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Ecocriticism and environmental knowledge of Asante oral traditional poetry

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CHAPTER 4

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF NATURE-HUMAN CO-EXISTENCE

4 : 1 Introduction

This chapter consists of an 'ecocritical' description showing the dialectical structure of the respective thematic nuances of the various proverb-poems. It is an analysis which concurs with the idea of F. Capra that: "…ecological awareness will arise only when we combine our rational knowledge with an intuition for the nonlinear nature of our environment. Such intuitive wisdom is characteristic of traditional, nonliterate cultures in which life was organised around a highly refined awareness of the environment."[260]

It is important to note, however, that such knowledge was not only intuitive because its "practices were passed on from generation to generation not in an unconscious, haphazard, or inadvertent manner but in a systematic and orderly way using diverse methods of socialization sanctions."[261] In showing the texts to be proverb-poems containing traditional ecological knowledge/message of humans-Nature co-existence influenced by both local and foreign undercurrents, I derive illustrative evidence from three main sources namely, the form of the texts, the content of the text, and the intertextuality[262] of the texts. These drum texts consists of "words" and "spoken

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[260] F. Capra, *The Turning Point*, London: Flamingo, 1982, p.25.

[261] Kwaku Asante-Darko, "Ecological Literacy in Preliterate Communities", in Tsepo Mokuku, Likonelo 'Bitso, Allan Femi Lana (eds.), *Environmental Education for Sustainable Development - African Perspectives – Proceedings of the EEASA 19th International* Conference (Held at the National Convention Centre, Maseru, Lesotho, 01-05 October, 2001), Maseru: Epic Printers, 2002, p. 285-288, p. 285.

[262] Ulrich Luz explains both the (thematic) unconscious and (cultural) conscious dimensions/perceptions of the notion of intertextuality as a link between the themes of a given text and its social-cultural bedrock in this way: "In the Gospel of Matthew there are two entirely different types of intertexts. The first is the

utterances" and possess the features which Finnegan observes as follows: "Proverbs are generally marked by terseness of expression, by a form different from ordinary speech, and by a figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor."[263] The texts equally have prosody of repetition, contain musical features, have specialized syntactical forms, possess obscure words, and consist of figurative expression which qualify them as poems on their on right.

4 : 2 Data Presentation

Concerning the Asante drum texts that I deal with in this work Finnegan observes that:

> With the Akan some poems can be drummed or sung, others are designed specifically for voice, drums, or horns respectively. Many different kinds of communications, then, can be conveyed through the medium of drum language – messages, public announcements, comments, and many types of poetry – and the same sorts of functions can be fulfilled as by the corresponding speech forms, with the additional attributes of the greater publicity and impressiveness of the drum performance.[264]

In this sense the proverb-poems I deal with in this work constitute a set of actions which have the effect of mocking, advising, criticizing, and instructing the community concerning its attitude and actions toward flora, fauna, and landscape. The poet-drummer is thus a critic who uses the medium of drum poetry to reach the general community. I argue that these criticisms contain an environmental perspective which seeks to advocate

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Gospel of Mark, the primary hypotext upon which Matthew's hypertext is based. It remains invisible to Matthew's readers. In spite of its invisibility, the Gospel of Mark completely determines the structure of the Gospel of Matthew and functions as its primary matrix. Matthew as a whole can be interpreted as a metatext of Mark in a rather strict sense of the word. This is not true for its relationship to Q, however, which merely supplements Matthew's "primary matrix." He continues for the second dimension thus:
"The case of the Bible as intertext is very different. It serves more generally as the basic text of reference that illuminates and interprets the new Matthean foundational story. Beyond that, it enhances the status of Matthew's Gospel by giving it a quasi-canonical character" (From" Luz, Ulrich, "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew" in *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 97 Issue 2, April 2004, pp.119-137, p.137.)

[263] Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Nairobi/Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 399.

[264] Ibid, p. 498.

human co-existence with Nature, and that the various practices to which they respond are of both pre-colonial and colonial times. This environmental perspective is seen in the meaning of the semantic and lexical content of the texts. In this regard I would like to cite Melissa Leach who clarifies the holophrastic dimension of African environmental oral literature when she notes that:

> When African farmers describe and manipulate the soils and vegetation which are basic to agricultural livelihoods, for instance, they use culturally embedded concepts. Kinship terms such as 'companionship' or 'brotherhood' may be used to describe situations in which particular trees, crops or weeds coexist; equally, terms such as 'killing' or 'struggle' can be used to describe competitive suppression, whether in fallows or crops. Soils fertility may be described in terms of heat and cold, damp and dry, hard and soft, with farmers managing these attributes to balance their qualities. Such vocabulary find echoes and gain their meaning in the broad frames in which people understand their world and their place in it, and which might include phenomena – such as kinship and social relations – which Western science would not treat as 'environmental'[265]

The community readily comprehends and associates with the kind of sentiments evoked by the culture-specific images and mode of expression through which the poets present Nature in these texts. They are, therefore, the meaningful images through which attempts to salvage environmental degradation and attain the developmental effort of Human Security by means of a people-driven local initiative can be effected among the community at the grassroots in conformity with the requirement that "Human Security is "people centred", focusing the attention of institutions on human beings and communities everywhere."[266]

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[265] Melissa A. Leach, "Culture and Sustainability", in Lourdes Arizpe (ed.), *Unesco World Culture Report, 1998: Culture, Creativity, and Markets*, Paris: UNESCO Publications, 1998, p. 94.

[266] *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People*, Forward by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, New York: United Nations Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 130.

4 : 3 Proverb-Poems and Environmental Content

It is significant to indicate that the concern of the poets has been to communicate to a specific audience in the sense in which "Every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication in either an explicit or implicit sense."[267] The content of these texts concurs with the opinion of Karl Kroeber that: "Ecological criticism, of course, cannot be ideologically neutral any more than it can exist independent of specific metaphysical presuppositions."[268] On the basis of this I affirm that the poets' evocation of flora, fauna, and landscape in these poems is directed at presenting an environmental line of thought and action which consists in awakening the sensibility of the audience concerning the need to give consideration to Nature's interests. I have also noted that this quest for a specific line of thought among these poets to conserve Nature is vehicled by these proverb-poems in the manner in which Swingewood links[269] literature and thought in these terms: "The connection between the specifically literary and the specifically social was ideology… A literary work was thus a highly organized structure of utterances saturated by ideology and meaning."[270]

With the centrality of environmental meaning in mind, I deduce ecological meaning from the proverb-poems by describing the linguistic content or discourse of the proverb-poems

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[267] E. Sapir, *Seclected Writings in Language, Culture, and Personality*, p. 104. Cited in Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 125.
[268] Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagination and the Biological Mind*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 35.
[269] Swingewood again explains: "Yet Literature is also social and historical. The weakness of Formalist criticism lies in its rejection of sociology." (From: Alan Swingewood, *Sociological Poetics and Aesthetic Theory*, London: Macmillan, 1986, p.20.)
[270] Alan Swingewood, S*ociological Poetics and Aesthetic Theory*, London: Macmillan, 1986, p.20.

in a manner which concurs with the opinion of Katheleen Stewart that: "Cultural discourses [environmental perceptions] are situated in the social and historical in such a way that we have to say not only that discourse [environmental perceptions] is socially constructed but also that the social is discursively [environmentally] constructed."[271] This concurs with the observation of Hawkes that: "Each system, that is kinship, food, political ideology, marriage rituals, cooking, [relationship with flora, fauna, and landscape] etc. constitutes a *partial* expression of the total culture, conceived ultimately as a single gigantic *language*."[272] Nonetheless, I do not rest on this structuralist imitative[273] perspective in my account of the significance of the contents of these proverb-poems. I equally explicate the environmental advocacy of these proverb-poems in a manner as to confirm: "…the notion that art acts as a mediating, moulding force in society rather than as an agency which merely reflects or records."[274] It is from this perspective of moulding that the poets are seen as critiquing society.

The co-existence advocated in the proverb-poems I deal with in this work entails the expression of gratitude and appreciation due to useful elements of Nature (as in *Odum ne ɔdan*), the need to desist from doing physical harm to Nature (as in *Kotokurodu*), the respect of Nature by not trespassing its territory with aggression (as in *Abedeɛ*), the need to refrain from the abuse of Nature (as in *Koterɛ*), and the obligation to come to the rescue of Nature when it is in trouble (as in *ɔkwarifa*). The nuances of messages in the

[271] Kathleen Stewart, "On the Politics of Cultural Theory: A Case for `Contaminated' Cultural Critique" in *Social Research*, vol. 58, Issue 2, summer 1991, pp. 395-413, p395.
[272] Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 34.
[273] This resemblance between the pattern of ecological quest and the Asante social organization, it must be pointed out, is not necessarily a relationship of causality. It is rather, more of a unity of resemblance on account of the similitude between the two.
[274] Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 56.

fourteen examples of proverb-poems presented in this work confirm the point of Finnegan that: "The interests of each society tend to be reflected in the sort of images through which their proverbs are expressed – like the Ashanti experience of gold ('Wisdom is not gold-dust that it should be tied up and put away')."[275] I should add that the proverb-poems I offer here are images giving vent to the environmental experience of the community. In what follows, therefore, I will analyse each proverb-poem by showing how structuralism reveals the texts' respective nuance of human-Nature co-existence and development.

4 : 4 Human History is Implicated in Natural History

1 Kurotwiamansa

Kurotwiamansa da sɛsea mu	The leopard is lying in the thicket;
Ma sɛsea woso biribiribiri,	causing the thicket to shake frantically,
Kwaeɛbirirem.[276]	In the thick forest.

In this poem, the persona is admonishing the audience to refrain from visiting the dangerous abode of the leopard. The leopard is lying in the thicket, causing the thicket to shake. The implication of this literal image is that all other animals are fleeing out of the thicket because the leopard is lying there. Though it is the flight of the animals that directly causes the thicket to shake, it is rather the presence of the leopard that induces the shaking. The persona has assumed the role of an observer reporting the incident. The simple constative statement results in the revelation of the persona's state of eagerness as

[275] Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Nairobi/Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 399.
[276] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 103.

s/he seeks to induce awe and admiration among the audience for the same animal. The persona, it must be emphasized, is also afraid of this animal that causes all others to flee. Nonetheless, s/he is thrilled by the fact that a leopard is the source of so much alarm. The persona thus admires the leopard for its mastery and dominion over the forest, a place so dreaded by humans who, as I indicated in chapter two, have demarcated the forest as a realm of the beasts and the wild.

This laudation of the leopard (Nature) is revelatory of the positive manner in which the persona wants humans to refrain from abusing Nature. The plea to the audience/community to be wary of visiting the forest is here implied. In effect the caution, thus, serves to inculcate the value which dissuades people from visiting the forest for trivial reasons. The reduction in the frequency of human visits in the forest is thus expected to reduce the extent of human impact on the (natural) history of flora, fauna, and landscape. In metaphoric terms, this image of emphasizing the strength of the leopard connotes the exaltation of the leopard as causing a kind of stir of which even humans are incapable. Thus, at first sight it would seem that all that is taking place is that the persona elevates the leopard's prowess above that of humans, thereby depicting how admirable the leopard's power is.

The persona sees the dread inspired by the leopard in the world of fauna - and also to human hunters - as reminiscent of the power of humans in their environment. Thus, by likening the power of the leopard to that of humans the persona bridges the two opposing species - humans and the leopard - on account of the fear both inspire and how they

dominate their surroundings. In spite of this difference, the persona perceives the leopard and humans as being linked by the fact that they both inspire dread in their surroundings. This mutual quality is a dialectical view in which opposites are united. It depicts the persona's affectionate disposition toward so dreaded an animal, and implicitly for the quest for co-existence with it.

The scene takes place where the leopard lives - "*Kwaeɛbibirem*" (the thick forest). The surprise in the persona's message suggests that s/he is witness to this incident and is, therefore, present in this realm of the beast. I should add that the persona's appreciative voice shows that despite the terror the leopard inspires among both humans and beasts, it deserves to be accorded admiration on account of its mastery of *Kwaeɛbibirem* - the thick forest (in the heart of the forest) where humans are scared to venture. It is logical that by dramatizing the strength of the leopard, the persona's message envisages the effect of cautioning humans against the danger involved in the encounter with the leopard/Nature. This implies an appeal for the control of human activity in the realm of Nature.[277]

Here, the array of grammatical elements mirrors this interpenetration of human activities on one hand and Nature on the other. For example, there is first the fact that the text contains two ideas in two terse sentences. The two sentences are linked by the circumstantial complement of cause ("*mma*" – causing). The magnitude of the interaction

[277] It is a feeling that Michael Rice observes in the attitude of certain cultures toward the bull. He notes: "There is also a compelling sub-plot, of the mysterious union of bull and man; even the Minotaur, one of the archetypes of the monster whose nature is as melancholy as it is threatening, has an antiquity which reaches far back into our kin's more distant past. Bulls and men, especially masked men, have long been companions; men have sought for, even perhaps recognized, a community with the bull." (From: Michael Rice, *The Power of the Bull*, London & New York: Routledge, 1998, p.6)

is described by the circumstantial adverb of manner (*biribiribiri*) frantically. The venue of this encounter is indicated at the end of the text by a circumstantial complement of place ("*kwaeɛbibirem*"). Thus, it is one but complex sentence with diverse elements, a reflection of its thematic quest for co-existence of different entities and the integration of the dual interests of animals and humans. Also, the verb governed by the leopard is a verb of state "*da*" (lying). On the contrary the thicket (metonymy for other animals and the equally scared human persona) governs a verb of action "*woso*"[278], shakes/trembles. The nouns "*Kurotwiamansa*", "*Sesea*", and "*Kwaeɛbibirem*" emphasize the realm of the leopard. Their mention (and the repetition of *sesea*) without any reference to or comparison with the human realm suggests the persona's conviction that, the realm of Nature is just as worth mentioning and (self) sufficient as any other (that of humans). It must be noted that this way of highlighting the leopard showing it as resting, and by a tacit exclusion of the human realm, mirrors a quest or a message that the two - humans and nonhumans influence each other - and are 'equal', such that one can be independently mentioned without any reference of dependence on the other.

At the beginning of the text, the image of ("*da*") sleep or lying and the innocence it implies contrasts sharply with the effect caused by this sleep or lying - namely the panic or shaking of the place. Thus, the persona presents two images. The first is one of quietude showing the leopard as lying; the other is disturbance and panic induced by the same source of the quietude. The idea that all is not quietude in the forest serves to indicate and to shape the nature of human encounter with an ideological direction that precludes abuse of Nature. This is done through an advocacy for a limited human

[278] "W*oso*" literary (to) shake or tremble is used to indicate that the subject is afraid.

intervention in the history of Nature. In a sense this can equally be seen as an opposition to colonial environmental policy by means of lauding the beauty of the environmental status quo that colonial intrusion was seeking to alter or had already altered.

2 Osisire Kwabrafo

Osisire Kwabrafo	Kwabrafo, the bear,
Yɛdi w'akyiri a,	If we pursue you,
Atuduro bɛsa.[279]	Gunpowder will get finished.

It is significant to underline that the mention of gunpowder and by implication the gun, can be said to locate this proverb-poem in a period well after European contact with Africa, thus after the gun had become traditional to Asante society. Unlike the previous text which emphasized the fear inspired by Nature, this present one accentuates the warning that it is unprofitable for humans to wantonly attack Nature since human history (existence) is inconceivable without Nature's history (existence). In the literal sense this poem indicates that the bear is so strong that humans will not have enough gunpowder to do what it takes to subdue it. The central message is that Nature is a force to reckon with, a power whose 'history' is not easily manipulated by humans. The persona reveals this idea in a distinct succession of poetic images. In the first instance s/he perceives of the bear as a target of attack or hunting; an enemy to be pursued (*yedi woakyiri a*) and overpowered. In the second instance one understands that the persona is indicating that the animal has a formidable strength that is admirable since it can cause its attackers to exhaust their gunpowder.

[279] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 103.

The pursuit of the bear is a metonymic rendering of the human pursuit of Nature. In this sense we appreciate how much the persona is advancing a principle by which humans should interact with Nature without being aggressive towards it. The words of the persona advance the idea that it is profitable not to use excessive violence against Nature on which humans depend for sustenance. It is important to note the paradoxical nature of the traditional perception of violence: in this picture, the same inexhaustible strength, which underlies the danger the bear poses to the persona (human) is paradoxically/simultaneously the cause of the persona's admiration for the bear. That is, the hunter/persona expected the bear to die of bullet wounds, but his disappointment or surprise has turned into admiration. A resolved position is seen in the persona's implicit admonition that humans leave the bear alone. It amounts to a highlighting of the bear and a quest of a life of co-existence with it. Here, co-existence[280] born of admiration and dread is seen in the human recognition of the need/safety in not pursuing/following the bear.

The terse image used to convey this human attitude to Nature is typical of the proverbial style. The implicit quest is, thus, that enmity between humans and the bear must be eschewed or abandoned, at least on the principle of human interest of saving precious gunpowder. Again, by stating that s/he would exhaust his/her gunpowder if s/he continued pursuing the bear, the persona is indicating that s/he is resigning from or giving

[280] This connotes conviviality in the sense similar to the opinion Ian K. Lilly expresses in the role of food in fostering conviviality when he notes: "The theme of conviviality – conceived here in a broad sense – has several interrelated facets. There is a strong connection between food and sociability among men and women. Secondly, between food and physical and spiritual well-being, and thirdly, between the places where food is consumed…" (From: Ian K. Lilly, "Conviviality in the Prerevolutionary 'Moscow Text" of Russian Culture", in *Russian Review*, vol. 63, Issue 3, July 2004, pp. 427-459, p. 432.)

up the waste of precious resources. The idea concurs with the notion of the judicious use of nature to alleviate human suffering and poverty, a concern central to the quest for development.

This concern to conserve the bear is equally manifest in the fact that the persona addresses the bear directly in the figure of personification (in the very first line of the poem). In this proverb-poem, one thus witnesses the personification of the bear aimed at influencing the community to accord the bear the consideration usually attributed to humans. This metaphor of bear-as-human becomes an image conveying the predilection for consideration for Nature and for co-existence between humans and Nature.

The language of the poem has the same imprint of highlighting the strength of the bear and by implication showing the text as the persona's advocacy for a live-and-let-live relation between the bear and humans. This is seen first in the sentiments of the text. Initially, the persona expresses admiration by evoking the admirable qualities of the bear in the employment of the appellation "*Kwabrafo*" meaning the 'strong one'. The appellation, thus, has the effect of operating what Marilyn Strathern calls an "…interdigitation of kinship terms and personal names"[281] as it serves to evokes affection for this strength. It is equally interesting to note that this close link or affinity between bear and human concurs with the fact that in the text they - both bear and humans - are designated in pronominal terms, and that these pronouns by which they are designated "*yɛ*" (we) and "*wo*" (you) find additional correlation in the fact that they are

[281] Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.17.

both in the subordinate clause, "*Yɛdi wo akyi a*" (if we follow you). The persona avoids (which s/he could have done) introducing the personal possessive pronoun "our" (*Yɛn*) in the principal clause, in which case the addition of another pronoun referring to humans would have served to tilt the emphasis of the message to humans rather than the bear. As s/he leaves it, the bear is mentioned by name and by the affection of appellation; but note that s/he refers to humans only by a pronoun rather than by a proper noun or name. But it is significant to note that the bear is given prominence by being referred to by a noun, its name "*Osisire Kwabrafo*" as well as a pronoun "*wo*" (you). However, this linguistic disposition and its meaning are balanced by a feature which in a sense serves to attenuate this prominence of the bear: the bear is deprived of being the subject of any verb in the text. It is left in the state of an inactive grammatical object of description. The balance made by the inactive state of the bear coupled with the human monopoly of the verbs of the text put both the bear and the persona in a relationship of companionship/parity and co-existence. When understood as part of an environmental archive, the proverb-poem is a reminder of an appeal for the reduction of human activity in the realm of Nature. The overall impression created is conserving of the bear and its habitat.

3. Obirekuo

ɔkwankyɛn twirara,	A rattle along the path,
Kyerɛ sɛ aboa bɛn?	What animal could it be?
Kyerɛ birekuo,	It is the clock bird,
Kyerɛ birekuo.	It is the clock bird,
Obirekuo Seniampɔn,	Clock bird Seniampɔn,
ɔnema kwankyɛn na ɔredi ayuo.	It is walking along the path and eating millet.
Obirekuo dammirifua![282]	Clock bird courage!

[282] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 108.

In this text one finds the advocacy of camaraderie with the clock bird. The persona encounters a clock-bird and presents the bird as being preoccupied with its own needs - feeding along the path. The persona's account of this encounter depicts interconnectedness between humans and elements of Nature which shape both social and environmental history. The persona's acknowledgement of the bird is indicative of his/her rejection of the conquest of Nature by humans. It can, thus be considered a rebuttal of any claim that African modes of the management of Nature must be replaced with European ones since the African attitude to Nature amounted to one of hostility and destruction. This acknowledgement suggests that the persona recognizes the bird as an agent of change in the environment, rather than an object who is simply acted upon by inexorable environmental factors. This is presented in three inflections in the images of the text: The first is the initial *fear* created by the noise the persona hears. This fear appeals to the sense of hearing (the noise) and is quickly followed by that of sight expressed in the *anxiety* found in the interrogation "which animal could it be?" This is followed by a sense of *relief* as s/he notices it is the familiar, harmless, and useful timekeeper, the clock bird. The persona ends by commending the bird's useful pursuit of labouring to feed itself and addresses the bird with the expression of encouragement and camaraderie "*Damirifua*."

The persona's initial anxiety is suggestive of his/her awareness that the presence of certain animals/birds along the bush path has often been a source of danger to humans. Joseph Dupuis attests to this when he noted concerning a fierce snake during his journey to Asante in 1817. He noted: "A serpent, agreeing with the *constrictor* of the class I met

with on the road to Doonqua, but larger, was said to be occasionally seen here; it was dreaded by the traveller more than either the lion or panther, and would attack men as well as the most powerful animals in the creation, the elephant only excepted."[283]

Relieved that the rustle is from a harmless bird, the persona concentrates on highlighting the bird. This concentration on the doings of a bird going about its daily labour/business is indicative of the interest the persona has in the life of the bird. The use of the device of repetition "*kyere birekuo*" which is a deviation from normal speech order, has an incantatory effect which accentuates the affection and familiarity the persona is manifesting toward the bird. This affection and familiarity is further reinforced by the appellation "*Seniampon*." The semantic significance of the appellation couples with the face-to-face encounter between human and bird help to clinch the persona's recognition that the bird is a partner in shaping the human and natural environment. Thus, both are acting upon the environment. It is interesting to note in this regard that the words ɔ*kwan Nkyɛn* - depict the path made by humans inside the forest. That the human persona is not just an intruder in the forest (but restricted to a specific strip of path carved by humans) is inferred from the fact that the persona uses the word "ɔ*kwan*" rather than '*twononoo*' which means the path of an animal or bird on the ground. The poet's specification that the bird is "*aboa*" (animal) also makes it clear that the interaction is between two different species whose respective activities and encounter with each other determine the nature of environmental and human history. The affection created by the appellation also creates a rapprochement which can be understood to mean that the two are united in the common pursuits which affect the environment. That the personae approves of the

[283] Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee*, London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1966, p. 55.

animal's use of the path is indicative of the fact that s/he considers Nature not as a possession to be monopolized by humans as their historical preserve to the exclusion of other species. It is to reinforce this acceptance (in their otherwise unconnected existence) that the persona bids "*dammirifua*" (courage or cheer up) to the bird.

This expression of concern, in spite of difference/conflict, makes the theme of the text a hybridisation of the two opposing entities, namely *aboa*/animal (line 2) on one hand and its implied opposite, *nipa*/human on the other. These two find a common ground in the fact that both *aboa* and *nipa* are engaged in a common pursuit - the animal feeding along the path and the human going along that same path. This concern for the perception of Nature by the persona is central to the practice and objectives of Ecocriticism where the claims of environmental realism are revived to halt environmental degradation.

The linguistic disposition of the text equally replicates the balance that characterizes the eventual dialectical resolution or harmonization of initially opposed entities or interests. The persona simply mentions that there is a noise, without explicitly mentioning that s/he hears it. The verb "hear" is, thus, omitted. The absence of human activity - manifested by the suppression of any mention of the persona hearing the noise - paints the image that the activity of the human (person) in the text is being de-emphasized to highlight the role of Nature. In contrast to this, the verb "*kyerɛ*" (is) (lines 2 and 3) used in connection with the animal is explicit, thereby creating a sense of dichotomy between the subjects, which employ these two different verbs. The image of the two meeting along the path inside the forest despite the clear demarcation culturally made between the realm of humans and

that of Nature is indicative of the persona's predilection for human-Nature rapprochement and the creation of the idea that the bird/Nature is not a strange entity to avoid. The preference for co-existence with Nature is here implied.

4. ɔkwan Atware Asuo

ɔkwan atware asuo,	The path has crossed the river,
Asuo atware ɔkwan,	The river has crossed the path,
ɔpanin ne hwan?	Which (of them) is the elder?
ɔkan atware asuo,	The path has crossed the river,
Asuo atware ɔkwan,	The river has crossed the path,
ɔpanin ne hwan?	Which (of them) is the elder?
Yɛbɔɔ kwan no kɔtoo asuo no.	When we made the path we found/saw the river
Yɛbɔɔ kwan no kɔtoo asuo no.	We made the path we found/saw the river
Asuo no firi tete.	The river is from time immemorial.
Woboa, asuo no firi,	You are wrong/lying, the river is from,
ɔdomankoma ɔbɔadeɛ.[284]	*ɔdomankoma*, the Creator.

The poet's imagery of river and path mutually crossing each other is metonymic of the influence humans have on natural history and *vice versa*. I consider this proverb-poem as a canal and support for a message of co-existence in which the persona presents an interaction between the river (as object of nature) and the path (a thing of human origin). The persona establishes a hierarchical relationship between river and path in which the former is privileged. The elevation of the river over the path might be understandable in the context of the unconscious cherishing of water resources.

It is significant to note that the persona's admission of the ancientness and divine origins of the river does not suppose that s/he accepts a form of environmental determinism. This

[284] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 95.

is because by saying "*woboa*" (you are lying), the persona implies his/her rejection of an existing opinion, a *status quo* according to which the path was generally believed to have pre-eminence over the river. Such a view could be associated with the importance of trade routes and commerce across rivers which usually inspired spiritual worship. This rejection of the *status quo* constitutes a critique. The critique equally debunks any idea that there was indifference and absence of innovative reflection and independence of thought in Asante traditional cultural setting.

The terse proverb images of this text such as the incident of a river crossing the path and the path crossing the river, as well as a dispute over which of the two (river and path) is the elder manifest the poetic quality of repetition. The repetition has the effect of heralding or emphasising the contrast between the repeated idea on one hand and the succeeding one on the other. The subordinate position of the path as a human-made object, compared to the divine origins of the river is highlighted in this way. Again, when the text is read aloud it reveals the kind of repetition which develops into a cadence and a song. This musical touch adds a didactic quality which enhances the familiarity with the river and its importance over the path. Thus, the sound pattern of the text supports or controls the ideas of the text. In this regard it is significant to note that the sound pattern of the poem structures its performance. Another feature that controls the message of the poem is the rhetorical question "*Opanin ne whan?"* It serves as a commentary, a kind of fixed reference from which the truth of the succeeding affirmation (*asuo no firi tete*) finds meaning.

The meaning of this poem is equally enhanced by the extra-textual knowledge to which I referred earlier, namely that among the Asante, rivers were believed to have spirits which could be appeased or propitiated for communal fortunes. This attitude presented in the image of a path crossing the river reveals the interaction between the two in the determination of natural and human (environmental) history. Prominent among the figures of speech deployed to convey this message is the metaphor of the river as the "elder" of the two, river and path. It is equally significant that *Asuo* and ɔ*kwan* are metonymic rendering of the natural and the human, respectively.

Evidently, the rhetorical question the persona asks (lines 3 and 4) presupposes that s/he initially perceives a hierarchy of seniority between the two entities - *Asuo* and ɔ*kwan*. S/he is indeed affirming a hierarchical dichotomy in which the river is more eminent[285] than the path. But this initial virtual elevation of the status of the river over that of the path is only apparent, not real. This is because in saying that the river is the elder, the persona is disputing or reacting/responding to an inverse idea - a generally held opinion according to which the path is held to be more pre-eminent than the river. This contention explains the resort to a statement of direct refutation "*woboa*" - you're lying - (line 5).

This counter-projection of the river explains the persona's resort to the hyperbolic form of expression in which the river is raised above the path. This form of expression is a rhetorical strategy that attempts to advocate or restore equality by the method of a provocative and deliberate inversion of the *status quo*. It consists in substituting the

[285] Opanin (Elder) means 'pre-eminen't: see proverb "*Osoro tere, Nyame ne panin"*). in R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: The Primitive Ethics of a Savage People*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916/1952, p. 23.

inferior for the superior, the privileged for the unprivileged or reversing their roles. This idea of parity is equally seen in the persona's employment of verbs in the present tense when describing states of permanence. For example, "*ɔpanin ne hwan?*" (which of them is the elder?) and "*Asuo no firi tete*", (the river is from time immemorial[286]).

The persona's quest for the parity of the new/path with the old/river, thus, speaks of the nature of Asante quest for innovation and conviviality. The existence of this contestation indicates that traditional ecological knowledge often underwent changes when change was needed for forward movement. This innovation of traditional values is reminiscent of what Gracia Clark observed recently:

> The consistent openness to debate and contestation of many aspects of Asante culture in fact holds the key to its continued viability and centrality until today. A fierce pride in Asante culture can be rooted in its capacity for cultural innovation as firmly as in its unbroken continuity with the past.… It is that continuous tradition of reinvention and creativity constantly redefined and renegotiated that keeps Asante feeling in possession of their own culture.[287]

The recognition that Nature should not be disregarded but offered consideration is here implied.

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[286] The persona constructs a scenario in which s/he contests a popular misconception which devalues the status of the river/natural, a paradigm which subordinates the river to the path/cultural. The dynamic of this contention is akin to a social change in which the development of commercial activity along paths and major roads gained importance over the river, which was not only a source of water supply but was also equally perceived as an object of religious significance. Rivers were generally revered for the fact that they were believed to be abodes of spiritual beings and supernatural powers, which were supposedly intermediaries between God, the creator and humans. This is not withstanding the fact that in Asante religion individual could approach God the creator without any intermediary.

[287] Gracia Clark, "Negotiating Asante Family Survival in Kumasi, Ghana", in *Africa*: *Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 69 Issue 1, 1999, pp. 66-86, p.82.

5 ɔwea

ɔwea, dammirifua!!	Civet cat, courage!!
ɔde nam soro do,	It is moving/walking up there,
wakuntun.	It is bent.
ɔwea, dammirifua!!	ɔwea, courage!!
ɔde nam sosro do,	It is moving/walking up there,
wakuntun.	It is bent.
ɔwea Kwaduampon Kyerefo,	Civet cat Kwaduampon Kyerefo
Mete m'adɔtɔfi,	I live in my house in the thicket,
Mekasa a, aman te.	When I speak, the nations hear.
Aman gye me sɛn ni?	What response do the nations give me?
ɔwea, dammirifua![288]	Civet cat courage!

Here the message presents a contact between the civet cat and humans. The emphasis is on the need for humans to offer consideration and recognition to *ɔwea*[289], the civet cat. The persona describes the animal's physical appearance and then offers the animal the chance to speak for itself in the first person singular. It asks what the nations think of it. This can be considered as the central theme - the persona's hint at the interdependence between (the nations) humans and (*ɔwea*) Nature. This inquiry or self-searching attributed to the animal requires humans to react or answer to the anxieties of the animal. The inquiry of human perception is not limited to the anomaly that the civet cat is a hairy animal which has teeth but flies like a bird. Thus, the persona is indicating that the awareness of the animal's presence must shape human attitude (toward Nature) or form part of human preoccupation.

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[288] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 102.

[289]In explaining a proverb in which the civet cat is mentioned, J.H. K. Nketia notes that: "In towns in the forest area, the civet cat may be heard at night. The proverb is, therefore, used for referring to the circumstances of a person whose actions or speech calls forth unwarranted rebuke, criticism or comment." (From: J. H. Nketia, *Folk Songs of Ghana*, London/Amen House: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 64.)

It is also important to note that the sense of anxiety expressed by the animal in the interrogation: "*Aman gye me sen ni?*" (what do the nations think of me/how do the nations receive me) is indicative of the persona's desire to accentuate the link between ɔ*wea* and the human community. To that effect the persona is acknowledging the influence of Nature on human history and environmental history. This perception equally explains why the animal speaks directly to humans. The idea that the two mutually influence each other is seen in the fact that before indicating the commonality of action between human and the civet cat, the persona first presents the physical appearance of the animal "*wakutun*" (it is bent), as well as the distance between their respective abodes "*soro do*" (up over there) between them. The persona equally mentions a third point of difference "*adotofie*" (thicket house) an indication of the difference in their respective places of domicile or the animal's habitat.

It is significant that these differences in structure and domicile are immediately followed by a dialectical rapprochement by means of the personification of the animal in two ways. The first is the fact that the persona describes the noise made by the animal as *kasa*, speech - "*me kasa a*" (when I speak) - rather than the usual word (*su*) by which the cry of an animal is designated. The second is the rapprochement evident in the persona's reference to the animal by its appellation "*Kwaduampong Kyerefo*". The persona's presentation of the differences and similarities between the animal and humans means that Nature has a narrative, habitat, and history of its own irrespective of any perception or construction humans may make of Nature. This idea of the celebration and recognition of the intrinsic value of Nature finds expression and accentuation in the repetition of the

first two lines of the proverb-poem. It is an example where the repetition of sound, syllable, word, phrase, line, and idea emphasises a thought through an image which in turn creates an affective feeling.

In this instance, the repetition does not simply reinforce the idea of the importance of the civet cat but has two basic functions: first, it creates/supplements/substitutes or plays the role of stanza in written poetry, second, the repetition acts as a basic unifying device of the proverb-poem by pointing to its various organic segments/parts. The emotional bond created by the features of the proverb-poem influences the community's attitude toward Nature, namely an acceptance of co-existence with it. The attitude stems from a conviction or the knowledge that the message in the proverb-poem constitutes traditional ecological knowledge which can inform policies that can be supportive of local alternatives and initiatives. It will result in human intervention seeking a creative transformation of Nature. Such a result will debunk the claim that: "Folk society and folk art do not accept, reflect, or value change"[290]

ɔ*wea*'s inquiry to know what humans think of it is expressive of the animal/persona's quest for a rapport between Nature and humans, a demand for the recognition of the role Nature plays in shaping human attitudes and actions. By creating this image, the persona ends up drawing the attention of the audience to the plight of the animal. This concern for response contains an ethical dimension in the sense that it requires that the differences between animal and humans should not create a sentiment of human indifference toward

[290] Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss, *Anglo-American Folk Song Style*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: New York Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 1.

the animal. In this sense the animal is presented as befitting human consideration. This quest concurs with the fact that at the beginning of the proverb-poem, the persona empathizes with the animal ("*dammirifua*") as a sign of consideration, goodwill, and acceptance despite the differences in their respective appearance and realms. Thus, ɔ*wea*'s greetings and the expected corresponding response of humans conjugate to resolve the differences which the human/persona highlights in the anxiety and interrogation found at the first part of the text.

It is worthy of note that ɔ*wea* is given a prominence of parity in this text by the fact that four of the six verbs in the text have ɔ*wea* as the subject or active agent. They are "*kuntunu* (bent); *nam* (walk); *te* (live), and *kasa* (speak.) The remaining two verbs in the texts have humans as subject but only one of them is a real verb of action. It is "*gye*" (to respond); "*te*" - (to hear) being a verb more of state than action. Again, the separation created by the phrase "*soro do*" (far up there) is attenuated by the persona's use of appellation, (*Kwaduampon kyerefo*), a device which among the Asante connotes the expression of affection and concord. Here it depicts acceptance, co-existence, and hence a quest to protect the environment with all the results it presupposes for environmental development.

Set Two

4 : 5 Nature's Interest is Also Legitimate Interest

But all is not fear, admiration, spirituality, and recognition in these selected proverb-poems of the Asante. In the following set of texts co-existence with Nature is expressed

by the emphasis on the idea that the interest of Nature is also legitimate interest or that "human interest is not the only legitimate one". This emphasis is shown in the nuances of the recognition for the earth, the appreciation of the usefulness of the chicken, *Asɛnsɛ*, the fellow feeling and kinship affection for the bird *Kokokyinaka*, and the appeal for the protection of *Ananse,* the spider.

6. Asase

Asase, dammirifua!	Earth courage!
Asase, dammirifua!	Earth courage!
Asase bככ mfuturo kyerɛ-bi ámpám,	Earth, creator of dust *kyerɛ-bi* ámpám,
Asase Amponyinamoa,	Earth *Amponyinamoa*,
Ntikumakuma na ɛkum Adakwabie.	It is *Ntikumakuma* who kills Adakwabie.
Asase, mete ase a, mesom wo.	Earth when I am alive, I depend on you.
Asase, merebewu a, mesom wo.	Earth when I die, I depend on you.
Asase a כdi amu,	Earth, who eats dead bodies,
Asase Amponyinamoa,	Earth *Amponyinamoa*,
Amponyinamoa Okurכntכ.	*Amponyinamoa Okurכntכ.*
Asase, makye oo,	Earth, good morning indeed,
Makye, כkɛseɛ.[291]	Good morning, great one.

In the above proverb-poem one finds the idea that human interest is not the only legitimate one. This message is presented by the persona's emphasis on the respect and recognition due *Asase*, the earth. S/he accordingly elevates the earth above humans by accentuating human dependence on the earth. The earth is personified and offered greetings, human fashion. The three different sense/feelings in which the persona presents these is indicative of his/her admission of the earth's role in human affairs. The

[291] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 46. (Nketia puts this proverb-poem in the second group on Ayan, called "Anyanaanyane").

first is the expression of praise and admiration where s/he presents the earth as the producer of the dust/soil and the giver of resting place to the dead. The second expression is the persona's resignation to his/her fate as a mortal. The third expression is the feeling of awe found in the persona's reference to the exceeding greatness of the earth in comparison to the implied relative insignificance of humans. It is significant that the persona raises no objection to the earth's right to "eat" (*di*) human after their death.

However, this acknowledgement of the preponderance of the earth in human affairs does not imply surrender to environmental determinism. Rather, this surrender reveals the situation where the earth exercises a patriarchal and authoritarian gaze which pervades and shepherds the persona throughout his/her encounter with Nature. For instance, the persona's awareness of human limitations *vis-à-vis* the overwhelming power of the earth is complemented by the fact that s/he creates a sense of association between her/himself and the earth through the evocation of the expression of camaraderie "*dammirifua*" (courage). This respect or recognition of the interest of Nature tallies with the awe, honour, and esteem with which the traditional Asante community acknowledged the earth through the observance of holidays, the pouring of libation and the offering of sacrifices on account of a good year's harvest.

One sees here an Asante attitude/relation to Nature which resembles, in a sense, their own (Asante) human-to-human relations in the form that Claude Levi-Strauss describes as: "…a logical equivalence between a society of natural species and a world of social

groups."[292] In other words the construction of Nature in Asante finds meaning in similitude with socio-cultural realities of Asante. It is this resemblance which reveals ecological significance in the texts. This resemblance guided ecological knowledge and ascribed to Nature-human relations the commitment or importance accorded social relations based on communal conviviality. The persona poeticises his/her relationship of co-existence with the earth from an angle that emphasises that Nature deserves respect and gratitude rather than indifference.

S/he proceeds to indicate his/her resignation to the inexorable fate of death to which the earth consigns humans by saying that s/he depends on the earth in both life and death. This dependence, the persona designates with the metaphor "…*som*" (worship or service/servitude). S/he finally bids the earth "*maakye"* (good morning) and exalts it as "כkɛseɛ", (the great/big one). These seemingly constative phrases have performative value because the persona's salutation and praise of an object which is the cause of his/her resignation implies his/her ready acknowledgment of the respect caused by his inescapable[293] dependence on and bondage to a superior entity s/he has to submit to in worship (line 5) and adoration (line 12). In this particular instance the theme of the consideration of humans for Nature/earth is on account of the superior status of the latter.[294] In ecocritical terms it shows one of the ways in which cultural constructions of Nature affect the use or abuse of Nature.

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[292] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, p. 104.

[293] It is in the manner similar to the one which as Immanuel Kant would have it: "the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature" (From: Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Judgement (1790), (Translated by J. H. Bernard,) in Hazard Adams (ed.), *Critical Theory since Plato*, 2nd re. Ed. New York: 1992, p. 390).

[294] In a sense the appeal for parity between humans and nonhumans is, this time around, on behalf of humans. The admiration implied in this is notwithstanding the fact that humans are doomed to die while the

In intertextual terms, this reverence for the earth is accompanied by an adoration which proceed from the reverence[295] of the earth on account of the traditional Asante belief in which "*Nyankopon Kwame* is often associated with *Asase Yaa* (the Thursday born Earth Yaa), and is referred to as his *yere*, 'wife'. Offerings are made to *Asase Yaa* on numerous occasions…"[296] The persona understandably lauds the fairness in the fact that the earth, who created dust (line 3) must receive or "eat"/(*di*) the mortal remains of humans (line 8). This admittance puts the earth beyond the role of serving only human interest. It contests the claim of Mather that: "… the land is useful in many different ways: it is perhaps better regarded as a resource base rather that a resource in itself."[297] This is because here, both material and spiritual reasons are adduced for the respect and recognition accorded the earth.

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earth exists, killed by it, as it were (line 5). The earth is presented as a great infinite reality, which long preceded humans (line 3) and will outlive them (line 6).

[295] It could be added in this context that this fear and love for the earth applies to the Asante fear and love of the sea, with which they equally associated perceive spirituality. Emmanuel Akyeampong tells the story of how in order to depict Asante as having dominion over both the sea and the land, an Asante King bathed in the sea, an object hitherto dreaded by the Asante. He recounts: "Asante fear of the sea is proverbial. Aside from Asante's recognition of the sea as a powerful deity, the inland, agrarian Asante felt out of their depth when confronted with the marine world. When the victorious army of Asantehene Osei Tutu Kwame (1803-23) routed the coastal Fante forces in 1807 and reached the Atlantic he waded into the sea in defiance of the Asante phobia. His entranced followers watched him, spellbound. The king enquired what was the largest or most powerful creature in the sea. He was informed that it was the whale (Twi 'bonsu'). The king then chose bonsu as one of his appellations and was henceforth known as Osei Bonsu. The king of the forest (Twi 'kurotwiamansa', the leopard, is one of the titles of the Asantehene) had also become king of the sea." (From: Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Christianity, Modernity and the Weight of Tradition in the Life of Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I, c1888-1931", in *Africa*, vol. 69 Issue 2, 1999, pp. 279-312, p. 284.)

[296] John T. Evans, "The Akan Doctrine of God" in Edwin W. Smith (ed.), *African Ideas of God: A Symposium*, London & Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb Ltd., 1950, pp. 241-259, p. 247.

[297] A. S. Mather, *Land Use*, London: Longman Group UK, 1986, p. 5.

The gratitude and respect which form the basis of the poetic construct of this proverb-poem is, thus, similar to this attitude that Asante cultural institution has created[298] toward God. He is simultaneously feared/distanced and admired/approached.[299] The attitude culminates, in the case of the earth, in the conservation of the environment and helped the judicious use of resources. For example, Falconer notes that in every Asante town where she conducted her 1989 research there is a "*dabone*" during which the earth is not tilled and all farming activities are prohibited. This observance, which recognizes respect and recognition for the interests of the earth, has the effect of reducing the impact of human activity on the environment, thereby ensuring a measure of conservation of Nature.

7. Asɛnsɛ

Nkokɔ pa redi ayuo, Boafo asɛnsɛ, wowɔ mu bi?	Good chickens are eating millet, Asɛnsɛ, the helpful one, are you among them?
Nkokɔ pa redi ayuo, Boafo asɛnsɛ, wowɔ mu bi?[300]	Good chickens are eating millet, Asɛnsɛ, the helpful one, are you among them?

The persona is admonishing the audience to acknowledge and reward the chicken, Asɛnsɛ[301] on account of its usefulness and exceptional skills. This acknowledgement also implies a condemnation of any indifference on the part of humans toward so industrious a chicken. This particular chicken is believed to be capable of nurturing[302] chicks more than any other chicken. It is also believed to offer exceptionally effective protection for

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[298] Rattray explains also that: "It is thus seen that, *indirectly*, every fetish priest is a priest of Onyankopɔn; but *direct* service is also rendered. In every village in Ashanti may be seen a tree or stick terminating in three forks, which form a stand on which a pot or gourd is set. The name of this stick is *Onyame dua*, Onyame's tree. In the pot, dish, or gourd, are placed offerings for Onyame." (From: R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: The Primitive Ethics of a Savage People*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1916/1952, p. 23).

[299] Ibid, p. 22.

[300] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 110.

[301] The chicken, *Asɛnsɛ* is identified by the fact that its feathers are constantly raised.

[302] It is acknowledged for its extraordinary ability to lay a lot of eggs, hatch them, and devotedly protect and raise its chicks in spite of the odds offered by predators such as the hawk.

its chicks against hawks and other predators. The persona is lauding Nature and acknowledging its usefulness to humans. The recognition of the merit of this particular chicken[303] as a helper who, more than any other chicken, deserves extra ration comes out more clearly when we consider the language and form of expression of the text in some detail. There are two poetically laconic sentences. The first is a statement in the affirmative. The second is an interrogation to which the speaker expects an answer. The fact that the question is addressed to the general public can be seen as a sign of the seriousness the persona attaches to his/her concern for the chicken. Again, the two sentences are linked by the fact that the object of the narrative, "*Boafo Asɛnsɛ*" (*Asɛnsɛ* the helpful one) reappears anaphorically in the previous sentence as part of the class of good chicken, in the form of the pronoun "כ*"* (it).

The persona has singled out this particular chicken also because it is generally said to have magical powers on account of its unusual appearance of constantly raised feathers. The reverence of this bizarre-looking chicken resembles the kind of reverence accorded the כ*b*כ*fo* כ (hunter) and/or the כ*k*כ*mfo*כ[304] (the local/medicine man/spirit medium and herbalist), who usually benefit from gifts and respect on account of their healing powers and also due to the fact that they are said to offer spiritual protection against wizards, witches, and other evil people/spirits and influences. When we consider the poet's appeal

[303] See Sarpong on sacrifice. The abnormality of its feathers was compared to *mpɛsɛmpɛsɛ*, the *rasta* hair which the traditional כ*komfo* כ (healer/seer/doctor wore. I think that the name "*Asɛnsɛ*", in its etymology suggest the idea of weirdness, *Asɛ* = resembles/deserve, *nsɛ* = does not resemble/deserve. This suggests the weird one.

[304] This oddity can be likened to the perception the Asante had of priest and hunters and certain animals. MacCaskie notes in this regard that: "The Asante recognized this. They saw hunters and cognate sojourners in nature, such as *akomfo* כ ('priests'), in ambivalent terms. Such people were deviant in that they practiced a dangerous willed separation from culture and community, but they were admirably, even enviably, special in their cultivation and projection of an autonomous individualism and selfhood." (From: T.C. McCaskie. "People and Animals: Constru(ct)ing the Asante Experience" in *Africa - Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 62. 1992, p. 237.

as an inspiration from the reverence the traditional Asante community accorded to traditional priest and hunters, we could compare the recognition of the interest of the chicken to the phenomenon of mimesis concerning which Evelyn Colby notes: "The relationship between the natural and the artificial is negotiated through mimesis and mimicry."[305] This mimicry would then be the mimicry of Asante cosmovision and environmental aspiration as mediated through the resembling of the chicken (and the attitude to it) to the hunter and the healer and the social institutional roles they played.

The persona's favourable reception of this chicken is, thus, a combination of two divergent acts: on one hand lies the persona's fear of the effects the magical prowess the chicken possesses, on the other hand is the gratitude the persona has for the chicken on account of its exceptional success in breeding and raising chicks. Thus, both spiritual and material reasons underlie the persona's appeal to the community to co-exist with the chicken by according it what is genuinely due it for its hard work. The attitude to the chicken, it must be said, has been made out of a specific knowledge of the capabilities unique to this particular chicken. As an expression which highlights the chicken, this proverb-poem serves to attest to the persona's detailed knowledge of the qualities of the different species of his/her environment. It equally underlines the need for a careful observation of the distinctive capabilities of species of Nature which could enhance management practices for the production and development.

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[305] Evelyn Colby, "Ambivalence and Dialectics: Mann's Doktor Faustus and Kleist's "& Uumber das Marionettentheater", in *A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 39, Issue 1, Feb2003, pp. 15 - 33, p. 28.

The description is in a sense a literary version (or inversion) of the task of sociological poetics which Swingewood puts thus: "The task of sociological poetics lies in analysing the transformation of socio-historical material (experience, events, and actions) into poetic form."[306] To this effect it is necessary to note that the text has a syntactic artistry which records as well as creates conviviality between humans and Nature. The text falls into two main parts: the declarative specifying or announcing the benevolent act being done for chickens and the interrogative inquiring whether Asɛnsɛ is present with the other chickens. The declarative and the interrogative are thus juxtaposed to mirror plurality of interests. It is indicative of the balance implied in the human material dependence on Nature. The persona uses only the present tense. Here it has the value of eternalising the perception or experience the persona is recounting.

8. Kokokyinaka

Kokokyinaka Asamoah,	Kokokyinaka Asamoah
Yɛgyee wo deɛ bɛn?	How do we respond to your greetings?
Yɛgye wo "Anyaado"	We say anyaado to your response.
Yɛgye wo kyerɛma ba.	We respond: son of the drummer.
Kyerɛma ba sɔre anɔpa	The son of the drummer rises in the morning.
Tutututututu[307]	Early, early, early.

In this text the persona praises the bird for its habit of rising up very early in the morning to sing and wake up the community. The text confers on the bird the status of the traditional drummer who usually drums messages to the community at dawn. The text encourages humans to perceive Nature as kin. It approaches co-existence from the

[306] Alan Swingewood, *Sociological Poetics and Aesthetic Theory*, London: Macmillan, 1986, p.20.
[307] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. x.

perspective of human kinship[308] with Nature. In this proverb-poem the persona makes a direct address to the bird, *Kokokyinaka* dubbed *Kyerema ba*.[309] S/he underlines the fact that humans accept this bird as kin. This explains why s/he asks the question: What is the response we give you when you greet us? The persona answers the question by giving that response. S/he goes on to describe the particular activity which has earned the bird acceptance and consideration accorded a professional drummer.

The central relationship of kin finds expression in the form of linguistic formulation in which the persona presents the bond between the bird and humans.[310] For example, the bird is the indirect object complement in the sentence "*Yɛgye wo deɛbɛn*?" But it is also the subject of the verb of action "*sɔre*" in the sentence "*ɔkyerɛma ba sɔre anɔpa tutututututu*." Thus, in the text the bird is seen to have a dual role of both subject and object complement, similar to the manner in which it is fully animal and also fully kin of humans, *ɔkyerɛma ba*. Again, while bird and human are different grammatical categories, they are both subject of intransitive verbs, and these intransitives are both verbs of action. Also the initial opposition implied in the pronouns 'we' (humans) and 'you' (bird) transforms to mean affection and union when the bird is qualified with the human appellation *Asamoa*, a device which has the affection associated with addressing someone

[308]This status accorded the bird is equally understood from the fact that: "Akanfoɔ kyerɛ sɛ wɔtumi wo obi kyerɛma" - (meaning: Akans believe that someone can be destine by birth to be a drummer) (From: J. H. K Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972, p.14.)

[309] The central activities of the traditional Asante drummer are mentioned by Daphne D. Harrison, when noting: "…but the most famous and widely used of these speech surrogates are the *atumpan*, the legendary talking drums which speak poetry, acclaim the chief, announce important events, and so forth…All members of the group understand and respond to this language" (From: Daphne D. Harrison, "Aesthetic and Social Aspects of Music in African Ritual Settings" in Jackson, Irene V. (ed.), *More than Drumming: Essays on African and Afro-Latin American Music and Musicians*, London: Green Press, 1985, pp. 49-65, p.51-52).

[310] The bird is, thus, incorporated into a specific clan to whose greetings the people culturally respond "A*nyaado*". Note that the Asante have specific responses for the greetings of members of different clans.

with his/her first name.[311] Here singing and early rise constitute prominent images by which the poet moves the bird up to a status of kin with humans.

In this way the persona is drawing the attention of the community to the presence as well as the useful activities of the bird. By so doing s/he is implicitly objecting to any indifference on the part of humans. An advocacy of concern and commitment toward Nature is thus being raised to conscientize the community for the good and recognition of the bird.

9 Ananse

Monya Ananse a, monku no.	If you get hold of Ananse, kill it
Monya Ananse a, monku no.	If you get hold of Ananse, kill it
Waka me, waka me,	It has stung me, It has stung me,
Na monku no mma no ntכ.[312]	So kill it that it might die.

In the above poem the persona condemns any enmity toward the spider. S/he means the very opposite of what s/he is saying, and is therefore, expressing his/her ideas by means of irony. I illustrate the validity of this denotation by the intertextual fact that among the Asante the spider is a species which is very much appreciated. For example, in mythology it is believed to have taught humans the knowledge of farming and in folklore it is presented as the most intelligent of all animals; it is often a trickster. Again, it is believed to be not only harmless to humans, but also helps them by catching in its web insects that are harmful to humans. That one should admonish others to harm such a

[311] But in Asante culture to call a person who is older than you or in a form of authority over you by the surname or just the first name (without preceding it with an appropriate title, such as *Agya*, = Father, *Eno* = Madam, *Wכfa* = uncle, *Sewaa* = Auntie, *Maame* = Madam etc.) is considered inordinately rude and is tantamount to unthinkable insolence).

[312] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 107.

revered, intelligent, harmless, and useful species should only be understood as an instance of irony. This irony is evident in the text by the fact that rather than counting him/herself as part of those who should attack Ananse, the persona makes the appeal to others to execute this attack. S/he does not say if '*we*' get hold of Ananse; s/he says if '*you*' get hold of Ananse. This reveals the persona as a supporter or defender of Ananse.

This style of appeal chosen by the persona is intended to provoke the audience to react by saying: 'No that is wrong. The spider does not deserve that.' Such a response creates a rapprochement between humans and spider, with the former mobilizing to the defence of the latter. This dialectic association of otherwise divergent entities makes the text an archive which posits an ideological expression of human-spider/Nature co-existence. This co-existence is founded on the ethical grounds of reciprocating the spider's harmlessness to humans. In the text this harmlessness is seen in the fact that the spider does not sting humans, a fact which the persona states in ironic terms when s/he says "*waka me*", he has stung me.

The persona, thus, bases his appeal for co-existence with Ananse on the community's common knowledge of the habits and usefulness of the spider. Against the background of this knowledge, one can then understand that the text is a proverb-poem which presents in a terse and succinct image the attitudes and preferences concerning a given species. This attitude bespeaks of the persona's appreciation of the contribution the spider makes or is believed to have made towards the economic welfare of humans either by way of

mythological introduction of the practice of farming to humans or by hunting harmful insects.

Set Three

4 : 6 Humans are Responsible for the Environment

The following are texts in which the emphasis is put on the idea of human responsibility toward Nature.

10 Odum ne ɔdan

Odum se ɔyɛ ɔbosom a, ɔdi tɔ.	If Odum says it is a god, it deserve to die.
ɔdan se ɔyɛ ɔbosom a, ɔboa.	If ɔdan claims to be a god, it is lying.
Yɛde deɛbɛn na ɛsene twene?	What do we use to carve the drum?
Yɛde tweneboa na ɛsene twene.	We use tweneboa to carve the drum.
Tweneboa gyan Nkansa, dammirifua![313]	Tewneboa gyan Nkansa, courage!

The persona appeals for human recognition of the merit and worth of a useful tree species. This consideration, it must be remembered, is accorded on account of the persona's belief that this particular tree has a spirit which can be appeased. The consideration, therefore, entails a personification of this species. It also constitutes an act of elevating this tree to a status of eminence. The fact that the persona considers this acknowledgement of the tree worthwhile is indicative of his/her recognition that the tree must be accorded its due.

The structure of the poem is revelatory of its meaning. It is founded on a parallelism where the same idea (ɔdi tɔ) is transposed in the next line as (ɔboa). Here the persona

[313] Ibid, p. 112.

elevates a particular tree above two others on account of the fact that it is the one used for carving the talking drum. The poet poses a question before answering it. S/he then follows the answer with the appellation of the tree and ends by pronouncing on it the affectionate human expression of camaraderie - "*dammirifua*".

The poetic deviation from normal speech order in this proverb-poem is seen in the persona's style of asking the question and answering it him/herself. The persona is having a monologue but puts it in the form of a dialogue. Again s/he attributes speech to the trees, thereby personifying them. The personification and the unusual mode of speech are indicative of challenge or questioning of the *status quo*, namely, humans are being dismissive of the care and recognition due to some elements of Nature. The first (ɔ*dan*) is rejected in a hyperbolic expression: it deserves to die. The second is presented as lying. They are both said to have no special power or any status of deity (ɔ*bosom*/Fetish). This personification has the role of subverting prevailing thought and practices about flora. The environmental point the persona is making is derived from the logic that this tree which is of such great usefulness must not be ignored as an ordinary tree, but must be accorded recognition for being the tree from which the talking drum is carved. This attitude to the tree influences the manner in which the audience, once persuaded, related to the tree.

In both instances the persona has attributed the quality of speech thereby personifying the tree. This personification equally induces a kind of attention, not toward these two trees but toward the *Tweneboa*, which is passive and dormant, the object of the appreciation in

the sentences of the texts. This appreciation concurs with the practice of appeasing the spirit of trees which are felled for the carving of the talking drum or the dread and reverence the community had for other plants such as the creeper, *Homakyem*. The result is the highlighting of the tree for the subsequent attention which ecocriticism accords to Nature species.

11 ɔkwarifa

Momma yɛnkɔ hwɛ ɔkwarifa ɛ.	Lets us go and visit ɔkwarifa.
Momma yɛnkɔ hwɛ ɔkwarifa ɛ.	Lets us go and visit ɔkwarifa.
ɔkwarifa rehunu amane.	ɔkwarifa is suffering.
ɔkwarifa rehunu amane papapapa[314].	ɔkwarifa is suffering a lot.

The persona is condemning human indifference to the suffering of the rat. This is seen in his/her appeal to humans to go to the rescue of the rat. In reality it is an appeal to humans to desist from hunting the rat, when we come to understand that huge forest rats were hunted in Asante communities. This proverb-poem highlights and condemns human terror against Nature. This appeal reflects the poet's reminder of human responsibility toward Nature. The essence of this reminder is the appeal that humans should co-exist with Nature. The theme is not implied but stated. The accountability is amplified by the fact that the appeal to go to the rescue of the animal is being directed at the same people who persecute it. Symbolically, therefore, the story about this animal allegory which uses the rat as a metonymy to present Nature, shows the idea that humans owe Nature the responsibility to prevent or end the suffering of Nature. The feeling of the persona is one of affection for the giant forest rat and sorrow or empathy for its suffering. Allusion is

[314] Ibid. p. 106.

being made to the practice where this animal is usually hunted by the method of smoking it out of its hole. One can infer that the persona's expression of sorrow and empathy might have the effect of evoking remorse among the members of a community. This appeal is reinforced by the fact that this rat is not big enough meat to warrant all the trouble humans go through in hunting it. Moreover, the act of smoking the animal out of its hole by stuffing its hole with burning wood and spices is part of the ("*amane*") trouble to which the persona is alluding. In this sense the appeal to take care of the rat is equally a condemnation of a practice the persona deplores.

It is also important to note that this appeal is not just a simple revelation of information but it also constitutes an expression requesting some response from the audience/community. The effectiveness of this appeal derives from the fact that it is presented in a kind of language which attracts attention to itself. Finnegan notes in this regard that: "One of the qualities of literature is that it is in some way 'set apart' from common speech or writing. This applies above all to poetry, where style and structure are a kind of end in themselves as well as a signal to the audience of the type of communication intended."[315]

In this regard, attention must be drawn to the fact that the repetition of the first two lines separates the text into two parts. This differentiation is accentuated by the final sound "ɛ" at the end of the line. By this sound the poet foregrounds the *urgency* to go and visit (*hwɛ*) the animal, to take care of it. The poet begins with this imperative and gives the

[315] Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 89.

impression that correctness of rescuing the animal is not debatable but deemed an imperative/expediency. This expediency is manifest in the pause given after the sentence which is stressed with the exclamation of urgency, "ε", which indicates that something is not just urgent but is also over due. This idea of presenting the change of attitude towards the animal as overdue is indicative of a critique of the *status quo*. This is expressive of the desire to co-exist with Nature, here expressed in metonymic or synecdoche terms as the rat. This desire to be responsible for Nature results in the conservation and hence the environmental health.

12. Kotokurodu Asamoa

Kotokurodu Asamoa	The wasp Asamoa.
Obi anka me a	Unless someone bothers me,
Memmɔ no	I do not sting him/her.
Kotokurodu Asamoa ee	The wasp Asamoa!
Obi anka me a	Unless someone bothers me,
Memmɔ no kora, kora, kora.	I do not sting him/her at all, at all, at all.[316]

The same idea of responsibility toward Nature finds expression in the text's admonition to humans to refrain from attacking the wasp. The wasp speaks directly to humans and explains that whenever it stings it always does so as a reaction to human aggression. In effect, the wasp is identifying humans as the initiators of the conflict. The quest for peace with Nature is implied here. The persona is reprimanding humans by recommending to them consideration for the nonhuman wasp. Though the persona implies that those who want to avoid being stung by the wasp must refrain from attacking it, s/he is equally indicating that the cause of the stinging must be removed, namely, human aggression.

[316] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ayan*, Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 17.

The mutual peaceful behaviour advocated in the text is seen in the fact that both verbs are constructed in the negative. Thus, the persona could have resorted to the rhetorical question: have I stung anyone who did not first trouble me? But s/he chooses to put both sentences in the negative – if *someone does not* sting me *I do not attack* him/her. Again, the dependent clause and the independent clause differ on account of their respective functions but are united in the fact that they are both negative constructions; the form "*someone does not"* of the subordinate clause matching "*I do not*" of the independent clause.

It is important to note that the persona is not endorsing the violent dispositions of any of the two parties in conflict. In other words s/he is not saying to humans 'if you attacked the wasp and it stung you it is okay'; nor is s/he saying to the wasp 'go ahead and sting humans when they attack you'. Rather, s/he is advocating avoidance of trouble and highlighting the peace that comes with respect and consideration for Nature. None should hurt the other. 'Humans should refrain from attacking the wasp' is the act the persona accomplishes with this speech. The story reveals a deep knowledge of the behaviour of this insect, as an example of the careful observation of Nature which results in the proper management of resources and production.

13 Koterɛ

Akwamu Dankyira twea,	Dog of Akwamu Denkyira,
Akwamu Dankyira twea,	Dog of Akwamu Denkyira,
Akwamu akotene,	Akwamu vanguard,
Koterɛ, mahunu amane.	I, Lizard, am in trouble.
Koterɛ, mahunu amane.	I, Lizard, am in trouble.

Akuatemma ɔdi adeɛ wɔ hɔ,	The little mouse who is enjoying itself is at peace,
Na mmɔfra bɔ me din sene bɛn.	And yet children carve arrows on account of me.
Koterɛ, mahunu amane Aberaw o.[317]	I, Lizard, am really in trouble.

The person's direct message is that humans should treat the lizard humanely. This appeal constitutes an evocation of human responsibility to spare Nature of abuse and degradation caused by humans. The persona is undertaking a critique of a familiar children's past-time with the intent of discrediting and discouraging its practice. In this soliloquy the persona, the lizard, complaints about the maltreatment it receives from children, a synecdoche for humans in general.

Ethically, the persona confronts the lizard with the mouse and projects the former as less harmful to human interest than the latter which pilfers (line 6) things such as grains from the barn, and destroys other belongings of humans. Again, it is in view of this unfair treatment that the lizard likens itself to the vanquished by condemning what it considers as a justice of the victor. The use of the epithets *Akwamu Denkyira* evokes this idea. They were two empires which preceded the Asante Empire. In fact Denkyira fell following the war with Asante in 1701. This evocation condemns subjugation and implies a preference for co-existence rather than a replacement of lizard by humans in the manner in which vanquished empires were replaced. This representation of the human-Nature relations depicts a proverbial and poetic rendition of reality in terms that are comprehensible to the cultural audience to which the imagery and allusions of the discourse are familiar. For example, the idea of *akotene* (vanguard) suggest to the Asante mind the direct and

[317] Ibid, p. 104.

unmitigated assault of the attack of the enemy since it reflects the manner in which in Asante military formation the vanguard always spearheaded the attack and suffered most of the losses. Thus, the persona advances the idea that this species must be spared the persecution to which it is subjected by humans. It serves as an example of the manner in which humans should offer consideration to nonhuman species and co-exist with them both on account of their usefulness to humans as well as on account of their right to exist for intrinsic reasons. This contestation of acceptable tradition is an instance of the dynamic and progressive nature of Asante oral literature in its function as an instrument of debate. From the point of view this contestation serves to demand a better treatment of the lizard by humans.

14 Abedeɛ

Abedee, ɔda ne sesea mu.	The grey antelope, it is resting in its thicket
ɔbofoɔ bɔ anwene frɛ no.	The hunter tries to lure it.
ɔbofoɔ di tɔ:	The hunter deserves to die:
ɔremua no."[318]	It will not mind him.

The *status quo* the persona is condemning in this particular proverb-poem is a traditional Asante method of hunting, one concerning which Rattray notes:

> Hunters among this people, with a few exceptions, are not as skilful trackers or as close observers of the habits of game as their brothers in East and Central Africa. They have one accomplishment, however, which, as far as the present writer knows or has seen, is not known to the Anyanja, Angoni, or Chipeta shihari. They can call up the smaller game, bush-buck, duyker, &c., by imitation of the bleat of the doe or kid.[319]

[318] Ibid., p. 104
[319] R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: The Primitive Ethics of a Savage People*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916/1952, p. 64.

The persona notes that the act of luring an antelope from its thicket by imitating the animal's cry amounts to an abuse for which the hunter deserves to die. The proverb-poem is a response to a given type of hunting which must have become threatening to fauna especially after the relative abundance of gun under colonial rule. For that reason I perceive the text as an exchange between two opposing views. The persona contrasts the peaceful life of the antelope with the aggressive marauding and trickery of a hunter and privileges the former as a hierarchical binary of the former. The comparison disapproves of the conduct of the latter as a felony punishable by death; and, thus, rejects the *status quo* and recommends a new way of hunting and hence an appeal to the community to adapt to the needs of a new reality. It must also be understood that the persona's defence of the antelope stems from the tacit or background knowledge of traditional Asante belief that humans are not the only ones with spirits and that animals also possess it. Thus, in declaring the hunter's action unacceptable, the poet is making a rejoinder to the hunter's actions on ethical grounds. This explains why s/he depicts the antelope as being in a position of rest; symbolizing innocence and harmlessness. This image or metaphor equally evokes pity for the animal and deepens the unethicality of the hunter's action.

The persona's statement "the hunter deserves to die" must be seen not only as information but also as an instruction to act[320] expressing a death wish for the hunter. Here, the acts are, first, the declaration of the wrongness of the hunter's act, which the antelope is admonished to ignore. Second, the persona is offering support, and third, s/he

[320] Jackson explains that the statement "The telephone's ringing" has simultaneously a prepositional meaning ('something is happening') and an interactional meaning ('you do something'). (From: Howard Jackson, *Grammar and Meaning: A Semantic Approach to English Grammar*, London and New York: Longman, 1990, p. 2.) Hence it is also an instruction to do something.

is assuring the audience of the futility of the threat posed by the hunter whose intention is to abuse the antelope.

And I see in it a dialectic that resolves the conflict between the interest of humans and that of Nature in the structuralist fashion. For example, one can posit that the persona is evoking two opposing kinds of deaths. The first is the death of the antelope implicitly sought by the hunter's attempt to lure it. The second is the persona's explicitly stated wish that the hunter deserves to die. This wish, which in Asante culture, is considered just as potent as the fire power of the gun itself,[321] the persona hopes will deter the hunter from pursuing the antelope in the thicket and, thus, help the hunter to avert his own death since rationally the hunter would not like to lose his life on account of an antelope. Hence, the implicit withdrawal of the hunter's death wish for the antelope, therefore, dialectically cancels his own death, which was to be a consequence of his attack on the antelope. The result is the sparing of the lives of both hunter and antelope. The two deaths are, thus, averted/reversed. This vision implies an option of mutual co-existence whose thematic and ethical disposition can be schematised as follows:

Thesis	**Thesis**	**Thesis meets**	**Anti-thesis**	**Anti-thesis**

[321] The importance the Asante attach to the power of simply mentioned words can be seen in the weight they give to words of blessing, the proper response to greetings, wishes of good luck, and especially the avoidance of or the unmetionabilty of certain words such as the names of dangerous diseases and "death." So strong was this mentioning of words that 'cursing the king' - saying something evil should happen to him - was punishable by death, was referred to by its very opposite "blessing the king" (hyira ohene; literally 'bless king') It is believed, for instance, that when you mention the word 'snake' in the night one will come along. By extension the belief was that when things were said or wished they often happened. This must be distinguished from the practice of "*Duab*כ" where one could put a curse on another by invoking a 'god' or a spirit to punish (usually a secret/unknown) offender.

	incorporates anti-thesis	**anti-thesis**	**incorporates thesis**	
Hunt nowhere	Don't hunt except in selected places	Do not hunt in the thicket	Hunt, except in very few places	Hunt anywhere

The text is a proverb and a poem. It consists of four complete sentences in four lines; two of which are longer than the remaining two. The collection or putting together of two groups of sentences - long and short - resonates the idea and imagery of variety and juxtaposition, not to say harmonization of the different interests of humans and Nature. This significant role of the poem-proverb is endorsed by a close look at its verbs, nouns and pronouns. The verbs in the texts are of two types, the first are transitive verbs - '*frɛ*' (call), '*di*', (deserve), and 'mmua' (from '*bua*'- to respond) on lines 2, 3, and 4 respectfully. The second set is made up of the intransitive verb, '*bכ ahwene*' (imitate/feign). It is symbolic, in this connection, that the message of co-existence is carried by an ensemble or a disposition of divergent groups of verbs rather than a single type of verb.

Again, the persona contrasts the antelope with the hunter when s/he uses the possessive pronoun "*ne*" (its) which would indicate in the context that the object "*sɛsea*" (thicket) belongs to the antelope. Implicitly, the antelope is said to be resting at its home. In proverbial fashion the antelope is highlighted by the possessive pronoun "*ne*" as a way of indicating its ownership of the thicket. The hunter is by contrast implied to have no possession where the antelope is. He is by inference contrasted with the antelope as a roaming intruder in another's realm. The persona's use of the present tense depicts this

gesture as a permanent occurrence, a habit of the hunter. The next line "כbכfo כ *di t*כ" ("The hunter deserves to die") is an expression of extreme disapproval wishing the hunter death. The persona's wish for the antelope, by implication, is that it does not respond (so that the hunter will not be able to locate its exact position in the dark thicket).

The pronouns in this proverb-poem are also of different types and have a variety of roles. This linguistic disposition of the text creates an image of the assembling of variety, and thus reinforces the idea or theme of (human-Nature) co-existence. The subject form, 'כ' (s/he/it) appears along side the object form '*no*' (him). We note that the persona initially distinguishes between Nature and the human actor by mentioning their respective names or proper nouns: "Abedeɛ" (antelope) and "כbכfoכ" (hunter). The nouns of the poem equally mirror this balance indicative of the ideology of co-existence. Two of the nouns - 'Abedeɛ' (antelope) and 'כbכfoכ' (hunter) have the role of subject (line 2) while the other two - 'sɛsea' (thicket) and 'tכ' (die/death) (lines 1 and 3) constitute a circumstantial complement of place and direct object complement respectively showing a diversity of roles for the same category - noun.

This resemblance between the persona's attitude to the antelope and the inter-personal relations in Asante culture underscores the point that the persona is aware of the life and habits of the antelope and has sought to defend it by appealing to already existing cultural logic, beliefs, and attitudes. The appeal to the audience by these familiar elements must be understood from the point of view of the nature of discourse regarding which Michel Foucault notes:

> The fundamental code of a culture - those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices - establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical order with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.[322]

Thus, here the persona unconsciously communicates or expresses the type of relationship s/he wishes could exist between the antelope/Nature and the hunter/humans. S/he desires that it be founded on the principles of co-existence and harmony, which underlie traditional Asante political institutions. This is why I have opted to see these environmental proverb-poems as being part of or at least emanating from the one system whose religious, legal, moral, and political structure is being replicated in the concerns expressed the poets of the selected texts I treat in this thesis.

4 : 7 Overview of Deductions from the Above Description

The foregoing analysis of the texts reveals the environmental content of traditional Asante proverb-poems as works of art. We have seen these works as poetic constructs of a traditional environmental knowledge whose concerns cover both pre-colonial and colonial times. It equally offers great insight into the nature of the various conceptual and linguistic strands that went into weaving the fabric of Asante attitudes towards flora, fauna, and landscape. It is by this trajectory - commitment to Nature, the poeticization of it as didactic instrument, mythologization - that the environmental knowledge and experience contained in these texts inculcate environmental values in a dramatic and compelling way among its audience. This idea of co-existence reposed on five main features of these texts: 1) the poets' commitment to the non-abuse of nature, 2) the

[322] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage, 1973, p. xx.

emphasis on the direct manner in which the people are implicated in the lives of flora, fauna, and landscape, 3) the fact that the language of the drum was understood by all the community, 4) the essential social, ethical values of the poets' appeal, and 5) the possibility that the texts contained elements of reactions to colonial environmental policies.

The proverb-poems are, thus, revealed as what J. H. Kwabena Nketia calls a "repository of the wisdom of the ancients, their way of life, and their reflection on existence on earth and life in general."[323] To some extent, this association with the ancient enables these proverb-poems to produce among the audience what is by and large, a quasi-mythological effect, which Phythian expresses as follows:

> Poetry seeks to do more than impart information, it imparts an attitude, or suggests an emotional response: it seeks the transmission of feeling as well as, or rather than, facts. In a poem the language takes fire: the reader is encouraged to bring a greater awareness to unfold and work on him in a way they might not in a prose context.[324]

The ancientness and the poetic ritual engender a sense of moral responsibility of humans to Nature leading to conservationist effects. This is partly because these features permit hearers of the texts to enter and inhabit the imaginary realm of these species and objects of Nature, personify them in a manner of the social human-to-human metaphorical connotation. In this way, the experience that the poets recount and the appeal they enjoin their hearers to heed, make these proverb-poems a set of pedagogical instruments which inculcate perceptions of value, worth, and consideration for flora, fauna, and landscape.

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[323] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Akanfo Nnwom bi*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. ix.
[324] B. A. Phythian, *Considering Poetry: An Approach to Criticism*, London: English University Press, 1970, p. 29.

I have described the contents of these proverb-poems with the aim of showing that the persona/poet pleads with humans to eschew the abusive exploitation of nonhumans and to live in harmony with them. Since the poet/persona directs his/her appeal at humans, the persona's language is couched in terms and structures accessible or comprehensible to Asante culture. This helps one to understand that the culture-specific dimension of the proverb-poems seeks to answer a specific communication requirement, namely to resemble the pattern of the persona's thought and expression to the patterns of beliefs, behaviour, and institutions that functionally integrate with the 'language' of the target audience - the traditional Asante community. It reflects Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of *bricolage*: "A significant feature of *bricolage* is clearly the ease with which it enables the non-civilized, non-literate *bricoleur* to establish satisfactory analogical relationships between his life and the life of nature instantaneously and without puzzlement or hesitation."[325] Generally, the analogy amounts to an art of the humanization of Nature (not just a metaphoric attribution of human qualities to Nature). Its result in the rousing of that type of imagination and feelings that favours perceptions which defend[326] Nature and advocate human co-existence with it.

The props of the persuasion of these poems *resemble*, first, an imitation of Asante cultural standards of freedom and ethics (as perceived by the poet), and second, it resembles a transposition of these standards onto the relations between the Asante on one

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[325]Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 51.

[326] The defence is akin to that which Andrew Linzey presents in these words: "If we cut up beasts simply because they cannot prevent us and because we are backing our own side in the struggle for existence, it is only logical to cut up imbeciles, criminals, enemies or capitalists for the same reason." (From: Linzey, Andrew, "C.S. Lewis's Theology of Animals", in *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 80 Issue 1, winter 1998, pp. 60-72, p. 63.)

hand and flora, fauna, and landscape on the other. I am not saying that the advocacy of the poet *contains imitations* of the social in the service of the natural, a borrowing of human values and their application to the cause of nonhumans. I am arguing that I have uncovered a similitude between the two realms in the description of these proverb-poems.[327]

It is in view of this simulation[328] that I have sought, by my literary description, to make intelligible the manner in which the poets have pleaded the conservation and non-abuse of Nature by humans. This poetic environmental concern effected in the poets' endeavour is akin to the realization which Jonathan Bate notes when he says: "The poetic articulates both presence and absence: it is both imaginary re-creation and the trace on the sand which is all that remains of the wind itself."[329] Thus, the desire for a connection to flora, fauna, and landscape, and the claim that such a link exists, is central to the poets' attitude towards Nature. It favourably predisposes the audience towards activities and attitudes that result in conservation.

Thus, looking at the type of relationship the poet has sought to create between humans on one hand and *ɔwea*, *Obirekuo, ɔkwan, Asuo, Kokokyinaka*, and *Kotokrodu* etc on the

[327] The description has been inspired by the view that "like language …the cuisine of a society may be analysed into constituent elements, which may be organized according to certain structures of opposition and correlation." (From: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, London: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 86.)

[328] It is this relationship that creates a semblance of the transposition of humanity onto nonhuman species in the manner in which Michael Worton and Judith Still perceive as essentially intertextual when they note in their comment on the imitative dimensions of the works of Plato as follows: "We would argue, in addition, that Plato's theories of 'poetry' highlight intertextual relations. Certainly the work of art, for Plato, is not autonomous – it is crossed, for example, by various references to social knowledge (military tactics, divination, statecraft, and so on.)" (From: Michael Worton and Judith Still, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991, p. 4).

[329] Jonathan Bate, "Poetry and Biodiversity", in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, (ed.), *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, London & New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1998, p.58.

other, one would notice the poets' attempt to impress upon the audience, the construction Steven Feld presents as follows:

> Thus the immediate village area is surrounded with the presence, through voices and sound, of friends and relatives. Because birds [and by extension other nonhumans] sing, whistle, say their names, make a lot of noise, weep, or speak, they provide a simultaneous index of the environment as well as a deeper symbolic understanding about self, place, and time.[330]

In this sense the contents of these proverb-poems reveal human "understanding about self, place, and time" as being inseparable from the presence of nonhumans, whence the necessity to conserve them at least for the meaning they bring to human existence in addition to Nature's own right to exist for itself. But it is also significant to underline that by this construct of Nature the poet does not only describe or admonish but equally "imposes" or brandishes what attitude s/he suggests should replace the *status quo*. The poets undertake in this sense: "…the construction of the world they appear only to describe. That is, this effect of the poetic and proverbial arts reveals to us … the confirming, supportive, problem-resolving nature of all art."[331]

From this perspective I perceive the proverb-poems as attempts at solutions to environmental problems. I have deemed them to be transcending their primary physical and literal value. Their performance is, thus, of the symbolic significance which Zeusse puts as follows:

> Ritual is the vehicle by which religions of structure achieve this complex act of integration. Transformation of one's perception of an ordinary

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[330] Stephen Feld, "Sound Structure as Social Structure" in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 2 Issue 1, September 1984, p.395.
[331] Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 56.

> object or person from a literal, personal, or social mode to a symbolic and transcendental one lies at the heart of all ritual action.[332]

The personification and prosopopeia entailed in the poets' artistic treatment of these objects of Nature further transforms these proverb-poems into an impeccable pedagogical instrument.

In a sense the conclusions I derive from this literary analysis of the proverb-poems is a specifically environmental role of literature, a role whose generalities Eileen Julien captures thus:

> Literature and orature in Africa as elsewhere are facts of communication, which reflect social and political values. This is true of oral and literary works - even those which have no explicit political themes or which do not rely on realistic conventions to depict the "slice of life". All are marked by the socio-political climate and factors which give rise to them: who fails to sense, for example, the communal context (and all it implies) of the proverb or the traditional praise song? […]. But, of course, an oral or literary work is not merely a reflection of a socio-political environment and its values, for, paradoxically, the arts also shape and promote values […]. The social and political conscience of African Literature has always existed and is here to stay - at least for a long while. It is not easy to write or speak well about socio-political reality, to avoid the path of least resistance, which consists of making a (necessarily pale or poor) copy of the real. If art has anything to give to that reality, it is its power to symbolise, to balance the realistic with the visionary, to change the real into myth. Whatever the contextual problems of censorship and the persecution of the artist continue to haunt African literature, the relationship of socio-political reality in Africa to orature, oral genres and literature can be […] a fruitful one. It is a union which, at its best, both moulds values that help bring about new and just societies, and challenges, stretches the creative potential of artists and the arts.[333]

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[332] Eva Zeusse, Ritual *Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979, p. 17.
[333] Julien Eileen et al (eds.), *African Literature in its Social and Political Dimensions*, Washington DC: The Three Continents Press, 1983, p. 123.

In showing the commitment of the texts, I have considered that they constituted a means of transmitting meaning and values to the community, and to a certain extent exposing the poets love and concern for local hold of the forest against colonial environmental policies.

We have shown the drummer-poet as having the function of advising, mocking, entertaining, critiquing, and at times upholding the structures and (environmental practices) values of the society. For example, by personifying the clock bird and solidarizing with it, the drummer-poet is creating a sense of kinship which goes a long way to foster association with the clock bird and hence an eventual concern for its conservation. This image emerged only as I described the semantic and lexical features of the texts and explained their pattern of the juxtaposition of otherwise disjointed elements. It is also significant that I have shown that these attitudes are derived from a set of beliefs and practices deeply rooted in the specific culture of traditional Asante society. The analysis further reveals that the community perceived human well-being to be inseparable from those of nonhumans. In this sense I would like to deduce that it is a community that conceived of development as embodying issues concerning the environment.

It is in view of these qualities and features of these texts that I argue that the content of these texts can be an inspiration to present-day environmental aspects of development. I perceive that this position of seeking current solution from traditional knowledge concurs with the observation of Henry Odera Oruka that: “Africa cannot by the law of history, regain her dignity and make contribution to human civilisation if she ignores her own and

past traditions. But, she will equally be handicapped if she abandons science and logic, in the so-called Western sense, as things that are un-African."[334] I should add that the ideas revealed by the description of these oral texts have effaced any idea which grouped orality, tradition, backwardness, and stagnation on one negative side and conversely grouped literacy, the modern, progress, and development on one positive side. Thus, I have demonstrated that the proverb-poems' content reject any such classification and, therefore, creates for the proverb-poems a place in the modern, the progressive, and the developmental realm rather that being confined to backwardness and some supposedly obnoxious past.

Again, this analysis has shown that since the drummer-poet really criticizes some attitudes and practices against nonhumans, one can deduce that the attitude to Nature (and societal issue for that matter) was not always monolithic. The poets' attitude to the suffering of the lizard, the aggression against the antelope in the thicket, and ironic manner in which they plead for the spider are instances of the proof that there was a critique of some practices as opposed to the misconception that traditions was never contested or innovated but imposed by the powerful or forced upon others in the name of ancestors and traditions. I have, therefore, argued that it was this existence of dissent that offered the instrument for ecological innovation and progress. The texts therefore admonish that we will need to avoid imposing environmental ideas and policies in a top-down fashion, that is, without due consultation with the people at the grassroots whose experiences and practices in matters of land management is derived from their direct

[334] Henry Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Leiden, New York, København, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1990, p. 16.

interaction with the land. This implies that a participatory approach is needed for such ideas to be adapted and adopted. The analysis feeds into attempts to address the complaint that : "Africans have been reproached for imitating, copying or reproducing the ideological, religious, and social models of others, instead of using their own cultures as a fountainhead for self-centred, self-sustaining, endogenous development"[335]

In this particular analysis it has been the issue of exploring how aspects of the artistic rendition of cultural paradigms can feed into a reconstruction of the understanding of the mindset and methods employed by the Asante in dealing with environmental issues and preventing environmental degradation. It will be of central importance to those seeking detailed insight needed to respond to the numerous appeals made in several recommendations and forums that urged that solution to Africa's problems should be inspired by local know-how and appropriate innovation. In what follows, in the next chapter, I indicate the nature of the resemblance that exists between the literary endeavour of Ecocriticism and the development.

[335] M. Glèlè Ahahanzo, "Culture in Africa", in R. Uwechue (ed.), *Africa Today*, London: Africa Books Ltd, 1991, p. 189.