of the children in the house. And because her selection of materials for her education was guided from emic perspective, she was able to reach her objective of making good errand boys out of them. When you come to Ghanaian formal education, one observes that the needs of the students and that of Ghana has been ignored by the curriculum in Ghanaian schools and this has been a subject of serious concern among academics<sup>46</sup>. Second, the place of study is supposed to be congenial. In the interview,

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<sup>44</sup> Bawa Kuyini, 2007.p. 169

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kweku Wusu, Yamoransah, Central Region of Ghana, 22/07/17

<sup>46</sup> See Baah-Boateng, 2004

the place is the compound of the house, a place the children were more used to and could relate to as home. No wonder, they were ready for the stories and the lessons the stories gave. In the Ghanaian formal school context, some children study under trees. Kuyini is also critical here, lamenting that “lack of school places and unstable structure and content are making secondary education the ‘the weakest link’ in Ghana’s education system.” The readiness and the enthusiasm of the old lady, and for that matter those who educate using *anansesem* is in no doubt. The children knew how enthusiastic their “teacher” was and would reciprocate by being punctual and attentive. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same of formal education in Ghana. While we are not generalizing teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation, Ghana Education Service has been complaining of these two bad habits among the generality of teachers in Ghana. Third, what interests me most in the informal education through *anansesem* is the practical aspect of the “lessons” as presented in the interview. The old lady would give some of the livestock to the children to rear and if the child did well, she would give the child one of the livestock as a personal gift. The children were therefore enthusiastic and became good errand boys, or within the context of this extract, they became good livestock keepers. We all know keeping livestock is a skill and by the time the young man who stayed with this old lady grew up, he would be excellent in animal husbandry.

Obaapanyin Aba Wu, 87, also from Yamoransah confirmed what Kwaku Wusu said about *anansesem*:

***I gave birth to ten children and bringing them up was not easy at all. Thanks to the ananse stories I used to tell them, they followed my advice and did what I wanted them to do.***<sup>47</sup>

Finally, even though it is not explicitly stated in the interview, we cannot miss the praxis of participation during story telling as already observed in our discussion of “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile.” As stated early on, the story has a collective ownership and the children are at liberty to interject with “mboguo” (songs) and much as these stories could serve as keeping the audience alert, in most cases they are selected according to the themes being proffered by the story. They also have the opportunity of turn taking when they have to respond to certain formulaic expressions provided by the narrator. This made them part of the “class”. Such a practice is almost non-existent in a curriculum that emphasises the writing of notes in class with students left with very little time to ask questions let alone to contribute in class. Therefore, apart from its literary merits, the practice and the art of *anansesem* has a lot to offer the pedagogy in modern Ghanaian schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper strongly recommends the introduction of *anansesem* as a major educational material in Ghanaian institutions. There might be some modifications to meet modern needs. The following are the reasons:

- Bronner is of the conviction that “folklore is an essential way that cultural knowledge and wisdom is passed down from generation to generation and from peer to peer”. Quite frankly, this paper has shown that *anansesem* can be used to develop thinking and behavioural patterns of the youth, a confirmation of Dundes’ quest to urge K-12 teachers in America to use folklore as instructional tool to develop tolerance, and to use the students’ own cultural traditions to enhance learning<sup>48</sup>. If we are looking for approaches to pass on values from generation to generation and peer to peer, we should seriously pay attention to the performance of *anansesem*.
- Performance of *anansesem* can play a major role in improving communications between people and thus reduce the rate of misunderstanding among people of the same country. This can be done by allowing people of different ethnic groups to learn the folklore of other ethnic groups to know the cosmology that informs their behaviour.
- *Anansesem*, as seen in “Kwaku Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile,” helps to disinter the unconscious culture that feeds the behaviour of a group of people. And it is against this background

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Obaapanyin Aba Wu, Yamoransah, Central region, 22/07/17

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Bronner, 2007.p. 53

that this paper recommends the study of folklore which can provide the opportunity to measure any alternative values against existing ones for the necessary correction.

- *Anansesem*, and for that matter the folklore in all the ethnic groups in the country, helps to create identity for the owners and this identity when properly and productively put to good use brings about peaceful co-existence and this in turn helps the development of the country in all aspects of life.
- *Anansesem* can also be used as a source of entertainment, a kind of mind game that helps students to develop their thinking.
- *Anansesem* can be developed to enhance the economy of the country. A company has already created cartoons films out of ananse stories and these films are exported for economic gains. The concept of *anansesem* clubs, as practiced in Ekumfi Atwea, must be re-organized using modern marketing techniques, to attract tourists, who are more interested in the way Ghanaians tell their stories and the thinking that informs it.
- The performance of *anansesem* has an in-built mechanism for role participation. Such a practice is almost non-existent in a curriculum that emphasises the writing of notes in class with students left with very little time to ask questions let alone to contribute in class. Therefore, apart from its literary merits, the practice and the art of *anansesem* has a lot to offer the modern Ghanaian pedagogy.

## CONCLUSION

We have observed that *anansesem* has its own type of plot construction that is based on three stages but this paper concentrates on the first stage, which is the beginning of the plot. We have also seen that the plot constructs reality by allowing the narrator to manipulate information, making the audience believe what otherwise should not be believed. The simulation of reality by the performer also allows the audience to evaluate the genre of performance which specifies the role each participant is supposed to play. Through the participation of both the narrator and the audience, a kind of bonding emerges and the identity that is the corollary element of this bonding is of great asset to the nation as whole.

We have therefore observed that leaving out “*Anansesem ye asisie o*” (*Anansesem* is lying) seriously undermines the meaning of the “*Kwaku Ananse and the Queen mother Crocodile*”. This convention is a serious component of the conventions of the narrative and its absence disrupts a smooth transition from the past to the present, the dead and the living. We are also not given any clue as to whether the audience granted the performer the permission to perform. We also do not know how the audience evaluated the genre, the basis upon which permission for the performance is granted. It is therefore recommended that collectors should respect every convention of the folktale to avoid the situation we have described above. The position of this paper is that if the right attention is paid to alternative approach to knowledge construction like what we have seen in the ananse story under study, mistakes like what we have discussed can be avoided and the educational content of the country stands a greater chance of developing more appropriate approaches to meet the needs of the society. At a time when educationists and the general public believe that there is “muddied vision of education in Ghana”, the country must seriously be thinking of modifications, alterations or additions in its educational system. This paper has made it clear that *anansesem*, a traditional oral performance is an alternative worth considering.

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