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Ecocriticism and environmental knowledge of Asante oral traditional poetry

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CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTING ENVIRONMENTAL MEANING: THEORIES AND NOTIONS

3: 1 Environmental Poetry as a Rejoinder

The first chapter gave an overview of the general concerns of the thesis. The second concentrated on beliefs and daily activities of Asante community and the nature and role of their proverb-poems. This chapter presents the modalities of the logic and evidence by which I argue that these Asante proverb-poems possess the following meanings: 1) they admonish humans to be cautious in their intervention in Nature since human history is implicated in Nature's history, 2) they criticize any actions that tend to indicate that nonhuman interest is not legitimate interest, 3) they advocate human responsibility toward the conservation of Nature, and 4) they deal with a range of Asante environmental perceptions over periods both precolonial and colonial. In view of the environmental and developmental nature of the inquiry, I have decided to locate my analytical frame within the domain of the critical endeavour of Ecocriticism the rubric of which Lawrence Buell presents thus:

> (1)consideration of the possibilities of certain forms of scientific inquiry (e.g., ecology and evolutionary biology) and social scientific inquiry (e.g., geography and social ecology) as models of literary reflection; (2) textual, theoretical, and historical analysis of the palatial basis of human experience; (3) study of literature as a site of environmental-ethical reflection—for example, as a critique of anthropocentric assumptions; (4) retheorization of mimesis and referentiality, especially as applied to literary representation of physical environment in literary texts; (5) *study of the rhetoric (e.g., its ideological valences of gender, race, politics) of any and all modes of environmental discourse, including creative writing but extending across the academic disciplines and (indeed even more important) beyond them into the public sphere, especially the media, governmental institutions, corporate organizations, and environmental advocacy groups*; and (6) inquiry into the relation of (environmental) writing to life and pedagogical practice. These and other ecocritical

> projects are being produced both separately and in combination, and by no means with one accord.[211] (emphasis added)

It must be made clear that the central emphasis of this thesis falls under the fifth rubric and seeks to illustrate that Ecocriticism must address the practical issues of public concern, which in the instance of this thesis have to do with development. The analysis of the texts is therefore in line with the opinion of Glen S. Love that: "ecocritics have an opportunity to reinvigorate the teaching and study of literature, and to help redirect literary criticism into a significant, widely relevant social and public role."[212]

The relevance of the above citation to the analysis of the proverb-poems is seen in the fact that it underlines that the essential concern of Ecocriticism is one of engagement for the conservation of Nature. In the words of Cohen: "…by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged. It wants to know but also wants to do. ... Ecocriticism needs to inform personal and political actions"[213] I, therefore, see the poets' pronouncements as constituting a kind of thought, feeling, and intention.

From this lead, I find it logical to first look more at the contextual aspects of the texts - (the '*parole*' - in Saussure's words) - rather than the '*langue*' or the system. For this work, looking at the contextual aspects means focusing on the environmental significance

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[211] Lawrence Buell, "Letter," *PMLA* 114, October 1999, 1090–1. This and other letters are collected under the title "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," *PMLA* 114, October 1999, p. 1089–1104. Quoted by Michael Cohen, "Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism Under Critique", in Environmental History, 9.1, January 2004, p. 12.

[212] Glen S Love, "Ecocriticism and Science: Toward Consilience?", in *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 3 summer 1999, pp. 561-576, p.574.

[213] Michael P. Cohen, "Letter," *PMLA* 114 (October 1999): 1092–3.

of these texts. I see the texts as standing at an intersection of the words of which they are made and the system from which the words are derived. They serve as an instrument of mediation, which frames the dynamics by which the traditional Asante community formulated its perception of flora, fauna, and landscape. I use this perspective to argue that the proverb-poems I describe here do not stop at representation or the simple evocation of the presence of Nature to the human audience, but that they seek to communicate to the audience the request or the necessity of improving the welfare of Nature. In this sense I differ from the perception of Buell who sees the environmental texts as "verbalizations that are not replicas but equivalents of the world of objects, such that writing in some measure bridges the abyss that inevitably yawns between language and the object-world."[214] I rather concur with Dana Philip who contests the position of Buell thus:

> The thought that we can be systematically in touch with language, and by extension, with culture, and out of touch with "the object-world," with nature, is one that has broad currency in ecocritical circles, and it mistakes the character of both culture and nature. Once one accepts that our language is essentially representational, however, this mistake seems inevitable. Having made it, ecocritics spend their time trying to bridge a rift that does not exist.[215]

I contend that the verbalization of the poet-drummer is not equivalent to objects, but constitutes language mediating a cultural attitude toward Nature. Thus, I argue, for example, that when the poet expresses awe at the dread inspired by the leopard among other animals or when s/he depicts the lizard as complaining about its suffering at the hands of humans, s/he intends to exact concern, empathy, and action from the audience.

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[214] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination; Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge: Mass University Press, 1995, p. 98.
[215]Dana Phillips, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology", in *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 3, summer 1999, pp. 603-623, p. 588.

The concern, empathy, and action imply the rousing of a consciousness toward the plight of Nature. The eventual effect could be the improvement of the lot of Nature. This is why I describe the proverb-poems as having the kind of contents which allows me to present them in the light of this opinion of Austin that: "Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed. ...Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake."[216] I perceive the texts as effecting a specific change of environmental significance.

I also look at environmental meaning from the perspective of Searle that: "Meaning is more than a matter of intention, it is also at least sometimes a matter of convention."[217] This idea of conventional meaning is effective in proving that in the proverb-poems the poets acquire a measure of their intelligibility to the audience through the fact that they are conveyed by existing Asante cultural codes or conventions (both linguistic and cultural) in the forms of language, beliefs, practices, and customs about Nature and its kinship with humans. Thus, one can infer that no matter the intention of the poet, his/her message will not make sense to the audience unless the audience grasps the culture-specific linguistic symbolism or the significance conventionally ascribed to the sign of words, images, and action s/he is using. This opinion collates with the view of Donald Davidson that: "you cannot change what words mean ... merely by intending to; ... but you can change the meaning provided you believe (and perhaps are justified in believing)

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[216] J. L. Austin, *The William James Lectures* delivered at Harvard University in 1955. Second Edition. Edited by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975. First published in 1962, p. 116.

[217] John Searle, *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980, p. 45.

that the [audience] interpreter has adequate clues for the new interpretation."[218] Thus, I reinforce the environmental meaning I give to the texts by rereading or reviewing works which have generally been seen as having human-to-human or social significance only. This exercise illustrates an essential power of literature to review and redirect or reverse perceptions of reality or to mask environmental reality.

3 : 2 Structuralism and the Appraisal of Environmental Texts

The idea of reading Nature-human (environmental) relations into texts which have hitherto been read as texts of human-to-human (social) significance implies a dichotomy between the two readings - human-to-human on one hand and Nature-human on the other. Again, the perception of Nature-human co-existence implies a synthesis of the social perspective and the human perspective. In view of these two dimensions - dichotomy and synthesis - the aspects of structuralism which I use to effect this environmental reading of the texts are two-fold. First, I use its traditional precepts of binary opposites/hierarchical dichotomy to clarify the nature of the initial conflict/opposition between humans and Nature in my texts. Second, I then proceed to illustrate how these two oppositions fuse dialectically to become a synthesis.

The idea of synthesis is central to the analysis of these proverb-poems. In this regard, I find in the following observation of Philip Petit an insightful element for the analysis of my selected environmental texts. Petit notes that:

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[218] Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality: Intentions, Categories, Ends*, Richard E. Grandy and Richard Warner (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 157-174, p. 165.

> Structuralism borrows the linguistic model of language and tries to fit this, in one way or another, to non-linguistic areas; the idea is that the model should suggest lines of empirical analysis…. As a conceptual argument structuralism corresponds to the philosophical component in linguistics: it is a general characterization of an object or objects of analysis, which provides guidance for empirical inquiry. This guidance however may be actual or after the fact. It may serve to stimulate empirical work; or it may serve after the fact to interpret empirical work already done. Thus it is intelligible that structuralism …is at once a manifesto for…analyses and a review of existing analysis…."[219]

I discern from this observation of Petit two attributes of structuralism[220] each of which is useful for my work because in my opinion they each constitute a synthesis. First, if it borrows (to complete what it has) then structuralism[221] is in itself a composite entity of intertwining or synthesized elements. Second, if it is "at once a manifesto …and a review" then these two roles confer on structuralism a hybridity of function since a 'manifesto' is usually justified on the basis of correcting existing shortcomings and a 'review' is a cross check to verify if any faults exist. On account of this, structuralism is by its very nature a synthesis. There is, therefore, already a similitude or resemblance between structuralism and the hybrid nature of the content of the co-existence of human-Nature interests in these proverb-poems. In view of this resemblance between the two, I judge it appropriate to describe these texts in the light of the conceptual tools and analytical guidance enshrined in structuralist practice. This is because the message of these proverb-poems - co-existence - is a composite idea and also a "manifesto" which critiques or "reviews" prevailing attitudes towards flora, fauna, and landscape. Thus, the duality of the texts (and to which structuralism conforms), which is central to establishing

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[219] Philip Petit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1975, p. 33 - 4.

[220] Structuralism has been criticized for three reasons: (1) for being static, ahistoric in nature; (2) for not accounting for human individuality and (3) for not addressing the dynamic aspects of culture i.e. change.

[221] See Charlotte Seymour-Smith, *Dictionary of Anthropology*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986.

the human/Nature harmony (environmental commitment) of the texts, is made more vivid when viewed through the prism of structuralism.

In handling the texts from this social perspective I resort to the insight of Claude Lévi-Strauss that: "Un groupe de mythes ne doit jamais être interprété seul, mais par référence: a) à d'autres groupes des mythes; b) à l'ethnographie des sociétés dont ils proviennent." [222] In the first instance, I consider the content of these texts as constructs/myths modeled on the wider constructs of the community from which it is derived. In the second instance, I see the myths (here the stories of my selected proverb-poems assume the status and role of myths) as being in interrelatedness with the beliefs of the society to which they must be referred.

In drawing on this position of Claude Lévi-Strauss, I am not unmindful of what objections others have made to his views and methods. Among the objection is that of Yvan Simonis, who notes that: "A s'en tenir à la logique même de ses methodes et si le structuralisme devait atteindre les buts qu'il poursuit, tout langage aurait disparu"[223] There is also Bertel Nathorst, who takes issue with what Lévi-Strauss says concerning unconsciousness and myth. Nathorst notes:

> However, there is a simple way of pointing out the arbitrariness in Lévi-Strauss' adducing of the unconscious. He has written: "Nous ne prétendons donc pas montrer comment les hommes pensent dans les mythes, mais comment les myths se pensent dans les hommes, et à leur insu"[224] Here it is not (any longer) a question of communication and meaning, not even the question of human thinking in general, but it is a

[222] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'Athropologie Sociale," in *Science*, No. 47, 1967, pp. 115-128. p.125
[223] Yvan Simonis, *Claude Lévi-Strauss ou la Passion de lInceste' :Iintroduction au Structuralisme*, Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1968, p. 309.
[224] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologie; le Cru et le Cuit*, Paris: Plon, 1964, p. 24

> question of some kind of thinking that makes use of human beings without their even being aware of it."[225]

Again, Leonard Jackson also comments on the analysis Lévi-Strauss made of the Oedipus Myth, and says that: "This [categorization by Lévi-Strauss] is a fairly arbitrary division into episodes, with many that are present in the original sources, and seem important to most readers, arbitrarily left out…These criteria also seem highly arbitrary."[226] He then concludes that:

> I must say that I do not believe a word of this tall story. What I don't believe, in particular, is that this is a scientific method of investigation. There are far too many points at which the investigator can make arbitrary decisions about the content of the myth or the classification of the units, so that the result confirms whatever he wants them to confirm. He can cook the books as much as he likes. Indeed, it is not clear that there is such a thing as an uncooked book about myths[227]

One of Lévi-Strauss' reaction to such accusations has been to underline that the essence of analysis is to give explanations which are as intelligible as possible. Lévi-Strauss notes: "Whatever the situation, a clever dialectic will always find a way to pretend that a meaning has been found."[228] For the purpose of this thesis I should say that in spite of these strong criticisms of rigid uniformism, arbitrariness, and lack of scientificity made against Lévi-Strauss by Simonis, Nathorst, and Jackson respectively, I still find that the work of Lévi-Strauss has merit for my purposes. My reason is that in spite of the

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[225] Bertel Nathorst, *Formal or Structural Studies of Traditional Tales: The Usefulness of some Methodological Proposals Advanced by Vladimir Propp, Alan Dundes, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Leach* ,Stockholm: Kungi Boktryckeriet P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1970, p.59.

[226] Jackson Leonard, *The Poverty of Structuralism: Literary Theory and Structuralist Theory*, London and New York: Longman, 1991, p. 91

[227] ibid

[228] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Structural Study of Myth* [reprint of Lévi-Strauss 1955 slightly adapted after translation of Lévi-Strauss 1958 {La Structure des Mythes, in *Structural Anthropology*, (trans Jacobson & Schoepf), New York: Basic Book, 1963, pp. 206-231, p. 208. Cited in Bertel Nathorst, *Formal or Structural Studies of Traditional Tales: The Usefulness of some Methodological Proposals Advanced by Vladimir Propp, Alan Dundes, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Leach*, Stockholm: Kungi Boktryckeriet P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1970, p.59.

arbitrariness of the scheme of Lévi-Strauss, his central idea that conflicting preferences can be reasonably presented as binary opposites has great appeal for the implications of the Nature-human activism of Ecocriticism. In this regard I resort to the explanation of Lévi-Strauss whose central concern has been described by Richard de George and Ferdinand de George in the following way:

> His aim, ultimately, is to uncover the structure of human nature itself, to discover the universal, basic structure of man which is hidden below the surface and which manifests itself in language, cooking, dress, table manners, art, myths, and all the other expressions of social life. [229]

For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, it is preferable to apply the anthropological matters and binary methods of Lévi-Strauss to environmental aspects of the public role of literature. In entertaining the idea that an analysis inspired by the scheme of Lévi-Strauss could help raise public environmental consciousness, I consider the following opinion of Lévi-Strauss which Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda put thus:

> According to Lévi-Strauss, the mythical mind establishes a web of relations between socio-historically given facts and it works on a symbolic level underlaid by the interplay of infra-and super-structure. It thus performs the specific task of mediating irreducible opposites. This conforms to the pattern of conciliation of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorium*, through a mediator, which other students of symbolism consider as the constant dynamic core of mental processes. A structural analysis should then be centred upon first discovering in the item itself pairs of opposites and a mediator capable of including them"[230]

Thus, the insight of Lévi-Strauss permits me to articulate and conceptualize the hierarchical dichotomy between the priorities of ecocritical activism on one hand and

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[229] Richard De George and Ferdinand De George, *The Structuralists: From: Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books Edition, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972, p. xxiii.

[230] Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda, "Structural Models in Folklore" in Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda (ed.), *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays*, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971, p. 24-25.

human interest on the other. In this sense Lévi-Strauss's explanation prepares the ground for synthesizing or harmonizing the two divergent positions.

I must underline in this regard the initial salient precepts of Saussurian linguistics which Ronald Schleifer explains in these terms:

> Saussure's systematic reexamination of language is based upon three assumptions: the *systematic* nature of language, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; the *relational* conception of the elements of language, where linguistic 'entities' are defined in relationships of combination and contrast to one another; and the *arbitrary nature* of linguistic elements, where they are defined in terms of the function and purpose they serve rather than in terms of their inherent qualities. All three of these assumptions gave rise to what Romanov Jakobson came to designate as "structuralism" in 1929.[231]

It is by this type of "relationships of combination and contrast" that the proverb-poems demonstrate the resolution or blending of the initially dichotomized hierarchies of the respective interests of humans and Nature. At first sight it would seem that the blending deviates from the hierarchical and dichotomized component which is central to the structuralist approach. But upon further reflection, one realizes, as Seth D. Kunin, would put it that though this synthesis of binary oppositions amounts to "…challenging [the] principles of traditional structuralism…the changes suggested are more refinements than significant alterations…. The discussion …raises some interesting ethnographic issues,

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[231]Ronald Schleifer, *Structuralism*, <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/structuralism.html> 01/25/2004. It is significant to note in this regard that there is practically no academic discipline in which the concepts of structuralism have not been applied as analytical tools. For example, Claude Lévi-Strauss, J.M. Keynes and Milton Friedman, Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parson, Loius Althusser, John Dewey and Wilhelm Wundt, Vilfredo Pareto, have applied them to the study of Anthropology, Political Economy, Sociology, Marxist Philosophy, Psychology, and Economics respectively.

particularly the presence of triadic rather than dyadic structure."[232] He dubs this approach "(neo) structuralist."[233]

The practicality of such an adaptation aimed at synthesized, dualistic, dialectical, hybrid equilibrium,[234] which I apply to literary analysis here, has also been demonstrated in works in other disciplines where traditional structuralism is modified to suit research objectives. For instance, Maurice Godelier does this in his anthropological study of Australian marriage systems. Janelle Meyer comments on Godelier's approach as follows:

> Maurice Godelier incorporated a dynamic aspect into his structural analysis of Australian marriage-class systems and their relationship to demographic factors. …He did so by incorporating Marxist ideas of structures representing an organized reality and the importance of change in society. Godelier took structuralism a step further with his examination of infrastructural factors. In structuralist thought, inherently conflicting ideas exist in the form of binary oppositions, but these conflicts do not find resolution. In structural Marxist thought, the importance of perpetual change in society is noted: "When internal contradictions between structures or within a structure cannot be overcome, the structure does not reproduce but is transformed or evolves" (Rubel and Rosman 1996:1269). This dialectic accounts for the process of antithesis into synthesis.[235]

With inspiration from the above perspective of Maurice Godelier I will analyze the content of the proverb-poems as showing a duality or compound-feeling[236] which is a

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[232] Seth D. Kunin, "The Allegory of the Olive Tree: A Case Study for (Neo) structuralist Analysis.", in *Religion*, vol. 33 Issue 2, April 2003, p. 105-126, p. 105.
[233] Ibid.
[234] It is pertinent to explain, in this regard, as Archie Bahm does, that: "Appositeness pertains to a closeness of relationship between two opposites which, in spite of their negation of each other, share something in common which is essential to the nature of each as a posit….It is this commonness which constitutes them a pair….This something, which apposite opposites share in common, is to be found wholly in neither of them….", Archie Bahm, *Polarity, Dialectic and Organisity*, Albuquerque: World Books, 1977, p. 8.
[235] Janelle Meyer, *Structuralism*, citing Paula Rubel and Abraham Rosman, in *Encyclopaedia of Cultural Anthropology*, Volume IV. David Levin and Melvin Ember (eds.), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

synthesis[237] of anthropocentrism on one hand and consideration for Nature - fauna, flora, and landscape - on the other. In that sense the interest of Nature and that of humans can be seen in a conceptual co-existence whose empirical ramification will be the raising of environmental consciousness and practices that enhance the conservation of Nature. It is in this sense that one can say that the interest of Nature does not "decenter", overthrow, or replace human interest to make it "its revolutionary opponent, successor, and superior."[238]

For instance, when the persona shows delight[239] in the beauty and agility of an animal, there is in this one experience the simultaneous/mixed feeling of dread and delight towards one and the same object. This synthesis is captured as a snapshot (fixed, synchronic) of a moment of time and place. It is significant to note again that this fixed experience, in a sense, entails a continuous dynamic aspect that confers on it a synthesized characteristic. This is because it is from this (fixed) particular-present that the persona continually deduces or formulates any general/future impression s/he has or is going to have about the practice.

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[237] The five ways of thinking as expression the theoretical stages of: 1. Thesis. 2. Thesis incorporates (dominates) Anti-thesis, 3. Synthesis. 4. Anti-thesis incorporates (dominates) Thesis, 5. Anti-thesis.

[238] Ilya Stavinsky, "Formal and Dialectical Logic as Unity of opposites", in *Philosophy Research*, Moscow, 11/2003. Also published in Economic Gazette, Moscow, No. 40, 10/2003. p. 27.

[239] In a critique of abuse of the animal world, Marian Scholmeijer notes the arbitrariness and want of logicality in the spiritualization of some animals in these terms: "There is no reason for a beetle to represent resurrection instead of a cormorant or a marmot. Nor is there any reason that the partridge should represent the devil any more than the peacock or the rabbit….Enter into the spiritual realm and reason flies out the window." I take it that this view can be extended to presuppose that human perceptions of nonhumans can be reconstructed to accommodate harmony and co-existence between the two species. See Marian Scholmeijer, "Animals and Spirituality: A skeptical Animal Rights Advocate Examines Literary Approaches to the.." in *Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 10, Issue 4, mar2000, pp. 371-395, p. 377.

Thus, in addition to simultaneously expressing two opposed sentiments, this fixed poetic expression presented in these proverb-poems has a second duality of revealing the particular in the general and seeing the future in the snapshot present. At the end of the process the persona obtains a synthesis of the beauty (thesis) and the dread (antithesis). This synthesis is a sort of grey feeling, a hybrid experience of the cautious admiration of a savage beauty. In this particular context considerations for the animal's quality of beauty assuage its otherwise despicable savagery. This intertwining of opposite feelings towards fauna, flora, and landscape makes the text a thing hybrid and environmental.

3 : 3 Formal Linguistic Disposition and Environmental Meaning

The hybrid quality of the texts exists not only in the contextual and the intertextual perspective but also in the internal formal linguistic disposition of the texts. I describe this character in a manner that validates the view of Roman Jacobson that:

> Any unbiased, attentive, exhaustive, total description of the selection, distribution and interrelation of the diverse morphological classes and syntactic constructions in a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and antisymmetries, balanced structures, efficient accumulations of equivalent forms and salient contrasts…[which] permits us to follow the masterly interplay of the actualised constituents.[240]

I link this feature to, or rather use them to endorse the proverb-poems' theme of co-existence. I show the environmental significance of my texts using the "interrelation of the diverse morphological classes" and the "balanced structures" which underpin the internal linguistic organization of the texts. This linguistic exercise I undertake is

[240] Roman Jacobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry", in David Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 127.

logically defensible from a feature of structuralism which Philip Petit describes as follows:

> Our conclusion so far is that language is at once differential and generative, that Saussure does not rule out Chomsky. This conclusion gives a picture of language as a system which enables the speaker/hearer first to see the syntagmatic constraints of a sentence, then the paradigmatic contrasts allowed by those constraints. The first capacity is the distinctively generative one, the second the distinctively differential.[241]

Thus, I demonstrate how each text contains a diversity which is symbolic of the idea that its thematic content "at once" resembles the harmonizing of human and Nature interests just as its: "language is at once differential and generative…"

But instead of considering the texts as a "closed system"[242] unrelated to its environment I have highlighted the environmental significance in the link between the linguistic system of the texts and the wider socio-cultural system from which they emanate. I effect this by adopting the approach to the idea of N. Frye that "every poem must be examined as a unity, but no poem is an isolatable unity."[243]

It is significant, therefore, for me to underline that this idea of examining a poem as a unity revealed by its internal features and connected to its external surroundings, also entails a synthesis, hybridization or duality of text and contexts in the sense in which Scholes has observed that: "meaning is a continual shuttling back and forth between the

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[241] Philip Petit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1975, p.18-19.

[242] Eleanor Cotton, "Linguistic Design in a Poem by Cummings" in *Style* xiv/3, 1980, 274-86; Michael Riffaterre "Describing Poetic Structures: Two approaches to Baudelaire's 'Les Chats", in *Yale French Studies*, 1966, 36-7; Romanov Jacobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poems" in Sebeok, 1960.

[243] N. Frye, "Literature as Context: Milton's Lycidas." Cited in David Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 129. (Michael Riffaterre, Jakobson, and Eleanor Cotton concur with N. Frye in this regard).

language of the work and a network of contexts which are not in the work but are essential for its realization."[244] Thus, I highlight the manner in which the internal and external elements of the texts synthesize to reveal a pattern in which human and Nature's interest merge as a symbolic manifestation of the texts environmental significance of interrelatedness and co-existence between humans and Nature. This explains why I highlight the resolved or hybrid content of these texts as they appear in the internal disposition of the texts' linguistic elements. I show them as reflecting the pattern/configuration reminiscent of the central organizing principle of these texts – namely, co-existence between human and Nature interests.

In other words, the orderings of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, as well as rhetorical elements and figures of speech match the synthesized character or the duality of experience found in the synthesized themes of conflict and solidarity, or adoration and fear characteristic of the human attitude toward Nature. This hybridity of the linguistic elements of these texts equally underlie the reason why I approach them with the view Tony Thwaites expresses when he says, "a text is a combination of signs." [245] Consequently, I explain that in the meaning-making process these signs are of two categories - internal and external - and that the (internal) texts' letters and words (signifiers) on one hand, and the (external) their cultural signs (signified) on the other, intertwine in a synthesis which brings out the texts' environmental significance. This combination makes the texts, in the words of Roland Barthes, "a seamless weave of codes

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[244] Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: an Introduction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975, p. 137.

[245] Tony Thwaites, Lloyd Sdavis, Warwick Mules, *Tools for Cultural Studies*, South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1994, p. 67.

and fragments of codes, through which the critic may cut his own errant path."[246] This weaving suggests a hybrid outcome reminiscent of the resolution of contradictions that underlie Godelier's adaptation of structuralism to the study of social phenomena.

It is with this type of detailed probing of linguistic elements that I arrive at describing these environmental proverb-poems the way Lévi-Strauss and Jacobson do in their structuralist portrayal of "Les Chats", a poem of Charles Baudelaire. Ronald Schleifer states concerning that study that:

> Thus, at the end of their analysis they present (in narrative form) the "experience" of the poem, the appearance of "Les Chats" as "a closed system" of grammatical forms and semantic meanings and, simultaneously, "the appearance of an open system in dynamic progression" aiming at "resolving" the felt grammatical/semantic oppositions of the poem between metaphors and metonymies. That the function of mythic discourse is to create the illusory resolution of real cultural contradictions.[247]

I operate the structuralist blending of the "closed" and "open" in the "resolution of real cultural contradiction" of these environmental texts to reflect the divergent interests of humans and Nature and their resolution, or at least their systematic intelligible explanation, in the wider context of the cultural beliefs and environmental practices of the traditional Asante.

The relevance of the link between all these elements and the traditional Asante beliefs and practices for the revelation of the texts' environmental worth necessitates an ample explication of the concept of intertextuality, another feature whose hybridity I explicate

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[246] Roland Barthes, cited by Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p.138.
[247] Ronald Schleifer, *Structuralism*, http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/structuralism.html At 01/22/2004l.

as a condition for revealing environmental content in these texts. Jonathan Culler defines it as "the relation of a particular text to other texts. … A work can only be read in connection with or against other text, which provide a grid through which it is read and structured."[248] In building the specific composite nature of the intertextual dimension of the environmental content of my texts, I refer to the opinion of Terry Eagleton that: "…all literary texts are woven out of other literary texts… every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work… All literature is intertextual."[249] Thus, in a sense the proverb-poems are a compressed rewriting of the wider text(s) of cultural beliefs and practices which I presented in the first and second chapters.

On account of this congruence between society and text, I judged that the texts constitute a gateway into the traditional Asante environmental cultural mindset. The fact that a common pattern of a unity of opposites runs through the structure of the poem-proverbs, their ethical content, their linguistic arrangement, and the social institutions of the culture from which they emerge makes the texts amenable to a structural explanation where one considers that basically "…Structuralism is a set of principles for studying the mental superstructure"[250] from which social organization and structures emanate. I, therefore, reveal the proverb-poems as doing the following divergent but interconnected things simultaneously: They reveal[251] as well as replicate[252] the unconscious[253] "mental

[248] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge &Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 139.
[249] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p.138.
[250] James Lett, *The Human Experience*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, p. 101.
[251] "The mythical system and the modes of representation it employs serves to establish homologies between natural and social conditions or, more accurately, it makes it possible to equate significant contrasts found on different plains: the geographical, meteorological, zoological, botanical, technical,

superstructure" from which the cultural/environmental themes emanate and which the internal linguistic patterns can also be said to replicate.

In this revelation and replication I show the opposing elements of the texts - be they themes, or linguistic structure - to be in a relationship in which, to borrow the words of Widdowson, "they overlap to create a unit of meaning which belongs to neither one nor the other: a hybrid unit which derives from both code and context and yet is a unit of neither of them."[254]

The ecocritical analysis of the proverb-poems undertaken in the next chapter thus makes it evident that the disposition of the human-Nature relationship found in the texts is not an anthropocentric claim in which the interest of fauna, flora, and landscape "decenter" that of humans. It is a synthesis of the two. This hybridity falls in with the traditional Asante "superstructure" when I assimilate it to the texts in the sense of Culler's explanation that:

> "to assimilate or interpret something is to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available, and this is usually done by talking about it in a mode of discourse which a culture takes as natural. This process goes by various names in structuralist writing: recuperation, naturalization, motivation, vraisemblablisation."[255]

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economical, social, ritual, religious and philosophical." (From: Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, p. 93.).

[252] "There must be, and there is, a correspondence between the unconscious meaning of a myth - the problem it tries to solve - and the conscious content it makes use of to reach that end, i.e. the plot. However, this correspondence should not always be conceived as a kind of mirror-image, it can also appear as a transformation. ('Four Winnebago Myths' in Richard and Fernand de George (eds.), 1972, *From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books Edition, Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1972, p.201.

[253] There is a relationship of cause to effect and vice versa in this context.

[254] Michael Short, *Reading, Analyzing, and Teaching Literature*, New York: Longman, 1988, p. 251

[255] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 137.

Thus, I look at the nature of the message of the texts in order to make its description reflect certain aspects of the methodologies inspired by the notions of structuralism, speech-act theory, and discourse analysis. It is on the basis of the methods deduced from the assumptions I have explained above that I have argued that the internal structures of the ethical, thematic, and linguistic components of each of the texts entail an ambivalence or hybrid content of the type concerning which Bourdeau notes that: "The man-nature relationship has always been ambiguous, nature being seen as both a provider and an enemy."[256] But I have built on Bourdeau's observation to argue that the simultaneous perception of nature he talks about is essentially one of synthesis rather than simple ambiguity.[257] I, consequently, assert that Asante attitude towards Nature - fauna, flora, and landscape - has the pattern of a compound-experience[258] born of the unity of two opposing experiences in which as Seth Kunin would have it: "…long-term compartmentalisation is not possible and that the differing structural equations will have to be synthesized …"[259]

I end this chapter by reiterating that in the analysis that I undertake in the next chapter, I employ the approach of Ecocriticism to explore the texts against the background of the

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[256] P. H. Bourdeau, "The Man-Nature Relationship in Environmental Ethics", in *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*, Vol. 72 Issue 1/2, , Feb2004, p9 – 16, p. 9.

[257] I say this because I think that this interconnection does not have to do with two separate relationships. It is an attitude which embraces the essence of the two issues and arrives at a third which is a single blend of the two.

[258] I employ the word 'compound' as it is used in the science of Chemistry. E.B. Uvaroux and Alan Isaacs define it as: "A substance consisting of two or more elements chemically united in definite proportions by weight. The formation of compound involves a chemical reaction and the elements cannot be separated by purely physical means." See E.B. Uvaroux and Alan Isaacs, *Penguin Dictionary of Science*, London: English Language Book Society/Penguin Books, 1986, p. 82.

[259] Seth D. Kunin, "The Allegory of the Olive Tree: a case study for (neo)Structuralist Analysis.", in *Religion*, , vol. 33 Issue 2, apr2003, p. 105-125, p. 113.

notions of structuralism, and hybridity to show the texts to be proverb-poems, traditional environmental knowledge, ecocritical activism, and spiritual and material motivations expressing a predilection for co-existence.