

Philosophy and Heroism: The Literary Perspective of Yaw Asare's Ananse in the Land of the Idiots



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the academic implication of Western influence on the study of Ghanaian oral literature and the extent to which literature in Ghana is “indigenized”, especially in the area of drama as addressed in Nana Yaw Asare’s *Ananse in the Land of the Idiots*. As the iron walls of Metropolitan English begin to show cracks, there is now a new development that brings new imaginations crucial for critically looking at the Ghanaian folklore as a literary piece. Using the ethnographic and the stylistic approaches for this study, one of the results of these new imaginations is to investigate “*anansesem*” text as both drama and narrative. From that perspective, one of the findings in this paper is that Ananse, whose behavior makes people taxonomize “*anansesem*” as a trickster folklore, far from being a trickster, is a real philosopher and cultural hero. Other findings are that the very behavior that qualifies Ananse to be called a trickster is indeed an Akan philosophical expression of how to survive in a secular world and that among the Akans, thinking right is highly prized, failure of which does not only bring about the doom of the perpetrator but that of the entire community. Again, the current moral thought in Ghana is based on the fact that religion is a Western invention and that the real moral thought of the Ghanaian as a social or a secular being as demonstrated by Ananse leads to the conclusion that corruption is the result of weak cultural thinking structures. The Akan folklore therefore has a lot to offer in terms of literature if treated as a locally produced text.

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana, a West African country, is known to have been colonized by the British, and until 1957 was still a colonized country. That the British occupied this territory over a long period cannot go without some cultural, educational, economic, social, and academic influence on this territory. The history of the country, both colonial and post-colonial is replete with the effects of this influence by the British.

There is no gainsaying the fact that since the English language is not the mother tongue of Ghanaians, Ghanaians learn English as a second language. The literary expression has therefore been made a product of this situation and, of course, using a second language for literary expression for a group of people comes with other ramifications other than just the study of English as a second language. The Metropolitan English, which is the English language authored by the English the American or their surrogates, has been and remains the canon and the target all Ghanaians aspire towards and indeed sometimes one’s ability to go closer to the Metropolitan English is a class index. So has it been that literary studies in Ghana has also followed this track of development and that the closer the content of literary studies are to the Metropolitan English, the more enlightening they are and the more acceptable they are in the schools. This is supported by research. Stern says without any ambiguity that English and American literature have constituted the canonical literature for non-English speaking countries for more than 100 years and that any attempt on the part of any non-English speaking countries using English as a second language to indigenize literature is confronted with challenges that sometimes affect the definition of literature.² The implication of this observation is obvious.

² Susan Stern, *Teaching Literature in ESL/EFL: an Integrative Approach*. (Los Angeles: University of California.1985)

Some may argue that if literature is about the study of the English language, then, as some academics will have it, where else does one turn to for quintessential language apart from the Metropolitan English? It is also well documented that the Metropolitan English serves as examples of good writing and illustration of grammatical rules for those using it as a second language.³ It would therefore take a very long time for the West to accept a text written by an author in a non-English speaking country as a literary piece. Those who wrote during the colonial period have lost out due to three reasons. First, their recognition by the British at that crucial time would have been a defeatist step. How does one glorify the work of his subjects which seems to undermine his/her political, psychological, and academic authority? Two, as already discussed, their works were not considered the kind that could serve as the kind of examples expected. This may not be true but, at least, this is what Africans have been made to believe. Three, some of the works of the Ghanaian writers during the colonial times were too contrived to be accepted as model writings. For example, J. B. Danquah and Graddiel Acquah were writing poems in the iambic pentameter and aping other English metrical structures even though the Akan language, a tonal language is completely different in structure from English, a stress language⁴. Also, the British claim that iambic pentameter is indigenous to their language. So how does one compete with Shakespeare in the use of this trope? These were not the only reasons why marginalized local texts have been considered literary. Text selection was also a challenging task considering the fact that factors like age, gender, background knowledge, and other factors had to be properly evaluated. This was crucial in finding the right position of local literary texts on the world map of literary studies. A lot of research had to be embarked upon especially in the area of background knowledge which included all the cultural and social background to the text. To make an otherwise complicated story simple, the colonial authorities were not interested in promoting local writings as literary texts.

The study of literature was therefore the literature of the colonial master and Ghanaian students had to study all the works of Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Pope, Poe, Elliot and many writers of the Western tradition before they could raise their heads high or strike their chests as being students of literature. This continued even during the time of independence and one would have thought that the then President, a firebrand pan-Africanist, who was so interested in the African personality, could have done something to change things.⁵ Indeed, in Ghana, until the 90s, the literary studies were called English literature. And the nomenclature is very suggestive of the fossilization of the idea that the Ghanaians had no literature and even if they had at all, it was not worth naming. It is instructive to know that this idea has lost its credibility in today's Ghana and that a lot of developments have, however, brought about the awakening that English and Literature are completely separate and that just as there is English literature, the literature of the English; there is also Ghanaian literature, the literature of the Ghanaians. Ghanaian literature is basically works by Ghanaian writers even though there have been occasions when some partially indigenous writers have contributed to the development.

Nonetheless, just when Ghana seem to discover itself as being literary proficient, the influence of the Metropolitan English still remains a very powerful force in this novelty. Most of the writers are academics, mainly from the departments of English in the Ghanaian universities. One can mention Kofi Awoonor from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast. Ama Ata Aidoo was also from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast. Vincent Senanu was in the Department of English, University of Ghana. Atukwei Okai was also in the Department of English, the University of Ghana, and the list goes on unremittingly. This births a corollary development. Their content might be Ghanaian but their structures are Eurocentric. They follow the literary theories and criticism offered in the West. Yes, literature is universal but it is never devoid of particularism. Literature works are judged by the same measuring rod used for Henry James or Charles Dickens. Indeed, Kofi Awoonor's Amamu in *This Earth, my Brother* is likened to an American character⁶, and Amamu is described as not being Ghanaian in his outlook and behavior. He behaves like a New Yorker. The same can be said about Ama Ata Aidoo's Ato in *Dilemma of a Ghost* and it takes the illiterate mother to reason like an African. Their approach to characterization, plot, language, and tropes are still Eurocentric, the kind of materials they give to their students.

Up till now, there has not been any theory from any Ghanaian university about the indigenous literary approach to characterization, plot, genres, forms, and other literary structures of authentic Ghanaian literature. Also, even when the universities talk of oral literature, covering the ballad, ode, lyric and panegyric, very little is mentioned of areas like drum text, traditional street poetry as practiced by a bard on board the VIP station in Kumasi and even the current poetic development in the country, Hiplife rap or even Spoken word are being practiced by some youth in the churches. These local genres are simply no-go areas. Literary studies in Ghana from the 70s to present have been studying the works of these writers whose allegiance to indigenous Ghanaian culture can be questioned and whose proportion of European structures outweighs that of the African ones. Clearly, the colonial spill-over is still present in the literary

³ Alan Duff and Alan Maley, *Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990).

⁴ Charles Kreidler, *The Pronunciation of English*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.) 1989

⁵ Charles Owu Ewie, *The Language Policy of Education in Ghana: A Critical Look at the English-Only Language Policy of Education*. *Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. John Mugane et al., 76-85. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

⁶ Lewis Nkozi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Essex: Longman, 1981), 3-5

studies in the country. This concept of canonicity can be compared to another development in the country in which in this terribly high temperature, Ghanaian lawyers still wear wigs, clearly a residual colonial practice that can be avoided or some Ghanaian Catholics who believe Latin chants go beyond practice and constitute an inevitable religious praxis that leads to salvation.

Even though there seems to be some level of self-identity in the African literary thought, texts on African culture are still considered non-canonical and students struggle to make departments of English in the country accept them as literary topics worthy of any investigation. During vivas in these universities, a question that is so pervasive is about the literariness of their thesis as if literariness is strictly the Eurocentric tradition of genres, forms, and thematics. It can be seen that what is called literature in Ghana today is on very slippery ground. The Author has interacted with the faculties and students at the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the three leading universities in the country, and they all confirm the above. In some of the universities, both faculty members and students confirmed that a student cannot present a thesis in a phenomenon that is not originally written in English.

These inconsistencies in Ghanaian universities on the grounds of which text can be accepted as a literary text and which text cannot be accepted is a reflection of a more serious challenge on the global stage. Literary studies worldwide have never enjoyed the stability other disciplines have. First Plato is skeptical of the artist⁷ and for him, the copied material cannot constitute the truth. Then comes Aristotle, his student, who challenges this concept and turns the art of copying into a whole theory called mimesis⁸.

Critical Literacy and Stylistic Approaches to studying literature

Indeed, Renaissance literature also has its version of mimesis or imitation and so is what is referred to as modern literary criticism. To add to this, the history of the development of literature is full of such inconsistencies. Therefore, for the sake of stability and consistency in textual treatment, two areas are marked for the study of literature: the critical literacy and the stylistic approaches. The critical literacy approach has for its preoccupation the literariness of the texts and it deals with aspects like characterization, plot, motivation, background, and so forth. This extends to areas like philosophy, pedagogy, sociology, feminism, and many other interdisciplinary practices. Stylistic literacy is originally an educational philosophy which postulates that knowledge is never neutral in power relations. This Marxist approach aims at uncovering the power structures and strictures of the text and the bias of the author. Thus, this approach helps to unearth materials and meanings that could otherwise go unnoticed. Literary artistes can also mention Discourse Analysis and its counterpart Critical Discourse here. They all help the reader to do critical thinking that allows the reader not only to evaluate claims made by writers but to analyze power dynamics in texts and question claims by writers. Though there might have been a few challenges here and there, the critical literacy approach has had a smoother development as compared to its counterpart, the stylistic approach.

The stylistic approach also helps to unearth meanings that could go unnoticed by dealing with the linguistic aspect of the texts and the reader's ability to describe literary language. Since the 19th Century, stylistics have had their fair share of the inconsistencies in their role in literary studies. Meyer-Lübke says that stylistics is just a mere study of language as art. Harris dismisses stylistics as being about only words on the page.⁹ Other critics discount stylistics because they believe it disregards the fact that the reader is coming from an ideological angle. These and many more reasons strengthen the hands of Roy Harris to jettison stylistics calling it a failed project. However, is it a failed project, a "forlorn attempt to validate metalanguage"? A good number of critics certainly do not think so.¹⁰ They find stylistics a valuable tool for the teaching of the text.

Their persuasions take readers back to the development of literary studies in Ghana. These critics find stylistics to be the link between language, literature, and linguistics and that it serves as a major tool to investigate the effects of linguistic choices. By implication, therefore, the text, as a teaching or learning material, should have a certain level of disposition towards the culture of the target language. In fact, literature and culture are bedfellows: one is the cause and the other is the effect and vice versa. Those days when Ghanaian literature students immersed themselves in English literature, they did so with a greater appreciation of the English culture. Thus they were studying the culture of Elizabethan, Victorian, Augustan, and other eras. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird* clearly explains the concept of witchcraft as a social philosophy during the early stages of the foundation of what is now called the United States of America. The list is unremitting.

Stylistics has in modern times, however, helped to move literature, as part of the culture, to be included in

⁷ Allan Gilbert, *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*. (Wayne State University Press, 1962)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ray Harris. When will stylistics? Paper presented at the 20th PALA Conference, Goldsmiths College, London, 2000.

¹⁰ Ronald Carter and Michael Long, *Teaching Literature*. (London: Longman, 1991)

the curriculum of non-English speaking countries.¹¹ Other experts in education are now clamoring for “a content-based curriculum that would have literature components.¹² In non-English speaking countries, stylistics was earlier introduced to promote L2 vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of lexical phrases, and fixed expressions¹³, to promote grammatical knowledge¹⁴ and to promote sociolinguistics and pragmatics.¹⁵ Then it was realized that poorly-prepared literature teaching materials and non-existent background knowledge in teaching EFL constituted a major pedagogical challenge that needed to be confronted. Carter had earlier on recommended that the involvement of the students in the culture makes him (the student) appreciate ideologies in the target and other cultures.¹⁶ Before Zynglier’s observation of the pedagogical challenge regarding the avoidance of literature in text analysis, Toolan had pointed out that “in the last fifteen years or so a new polyphony of contending approaches, disciplines, and agendas [sic] has emerged. So many formerly cast-iron and irrefutable distinctions, both linguistics and literacy criticism, are now acknowledged to be disconcertingly vulnerable to challenges.”¹⁷ One lesson comes through with clarity and that is stylistics has endured not only for the sake of language analysis but that of literature as well and that its relationship with literature has elevated the study of culture in literary studies and the link between language, literature and linguistics is even now more significant than it used to be, occasioning experts to recommend that the curriculum “in which language, culture and literature are taught as a continuum” should be the order of the day.¹⁸

Also, there is something that is quite revealing in the available literature on the learning of English as a second language so far as the study of stylistics is concerned. There is a shift from the emphasis on Metropolitan English to a continuum of language, literature, and culture, and the medium of expression here is not the Metropolitan English. It is rather the English, and that each country in the Commonwealth community has a genuine brand of English that is standard and can be studied in schools; the focus is on bi- and multilingualism that concentrates on the Circles and models and not just one single superior brand.¹⁹ This new development steps aside from the old notion of Metropolitan English acting like the old-fashioned head-teacher with a stick in his hand and too enthusiastic to correct the slightest mistake any of his pupils made. In effect, the language in the continuum being spoken about is the English of the locality. The literature in that continuum is also the literature of the locality, privileging ethnography a much significant role in literary studies in the locality and investigating the “thinking and reflecting” of a group of people²⁰ and the knowledge that supports the behavior of that group.²¹ Thus stylistics and its counterpart critical literacy have now moved beyond using culture to teach texts but it is now using the text to teach culture. Carter confirms this by highlighting the appreciation of ideologies of cultures in stylistics. He is supported by Zynglier who is persuaded that Literature is a huge access to the understanding of the culture of a target language. Even McKay’s skepticism that literature is saturated with too many cultural issues and that it presents problems to an inexperienced reader does very little to undermine the relationship between literature and culture. The role of culture in literature or vice versa is now highly regarded. The following are some of the reasons. Zynglier makes it clear that literary texts expose students to real language. The student is also given an “interactional role”, and he is better placed to make sense of language.²² Lazar also posits that literary texts facilitate imaginations crucial for critical thinking.²³ Some of the postulations about the link between the study of literature, language, and culture might be a bit old but they have now been found to be even truer than the time they were provided.

Quite frankly, from the discussions above, there is nothing wrong with using stylistics that helps to investigate literary structures such as forms, genres, thematics, the reading process involvement, and the psycholinguistics of the text to teach culture. It must be pointed out that in Ghana, the academics in theatrical studies have been quite impressive in this area. They have been able to use theatrical arts to indigenize literature, the kind that is not limited by the inevitable superiority of Metropolitan English. Arguably, there have been Ghanaian writers who have provided content based on Ghana but none of them have able to turn indigenous Ghanaian content into an acceptable literary form or genre like what those in the theatrical arts have been able to do. This is why Ghanaians are ever thankful to the seminal work of

¹¹ Jelena Bobkina and Elena Dominguez.. The Use of Literature and Literary Texts in the EFL Classroom; Between Consensus and Controversy, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 3, no. 2, (2014): 248-260.

¹² Anthony Liddicoat. (Ed.). *Teaching Languages, Teaching Cultures*. (Melborne, Language Australia, 2000)

¹³ Diana Frantzen, Thinking Foreign Language in Literature: Towards an integration of language and literature at all levels. In E. Scott & H. Turker, (Eds.), *SLA and Literature in Classroom: Fostering Dialogues*. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2002)

¹⁴ Farhad Tayebipour, In Defence of Teaching literature to EFL students in the era of Globalization.

¹⁵ Scott. McKay, Literature as content for ESL/EFL.

¹⁶ Ronald Carter. & Michael Long, M.N. *Teaching Literature*.

¹⁷ Michael Toolan, *Total Speech: an integrational linguistics approach to language*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996)

¹⁸ See the document titled “Foreign Language and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” 2007.

¹⁹ Braj Kachru et al.. *The Handbook of World Englishes*. Read also Suresh Canagarajah. 2013. *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁰ Gilbert Ryle. *The Concept of Mind*. (London: Hutchinson, 1949)

²¹ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture. Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books , 1973) 33-30.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gillian Lazar, *Literature and Language Teaching* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973)

Afua Sutherland whose concept of *Anansegoro* is now a household name in theatrical studies in Ghana. She picked a Fante myth and reproduced it in Ghanaian English, thanks to a concept called Englishes in *The Marriage of Anansewa*, using the traditional genre called *anansesem* to investigate indigenous thematics of marriage and to produce a text which has completely a locally flavored psycholinguistics. The reading process of *Anansegoro* provides not just a Ghanaian experience but a traditional one that makes the reader relive the Ghanaian traditional past. Such a traditional culturally produced text based on a folktale is unprecedented in Ghana, and it clears all doubts about the uncertainty in using culturally produced text such as texts produced in local languages and translated into English as literary texts. Unprecedented is her text that produces a reading process which evokes a communal effect, bringing the characters closer to the audience than what we find in the “high culture” writings. Unprecedented is also the role of the storyteller who is at a time out of the cast and more or less part of the audience and at another part of the cast. This rich literary experience is completely a traditional construction that is different from an experience that a text from the Metropolitan English will produce, thus exonerating Kachru’s models which allow all regional Englishes to be treated as standard English. Again, a continued tie to the Metropolitan English could also rob the non-English speaking countries the opportunity of showcasing their rich culture in literary texts.

Afua Sutherland’s brilliantly seminal, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, catches the eye of her colleagues in the same department and poised for a post-colonial Ghanaian intellectual identity, self-confidence, and self identity. and eager for an authentic art capable of promoting the reconciliation of national cultures and inculcating Ghanaian myth into the national academic discourse, members of the Department of Performing arts rolled up their sleeves and got down to work. Martin Owusu follows her with *The Story Ananse Told*. Efo Mawugbe is the next to blaze the trail with his *Ananse-Kweku Ananse*. Yaw Asare comes next with *Ananse in the Land of the Idiots*. Admittedly, their counterparts in the departments of English in Ghana might have written a few articles in response to this development²⁴ but by and large, the response to the study of such culturally produced text has not been very encouraging, considering the unrestrained higher level of attention their course contents give to American and European literatures. As a matter of fact, available works done in the departments of English in Ghana seem to wear a particular lens towards the character Ananse. Kwesi Yankah sees him as a trickster. Vecsay goes beyond Ananse being a trickster and describes him as a paradoxical character whose conduct goes against the grain of societal norms. Indeed, Ananse is a persona non grata, a wayward, capricious, and a well-rehearsed liar. Is there any wonder if Judy and Morrissette characterize him as a villain? This paper, using Yaw Asare’s work and coming from the same literary background as those mentioned above, has a totally different perspective of the character called Ananse. It argues that that Ananse is a true hero and a philosopher. It also argues that, contrary to the notion that Ananse is a villain, he is, indeed, the index for intelligence in the Akan culture.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study that used the ethnographic approach which had recourse to interviews with university faculty members, students, and certain older people in Yamoransah in the Central Region and Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The library research method was also followed. The main data is the text of Yaw Asare’s *Ananse in the Land of the Idiots*. The instrument used for analyzing interpretations was stylistics.

For the framework for analysis, the author draws from three taxonomical approaches. He first considers the phenomenological positions of these characters, how their ethical and moral norms are perceived in relation to the context in which it expects them to be. The research also examines the ontological density of the behavior of these characters and by this their real behavior is the focus. The ontological dispositions of the behavior of these characters emerge as they come into contact with Ananse. Ananse uses life experience as the basis of his test and the manner in which he does this offers us the epistemics of the Akan social knowledge in power relations. These three taxonomic approaches provide 6 stages in the plot and these stages, in turn, offer the readers or the audience, the opportunity to evaluate the characters²⁵ who within the context of this analysis are candidates. These approaches help to analyze the meaningmaking processes in the verbal communication of how ideologies are expressed in structures. The original frame is a traditional narrative but it is given a dramatic expression by Yaw Asare. The study is therefore guided by Goffman’s frame analysis which says that frame “pertains to the patent manipulation of the natural world following the special constraints that natural occurrences impose.”²⁶ Interestingly these two genres –narrative and drama - provide the frame of the plot of the play and the context within which characterization is constructed. Here too there is a need for Jakobson’s concept of structural poetics which postulates that, “poetic selection...cannot be viewed as negligible accidents governed by the rule of chance” and that this selection is governed by a sense of patterning which provides the language that shapes the discourse.²⁷ The patterning, therefore, in this analysis, constitutes the platform on which the

²⁴ Kofi Anyidoho. *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanity through African Perspectives*. Vol II, Kofi Anyidoho and Helene Lauer (eds). Ghana : Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012.

²⁵ Richard Bauman. *Verbal Art as Performance*. (Chicago, Waveland Press, 1977).

²⁶ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. (Boston: North-Eastern Press, 1986)

²⁷ Roman Jakobson. *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 59

binarism of *Anansesem*, on one hand, and the other characters, on the other, can be investigated.

As indicated above, the contact between Ananse and the other characters in this frame of analysis so far as the plot is concerned gives six stages. The first stage is the exposition when Ananse, not being satisfied that he is not well recognized, goes to the land of Idiots to show why he needs recognition, setting the stage for the rising action. The second is when he defies the taboo of the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira. The third is when he escapes the death penalty. These are the rising actions. The fourth is when he starts manipulating everybody in the palace, culminating in the climax when he orchestrates the killing of the Prince. The fifth is when he causes the death of Akpala after using him to achieve his (Ananse's) aim. And that is the falling action. Finally, Ananse escapes unscathed. What a resolution of a plot!

A word on the status of Ananse in the analysis. He reveals his identity: "the prime custodian of ethical, moral and philosophical norms." He is therefore the embodiment of all the philosophy that governs the ethics and morality of the people. So he goes beyond the concept of a personification of ordinary human beings as Afua Sutherland and Kofi Anyidoho take him to be. He is an institution and a culture. In this analysis, therefore, he assumes the role of a testing officer who evaluates the intelligence of all those who come into contact with him, and as an examiner; he chooses the examination or question tasks he pleases. Maybe he does not resort to the kind of pedagogical approaches known to readers. His examination is life and that means that he chooses his own materials for examining his candidates. When analyzing, one cannot therefore query him for not going for some options when other options seem problematic. For example, he cannot be queried him for looking elsewhere for food when he knew the food he saw was for the gods. This is because, as an examiner, the situation in question is the burden of his enquiry. On the other hand, the other characters are his candidates and they have a whole range of options to choose from, failure of which constitutes a weakness in studentship (in life).

SUMMARY OF YAW ASARE'S ANANSE IN THE LAND OF THE IDIOTS

Ananse makes what looks like a triumphant entry onto the stage and solicits recognition. Unfortunately, he is not satisfied that after all the perceived popularity he enjoys, the woman in the crowd cannot make him out. He leaves for the Land of the Idiots, ostensibly to prove why he deserves all the epithets he heaps on himself. Upon arrival, he meets a group of people who are performing rituals by putting food on a spot for the gods. He nonchalantly eats the food but runs out of luck. Akpala, one of the guards of the King sees him, arrests him and brings him to the palace where the priestess decrees his death sentence. "Not so fast," Ananse seems to be telling his accusers. He pulls out a beautiful kente band and shows it to the King. Having not seen the kind of kente Ananse advertised, the King ordered for his release on condition he is able to weave for the Prince and the Princess who are due for the wedding. Ananse requests that for the best of kente, he be sent, under guard though, to a cool place in the forest and that for the best activation of his artistic verve, the Princess should come there and dance for him. All the requests are granted. He succeeds in seducing the Princess, orchestrating the death of the Prince and he impersonates the Prince, a move that enables him to have his heart desire; to have the Princess for himself, all with the connivance of Akpala. Indeed, he is married to the Princess and leaves the Land of the Idiots to an Island where he is supposed to have his own kingdom. Odudu confesses having seen all that Ananse does but for the mere fact that nobody asks him anything, he cannot - say anything. Ananse escapes unhurt.

DISCUSSION

The plot is defined as the ordering or the re-ordering of events the following causality.²⁸ The exposition of the book starts with the conflict between Ananse and the woman in the crowd. And this constitutes the first part of the structure of the plot as indicated above. Ananse has a very high opinion of himself of being the philosophy, the myth, and the history of his people and he is shocked only to realize that he is nobody before his own people. He cannot think of any description than to qualify her as simply being ignorant. Quite interestingly, this woman is the metaphor of the people especially the intellectuals who ought to know the philosophy and ideologies that govern the life of the people, whose survival their knowledge is supposed to support. This timeless and mythical hero, "Odomankoma's" (the Almighty's) chosen one and the philosophy that guides the consciousness of the people is the metaphor of what the people lack; knowledge. After all, he was born on Wednesday, an auspicious day in the calendar of the Akans. The contact between him and the woman brings the binary opposites between ignorance, which is a killer, and knowledge, which is a healer, and if representational literature is anything to go by, then his people have chosen ignorance, instead of knowledge, a subtle castigation of the Ghanaian academia.

The second and the third stages in the plot are the rising actions and Ananse is seen as breaking a taboo by eating the ritual food. In the Akan community, food is not only for growth but an expression of the bond between the spirits and the people so, in most rituals, the spirits are given food "to have the energy" to take care of the people. Thus Ananse, the philosopher, perfectly knows this than anybody in the society. So why should he interrupt such a process? It is just

²⁸ Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1900)

culturally accepted that the mortals should eat to live, food being a prerequisite for survival. But logically this is not a prerequisite for the survival of the spirits. The logic is simple; first things first. He is faced with two possibilities; to eat and live or avoid eating and die. He cannot die from hunger when there is availability of food. Any other reason, including the food being offered for the gods, is therefore secondary. Again, readers are faced with the opposite binarism of the pragmatics of survival and intolerance due to the ignorance of the pragmatics of the situation. He is therefore questioning the priorities of the people and readers should have in mind that prioritization is an aspect of the mind that requires careful thinking and order. The order of thinking structures must also be verifiable such that another person should use the same structures of thinking and should arrive at the same conclusion. This takes readers to logic and the Aristotelian syllogism is still the best known reasoning process known in higher learning. One may argue that Ananse²⁹ is a Ghanaian and therefore there must be an African approach of measuring the validity of claims. Unfortunately, there is no known African philosophy that offers the precision of measuring validity in reasoning the manner the Aristotelian approach does. This is in no way belittling African philosophy which is different from the Western one, having as one of its pillars measurement. But for the purpose of better appreciating the evaluation of reasoning in the narrative, readers will have recourse to the Aristotelian approach to logic. Readers must work out the propositions of the binarism, Ananse on one hand, and the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira on the other. For Ananse, eating is to live, and not eating is to die when death is the cruelest form of punishment should the thinking go wrong. Ananse's syllogistic structures go as follows:

- A) Any mortal being who does not eat when hungry will die
- B) Ananse is a mortal being
- C) Therefore, Ananse will die if he does not eat

The conclusion is valid because the content and the form of all the syllogistic structures are correct; premise B is a category of premise A and the conclusion is a logical result of the combination or the continuum of premises A and B. Again, there is also a kind of consistency between his thought and his action. He is hungry and makes no secret about it, pleading with the gods, "You gods know how long my journey has been...without a morsel of food for days." He has stated the basis for eating the food: hunger, and following the verifiable thinking structures provided, and one cannot but agree with him. He thinks that eating the food is the right thing and follows this up with an action that is consistent with his thought. This is what Ananse in the book refers to as "my logic of existential imperatives." They are the standards of reasoning that cannot be compromised in any way and which should come first in all human endeavors.

To consider the other side of the binarism, that is the reasoning of the people who were scandalized by Ananse's eating of the food,

- A) All sacrifices must travel the full length of its process or the people should risk the wrath of the gods
- B) The process of the sacrifice by the people is truncated by Ananse
- C) Therefore, the wrath of the gods will be on them

In the case of Ananse, he demonstrates his logic by eating the taboo food but considering the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira, the Priestess rightly stands on her grounds that Ananse must be killed to forestall any calamity. What do readers see the King do? He capriciously sidesteps this traditional practice in exchange for a commodity to suit his desire. When these actions are analysed from afar, the difference between the King and the Priestess constitutes an inconsistency in the reasoning process here. When the King's action is analyzed, he even confuses readers the more. Classifying the gods as beings who eat physical food is worrying and the conclusion of such a faulty classification will yield a wrong conclusion. However, more worrying is the inconsistency between what he thinks and what he does. Was he not the one who was so infuriated at the culpability of Ananse, scolding, "you've broken a prime taboo and, in so doing, put the destinies of a whole generation of worthy maidens to great risk." But if the seriousness of what he says is compared to the speed with which he hushes the looming danger in replacement for Ananse's kente, readers are left confused. Either he is not serious about what he makes one believe or that =what he is saying is false. So the inconsistency between what he says and what he does reveals the role language plays in this discourse.

Readers are more inclined to believe what he said about a generation being at risk is false because why should he risk his throne, his people, and their convenience for just a mere kente band? Ananse's approach, pretending innocence and naivety, elicits the thinking and the ontological disposition of the King. This approach also gives the epistemic of how power is constructed by the ruler over the ruled³⁰ and that domination is keeping the dominated in the dark. Readers are made to know that the gods are angry only for mankind to realize that this anger is the knowledge or the preserve of an individual who uses it to his advantage. Foucault is perfectly right when he postulates that power is constructed through secrecy. Indeed, the King ignores the so-called demands of the gods for his personal gains Still in

²⁹ He is also known to be in the stories of some Caribbean countries.

³⁰ Teun A. Van Dijk, *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk.* (Sage Publications, Inc. 1987)

the rising action and still in the palace, Ananse has now established that the people are weak in thinking, he takes control of the plot and starts acting as a stage manager³¹, instructing all the characters around him to do his bidding. One sees *Anansegoro* casting a shadow of meaning here, an intertextuality that helps one to fully understand what is happening in this narrative. In *Anansegoro*, Ananse weaves the plot both from within and without. In this play, he constructs the plot by orchestrating the actions of the other characters. After eating the food, Ananse is condemned to death but he offers his kente band in exchange for his life. The sight of the band suddenly changes the King's demeanor, "You mean... you...wove these yourself? With your own hands?" The King in consultation with the Old one decides to trade the life of Ananse for the kente band. Instantly. The sudden change has already been commented upon but it is important to point out here that a good king seeks the interest of the people first. He is expected to have conducted the necessary research on Ananse before starting to do business with him. For a development that can negatively affect the livelihood of his people, just consulting the Priestess and the Old one is not enough. The people ought to have been consulted. Also, such a decision should not be taken off one's feet. Acceding to the demands of Ananse can only be interpreted in the following. Ananse might have charmed him but there is no evidence for that, at least not in the narrative. A beautiful kente band only appeals to one's sense of art. Hence, considering the issue at stake, a personal sense of art comes nowhere near the danger the people are likely to encounter. Again, he needs it to show off his wealth during his daughter's wedding. Maybe, he is so powerful that the people will even not dare to make him accountable for his action. The aggregate of all these is power; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Again, it is Ananse's engagement that has brought out all these details about the King. He has studied the King and has realized the intelligence of the King is malleable and can be manipulated to satisfy his (Ananse's) needs. How do readers learn the mental malleability of the King had Ananse not tempted him with a material offer? Again, the language proffered by the King is very revealing. He punctuates his speech with a lot of exclamations. "Hey! Let me see that one... yes, yes! Clearly, he is beside himself with admiration. Is there any wonder if he takes any wrong step, or makes any error of judgment since his sense of sobriety is compromised? He continues, "Ah! This is splendid." The use of the predicative adjective instead of the attributive belies the significance of the construction of that sentence. It is no accident that he chooses the absolute adjective, "splendid"; his sense of imagination cannot contain this beauty so he goes for the kind of adjective that characterizes its referent in a manner that is beyond description. The kente has now captured his sense of admiration and this has affected his mood and because his thinking is compromised, his mental state has suddenly changed from the state of being worried to that of appreciating beauty, which, of course, makes him relaxed. Thus mesmerized, he intimates, "Never seen anything so beautiful". At this stage, he reveals having surrendered his mental strength to the sight of a mere kente.

Yaw Asare is only using a metaphor to reflect the realities of some Ghanaian leaders taking bribes to the detriment of the people. In the Akan community, the chief is not only the custodian of the culture but also the custodian of the land. These days, it is common knowledge in Ghana that some chiefs easily take bribes and allow individuals with personal interests, what Erastus Asare Donkor, a radio presenter at Luv FM, Kumasi, who is a journalist working with the Inter-ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining, calls "greed"³², to engage in illegal mining. In the process, not only do these illegal miners destroy the forest but the land as well. An interview with Ken Ashigbey,³³ an official of the Inter-Ministerial task force against illegal mining, he indicated that some of these lands are supposed to be sacred groves³⁴ and it takes only the chiefs to go to these land to pour libation to let the gods allow these illegal miners to exploit the land. As a result, activities of these illegal miners, with the collusion of the chiefs, have indeed negatively affected the lives of these villagers. It is seen that it only takes the chiefs to interpret the temperament of the gods just as what is found in Yaw Asare's work. The rivers are now completely muddied so potable water is almost non-existent. These illegal miners have robbed the villagers of their survival. The chiefs instead of being defenders of their people rather engage in activities that threaten their lives, all because they collude with the real perpetrators of such illegal activities, exactly the manner in which King Dosey takes bribe from Ananse irrespective of the impending doom.

Literature is representational or mimetic and Yaw Asare is only directing the spotlight on the reality of power in the hands of the chiefs in the Akan community. Such misuse of power is usually reported in the Ghanaian dailies and the "Daily Graphic" puts it more directly that, "Prominent chiefs, including the Kwapiahene in the Ashanti Region and others in many towns and villages in the Western Region, were found to be behind "galamsey"³⁵ activities there too."³⁶ In the Akan tradition, especially among the Ashantis, the chief is the chief warrior. He is supposed to be strong both

³¹ Afua Sutherland, *Anansegoro: Story-telling in Ghana*. (Accra: Afram Publications, 1975)

³² This was said during a radio programme, "morning show" on Luv FM, Kumasi. 27/01/20.

³³ This interview was conducted during a radio programme, "Morning Show" on Luv FM, Kumasi. January 27, 2020.

³⁴ The belief among Akans is that some forests are the residence of some gods and in order to make peace prevail in these residences, these patches of forest are not touched.

³⁵ This is the local parlance for illegal mining.

³⁶ Sebastian Syme, "Anti-galamsey fight: Row brews over BNI report", www.graphic.com. May 8,2020.

physically and mentally to be able to defend his people in times of danger. Can the same be said of chiefs of the kind of King Dosey? If no, can such chiefs be trusted to lead the people, organize them, and lead them on to prosperity? No. Ananse offers readers the epistemic of the realities of such power relations in Africa. The epistemology offers the context within which the people are put at the receiving end of the negative mentalities of such leaders.

Ananse is still in the court and is still in the third stage of the plot divisions. He is exposing a more serious rot in the King's court and that is the Elder. The Elder recalls faintly the mysterious Ananse. He is supposed to be the adviser to the King in matters of tradition and yet he has a faint knowledge of Ananse, the metaphorical ethics, morals and philosophy of the people. When Ananse advertised the kente, the Elder saw it and also charmed by its beauty, collaborated with the King to take the band, and damn the so-called sword of Damocles that hangs in the neck of the nation. If the concept of Ananse being the ethics and the morals of the people are anything to go by, then the Elder's ignorance of ethics is more dangerous than the flippancy of the King. His ignorance of the philosophy of the culture makes him lose his senses easily. He adds to the levity of the King, "This is surely the work of a master craftsman." The sentence adverb "surely" demonstrates his sense of totally being encapsulated in the charm of the band. Certainly, he has also lost control of his senses. The Elder's role is to straighten up the King when he goes off course. In this context, his words rather influenced the King to deviate further from the norm.

Again, in the third stage of the plot, as presented in this paper, Ananse is now very confident of his mental superiority and starts manipulating his entire environment. In the court, the King has failed the intelligence test. The Elder has also failed. The Priestess is part of a plot revealed by the negligence of the King because silence means consent. Ananse now calls for the shots, instructs the King to send him to the forest where his muses could be in their elements. He also asks for a guard. Then he requests that the Princess come to dance to inspire his creative sense. When Sodziisa arrives, Ananse sends everybody around them away, with the exception of Akpala, whom he has already evaluated to be of a weak mind. He takes advantage of the naivety of the Princess and establishes a body contact with her that is so compromising and even though Ananse goes beyond ethical limits, the Princess is obviously more interested in the new dress she is going to have than the scandal Ananse is perpetrating. She is also not interested in the aftermath of the scandal and this is a reflection of the King's negligence with regard to the repercussion of taking bribe from a stranger. The King and the daughter are only interested in the glamour and the beauty of the kente; just what meets the eye. This ties in very well with Akpala's intimation to Ananse that, "If you show me, I shall relax my vigilance over you..." Ananse is in full control over their faculties and for Akpala, it takes just honey for him to risk his (Akpala's) life and that of the entire nation. However, there is something that runs through the behavior of all the characters mentioned here: greed and its accompanying selfishness. Here, too Ananse has been able to prove that opportunism that does not take into account the wellbeing of others is weak thinking and the results can be nothing but disastrous. Hence, greed and selfishness take readers to the climax in this narrative. Akpala, just for the sake of knowing the source and owning something as little as important as honey, betrays his compatriot, Pootagyiri, and he, Akpala, personally takes charge of killing the Prince. Ananse is able to continue the manipulation that leads to him marrying the Princess. And the reward of Akpala? Ananse deceives him into smearing glue all around his mouth making it impossible for him to talk, only for Ananse to accuse him of the kind of evil spirit possession which if not drastically eliminated by eliminating the medium could bring disaster to the nation. So Akapala was painfully killed; the price he pays for not thinking right.

This takes readers to the resolution of the plot. Before the arrival of Ananse in Dim-Nyim-Lira, the people know no evaluation and everything is good. But the arrival of Ananse has disaggregated what this good means and it is realized that the problem with the political hierarchy is weak thinking that leads to greed and selfishness. But Ananse has finished his work and has to punish the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira for not considering thinking as a very important ingredient in their quotidian affairs. They realize the punishment only too late: Ananse escapes with the Princess to an island where he is supposed to enjoy his booty of being a new chief. And for a greater measure, to enjoy the company of the Princess as well.

Maybe some may call it overgeneralization, using one *anasesem* to "pontificate" African moral values. However considering the fact that literature is not an exact science, and that literature relies on mimetic expression rather than scientific exactitude, this narrative as presented in the drama is representative enough of Akan social expressivity. Indeed, it is the political narrative of the entire African continent. It can be referred to as an allegorical expression of hidden meaning, the type found in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*. This narrative, like any other *anasesem*, shows the epistemology of the Akan identity, the community's characteristic way of life, "to which members stand in dialogical relation,"³⁷ the social meaning in which "shared understandings and interpretations of events to which members have access through their participation in the creation of their commonality".³⁸ This is the Akan speaking to the Akan: they understand each other, no matter the vehicle, channel, or object of communication, and therefore *anasesem* assumes

³⁷ Pieter Coetzee. Morality in African Thought. In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, *The African Philosophy: A Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2002) 322.

³⁸ Ibid.

particularistic linguistic postulations interpretable within the Akan social meaning-making dynamics. The initiates understand what is being said but the uninitiated need certain linguistic tools to unpack these meanings. This *anansesem* is an allegorical expression of the circumstances within which the particularistic interpretations of the Akan moral registers fail to operate according to the standard set by the community.

The question however is whether Ananse's investigation of morality is operating in the religious or social space. As a result of the above, Ananse, in this narrative, evaluates, or you may say researches, the epistemology of the Akan morality. His "research findings" are what have been discussed above. In the West, morality is inextricably linked with religion.³⁹ Nel makes things easier by emphasizing that "African morality is not necessarily based on religion or faith, but on the beneficiary values of collective family and community well-being".⁴⁰ This point had earlier been made by Gyekye who made it clear that morality was the result of social meaning, a choice within a cultural setting. This narrative therefore originates from this social meaning of power relations which postulates fairness and good thinking as the cornerstone of good governance. Of course, these are moral or ethical issues but in the Akan context, they are social rather than religious. This is how the Akan learns his world; he learns moral issues based on social meanings, a shared knowledge expressing itself in a linguistic package that embodies distinctive ways of experiencing the world⁴¹, through cultural praxis like the folklore. Using any other experience to interpret the meanings will have dire consequences. Again, the social meaning is saying that "this practice is what we all agree on" and by such consensus, as one people, you depart from this practice and you go against the rest of us. And this is not religion!

Even though the relationship between *anansesem* and the current spate of corruption in the country is under-researched or not researched, the Author argues that the meaning of morality and ethics and, for that matter, of corruption to the Ghanaian is not faith-based. It is a social meaning. No wonder Ghanaians keep on complaining that their top civil servants and politicians are all Christians or Muslims who go to church to pray on Sundays and to the mosque to pray on Fridays and yet come back and plunder the country. Ghanaians even point accusing fingers at the culture, citing the reason that "[we] celebrate riches irrespective of how it is made..."⁴² This research into the relationship between *anansesem* and morality indicates that Akorsu's assertion is just the tip of a huge iceberg. Of course, modernity has imposed money economy and its attending materialism on Ghanaians and that being the central definition of whatever Ghanaians do, people worshipping wealth without knowing its source cannot be ruled out but when it comes to matters of morality and ethics, the matter goes beyond the general notion of worshipping wealth; there is a problem with social meaning and practice and this even applies to the concept of corruption in general. The faith-based meaning is not enough to handle a phenomenon that has a social meaning. Thinking structures, which feeds actions and behaviour, are therefore weak as is found in the characters in the narrative under discussion. And as indicated above, the performances which construct these meanings are not popular in the current Ghanaian culture as they used to be. One does not hope to find the same results today in terms of morality and ethics as compared to those days when performances played a major role in meaning construction.

This development has far reaching consequences in modern Ghana. It is clear that locating the definition of the modern sense of morality on the traditional moral map is a problem. The first reason has already been given; that the meaning of morality is a social one and not a faith-based one. Another reason is that the morality and ethics that govern the lives of Ghanaians are crafted in a book called the Ghanaian Constitution. The Ghanaian still uses definitions circumscribed in the Western written culture and not the African oral culture. As seen above, the concept of morality is an oral one, the one that says that "this is what we all agree upon", a product of a folk mind, and not a written one based on scientific thinking of the West. Again, performances that serve as the site for moral acquisition are almost non-existent in modern Akan. On the other hand, achievement as a concept in the African culture as what meets the eye is located on the moral map of the Akan. Achievement by the Akan is determined in terms of the buildings, cars, companies, children one has abroad, the ability to sponsor kinsmen, and so forth. This does not need any serious mental process. Besides the differences in the way the modern Akan processes the meanings of morality and achievement can pose problems. It is seen that King Dosey is more interested in showing off his wealth or achievement during the daughter's wedding. That is for the optics. Again, he is also aware that those who will see the daughter in the resplendent kente are only interested in what they see. And just as he does not care as to how he comes by the kente, he is also confident that the people will not question how he got the kente. And they do not! In other words, the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira are more interested in what they see more than the morality behind what they see. Readers should remember the Old one supports him. Therefore, they are more interested in celebrating wealth rather than thinking about the actions that lead to wealth. This accounts for why the people fail to question the source of the King's wealth even when they are witnesses to the fact

³⁹ Jutta Nel, "Morality and Religion in African Thought." *Acta Theologica*, Vol 28, Issue 2, 2008, 33-46.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kwame Gyekye, *Communal Structure and Personhood*. In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, *The African Philosophy: A Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2002).

⁴² Sylvanus Akorsu, "Corruption in Ghana – Our culture is the problem", Ghanaweb, Accra. www.ghanaweb.com. Accessed January 27, 2020.

that the King uses dubious means to acquire wealth. Since the people fail to hold leaders accountable, leaders also fail to be accountable to them and this social illogicality is what is seen in the narrative and what Akorsu is also referring to. Parliamentarians and top civil servants are judged by what they have and not how productive they are. Yaw Asare is through this narrative referring to the weakness in thinking structures that lead to such instances of corruption in the country.

CONCLUSION

Anansesem as an academic material is doing well in the Department of Performing arts. The same success cannot be said in the departments of English in the universities in Ghana. When *Anansesem* enters the orbit of their consideration, Ananse is always characterized as a villain and a persona non grata. This paper has shown that far from being a villain, Ananse is an instrument of evaluating the intelligence of the Akans and he does not deserve the kind of opprobrium modern Ghana gives him. It is when literature is “indigenized” that Ghanaians can have the opportunity to look closely at their own culturally produced texts like the folklore to unpack meanings and come up with classifications other than taxonomies offered by Western definitions.

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