

## The Textuality of “Anansesem”: A Pedagogical and Ideological Resource in Traditional Human Relations among the Akans in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

“Anansesem”, far from being just a traditional source of entertainment for the youth in Ghana, as the uninitiated would believe it, is a serious Akan discursive approach to providing the social philosophy that guides their life. This investigation is done using ethnographic and structural analysis approaches that pair characters in “anansesem” to create a binary or coding system and this system helps to interpret the social ideologies inherent in the text. Through such interpretations, it is seen that the framing of the “anansesem” text gives us a dual function for Ananse— an art and a character. The Akans combine both functions as a huge pedagogical and ideological resource for training the youth and for socializing the adults. The paper also unpacks the epistemology of the Akan social order as a function of good thinking on the part of the individual members and this is a prerequisite for a peaceful society.

### INTRODUCTION

*Anansesem* is a kind of folktales of the Akans. It is found in other cultures that might have some blood ties with the Akans and these include some people in Jamaica, Suriname, Poeto Rico, Tobago and even the Blacks in the US. And in all these places, *anansesem*, even though it might be given a different name, it still endures. It is a kind of tale that belongs to the folklore of these people and Dundes defines folklore as a verbal art that serves as marker of group identity, when the group has a tradition they can call their own (Dundes, 1965: 2). The identity is in the ownership and this is where we would like to situate *anansesem* within the context of literary studies. Ordinarily, we would not have done this but as ethnographers, reading other intellectuals who ask an old question with regard to the legitimacy of the literariness of folklore for reasons of it belonging to a non-writing culture could be disturbing. And this is what makes situating the genre in the literary field of study important. The question, however, is: to what extent is the local definition of literature informed by the Akan socio-philosophical concept of what a text is and to what extent do we accept this genre to be in the

mainstream of World literature, that is the cosmopolitan and vernacular dynamics? Obviously, research into the literariness of vernacular in World Literature has been inadequate and this study seeks to contribute to popularizing literary expression in indigenous language which has been neglected for a long time.

Thus the problem this paper seeks to address is the belief by the uninitiated that *anansesem* is executed for the main purpose of entertainment. The study therefore aims at analyzing *anansesem* in order to reveal the tale as an ideological source and a pedagogical tool; to unearth *ananse* as an art and a character; to trace the history of how orality was dismissed to the advantage of the written; and how anthropologists rediscovered orality as a major literary expression. We also investigate how the relationship between the Metropolitan literature and English language has contributed to the slow development of literature in vernacular and how the textual analysis of vernacular literature (in the form of *anansesem*) demonstrates the philosophy of the Akan social interaction. The study reveals that *anansesem* is still relevant in the Akan culture not only as a source of entertainment.

It is a pedagogical tool, a source of traditional philosophy among the Akans and wisdom is drawn from it for social interactions among the Akans.

*Anansesem* in the Akan tradition is a narrative art usually practiced by old ladies who would assemble the children in the house around the hearth. It is also practiced during funerals as a form of entertainment to keep wake. We also have professional narrators who perform it for a fee and they perform for adult audience, especially tourists. We have such groups in Ekumfi Atwea (Agyekum, 2011). As a narrative or a folktale, it possesses all the qualities of a narrative; themes, genre, plot, characterization, setting, tropes, forms and all the other aspects of the narrative one can think of. The only difference is its geographical origin; it is not a western phenomenon but African. This difference could be a very slippery ground when it comes to treating it as a genuine literary genre because there are not enough theories to cover it, at least in Africa, and hence its restricted if not non-existent use in schools in Ghana (Arthur, 2020). It is therefore all right to talk of it in ordinary man's language but investing it with the allure of intellectual discourse poses problems to some Ghanaian scholars. Of course, the folktale as folklore coming under cultural studies belongs to anthropology but a study of the text belongs to literature, even though there are still grey areas when it comes to definition. However, Dundes, the father of folkloristics, is very emphatic that the study of folklore is in literature and for him "the definition of the materials and the discipline should become clearer as the relationships between the study of folklore and the study of literature and anthropology" (Arthur, 2020) are fully explored. In the Departments of English, the folktale is considered as performance which Richard Bauman alludes to as being oral literary texts (Bauman, 1977), the texts are frozen to permanence in the form of recording, transcribing or by writing. Thus a phenomenon which otherwise could have been an oral practice then moves from one context to the other (Bauman, 1977; Silverstein and Urban, 1996). This study is therefore dealing with a text, a permanent artifact, that is the product of a performance, never-to-be repeated realization or concretization of the text (Barber, 2003). Shakespeare did not write his plays to be studied the way we do but he wrote them to be acted on stage. And yet, in the Departments of English, we study the Shakespearean text, that permanent artifact and not the plays he directed during his time. The study of this development is made even easier by A. B. Lord who proved that the songs by the Yugoslav poets, written down by the researchers, still remained oral works and not written works even though they were written down. In other words, what the researchers wrote down was still oral culture and could never be written culture. The same is with *anansesem* and that the tale under study was transcribed by Courlander in 1957 does not make it a written text. It still remains an oral text, just one instantiation of a string of recurrent performances that started in the past, re-enacted in the present and could be re-enacted in future. The textual analysis that demonstrates the interpretive frame within which the messages are being communicated (Bauman, 1977) squarely falls on the shoulder of literature. And

so this is a very legitimate subject of study in oral literature. Francis Lee Utley is a professor of English at Ohio State University and his specialization is folk literature. Propp is a literary luminary but has contributed immensely to folkloristics and we can also mention Levi-Strauss, whose works in anthropology have illuminated the otherwise dark corners in literature and he is now considered a giant in literary studies. In Ghana, Anyidoho is in the Department of English in the University of Ghana and yet has produced some work in folklore. Indeed, the study of folklore is not only restricted to the Department of English but other language departments. Taylor is a professor in German in the University of California, Berkeley, and his specialization is folklore and literature. The list goes on endlessly. Folktale, an aspect of folklore, certainly has an important place in literary studies than currently accorded it in Ghana and Africa in general; and considering the fact that literary theories and criticism have the potential of offering better platforms for interpreting the texts of folktales, the African literary scholars should perhaps pay greater attention to it.

That African folklore has not been so much in mainstream World literature points to a lot of reasons. In early anthropological discourses, the African was referred to as the Other, the Europeans being civilized and the Africans being uncivilized (Levy-Bruhl, 1923: 384). Thus anthropological researches mostly dealt with travelling from civilized cultures to a primitive one and investigating the extent of its primitiveness. Civilization was among many things tied to writing and by implication cultures which were oral were automatically uncivilized (Coetzee, 2005). Anthropologists like Malinowski, Frantz Boaz and Heskovits all came to Africa for the same purpose. Some of these anthropologists, even after the huge success of the like of Levi-Strauss (Levy-Strauss, 1966), had used his concept of structuralism to debunk the concept of the Other. The concept of the Other grouped the world between the Euro-American block and the rest of the world all in a bid to research into the development of mankind and civilization. The Africans within this context of investigating world civilization were thought of having a fixed cultural phenomenon and this concept of African culture is still used by contemporary White leaders even though there have not been any scientific findings to confirm the superiority of one culture over the other. Being uncivilized therefore has been the frame that informed opinion about Africans so far as the Whites were concerned and this paper will restrict the reason for this framing to the domain of literature where writing or lack of it could be used as a yard stick in labelling a culture as civilized or uncivilized. And the folklore is non-writing.

The scorn for non-writing dates back to Plato's time (Gilbert, 1962) when Plato associated lack of scientific thinking with the artist. According to Havelock (1983), Plato's denial of the artist was the result of non-scientific thinking. Havelock continues that Plato's time was a transition between the oral Greek and the writing Greek. Each system of expression goes with a complete package of culture as a supporting device and what Plato is doing is to express little or no faith in the supporting device of the oral culture. And

he demonstrates this with the concept of the ideal forms, in which God is the originator of ideas and the carpenter is second degree imitator of the idea of God and the artist or the painter becomes the third degree imitator of the idea of God. Of course, this chain of thinking in this definition clearly indicates the position in which Plato puts the artist and his reason was that the artist's work is a copy of the copied. In other words, he is not part of the original creative process. The creativity of the artist, according to Plato therefore is based on illusion or fantasy and that to him, is unscientific. Finally, in the *Republic X* (Gilbert, 1962), he brands the artist a liar and bans him from having a role in his ideal city. Havelock links the artist's non-scientific thinking, as Plato puts it, to a kind of mythological approach to thinking that lacks the legs of critical thinking to carry it and by so doing, he is referring to a whole culture of orality that is perceived to lack the kind of precision we find in the writing culture. And Plato jettisons the oral culture and goes for the written one. There is, however, a very interesting development here which academics have not properly paid attention to. If what Havelock is saying is true, then he Plato can be accused of the same mistake he is leveling against oral culture because the mode of communication he uses is also oral; the whole concept of the ideal form is a metaphor and lacks scientific representation; it is a work of imagination and that indicates how deep imagination, which scientific thinking rejects, goes.

The written culture received further boost from the Renaissance period when the likes of Rene Descartes re-activated the concept of reasoning and precision started by the Greek philosophers. Scientific thinking, to the Europeans, became so indispensable and constituted the main mode of communication. But this development did not end with just communication but it extended to European culture as well and the written culture became synonymous with the European culture; thus any other culture not using this mode of communication was viewed as being inferior (Ong, 1982; Havelock, 1983; Goody, 1977). In these modern days, however, as mentioned earlier, the superiority of scientific over oral thinking has come under intense scrutiny by some Europeans and Americans and it is now a real bone of contention. Jack Goody and Walter Ong still hold that the written word is superior due to technology but Brian Street and other anthropologists seriously challenge this notion (Ong, 1982; Goody, 1977). And the Jericho walls of the superiority of the written word are seriously showing cracks. Studies by literary luminaries like Albert Lord (1960) Dundes (quoted in Bronner, 2007), Bauman (1977, 1981, 1986) and a Russian formalist Propp (1968) have put the debate beyond any doubt that the written and the oral cultures run on separate tracks and each of them is superior in its own right. Richard Bauman does not only contribute meaningfully to the oral and written debate but provides very important information on oral narration and folklore (Bauman, 1986) and his approach to narration is more germane to this study than his counterpart Genette (1983) who, even though a major theorist on narratology, believes that oral narrative can only be consumed (Genette, 1983). By implication, oral narration does not so much lend

itself to analysis but this study is the opposite of what Genette says and for that matter does not rely on his approach to narratology.

In theory, the debate may be over, but in practice, the culture of the Other, which allows a group of people to see the other group as being different, is still not given the attention it deserves. In another publication, mention is made of the various reasons for this development and this includes the fact that the colonialists know the power of language and are uncomfortable developing the language of the colonized for fear of having their control over the colonized undermined (Khatibe et al, 2011). After independence, the new nations still kept this yoke on the necks of their citizens citing reasons of globalization. Therefore, the concept of Metropolitan English being superior was introduced to the African and even after Kachru's concept of the Englishes, (Kachru, 1990) freeing the Outer Circles from such inferiority complex, the superiority of the master's language still persists and seriously subverts the growth of the local languages especially in the area of literature (Asante and Edu, 2018). The literature studied in Ghanaian schools is all full of Western materials. Apart from the concept of the Metropolitan language, there are a lot of researches and findings made in works in the Metropolitan English and they make it easier to teach such books. All the students need to do is to visit the library or the internet and the materials are available. This development finds easy accommodation in the way students learn in Ghana. It is no secret that students would prefer already-made materials, read and memorize them for examinations. And since not enough work has been done in the literature of local community, the institutions are not even prepared to put up courses in literature covering non-Metropolitan discourses and the students are also not too happy choosing topics from texts that are locally produced; a clear evidence that the "African, therefore, had a missing identity as far as writing creative works to suit their indigenous context" (Asante and Edu, 2018; 348) is concerned. Indeed, there are still academics, and even lecturers in the Departments of English on various campuses in Ghana who question the validity of contents like *anansesem*, a typically locally produced text, to be included in their programmes.

Meanwhile, the belief that these anthropological challenges in literacy have changed to the benefit of the Ghanaian or the African is now rife. Moore (1994) observes that changes in African socio-political developments in the past century have been an important reason for stimulating theoretical revision. As indicated earlier, theoretically, there is now no problem with the African indigenizing literature or studying his culture in the school because, Anthropology, as pointed out by Moore, is now more interested in understanding the process of culture over time rather than what was once considered to be fixed and permanent traditions. All these are indications that Africa is no more the growing field for beautiful harvest of studies of non-European cultural ideas and practices but it is now increasingly becoming a locale for the study of the dynamics of transformations (Moore, 1994) which is the result of globalization. In spite of all these developments, not much has been seen in the

area of literary studies with regard to the African culture. Unfortunately, the fact that colonial masters considered the African as being crafty and treacherous is no secret. This concept of mischaracterization, that is believed not only to run through Africans but their stories as well, is firmly believed by Ghanaians too. A typical example of this is how Ghanaian academics see Ananse, the leading character in their stories. Yankah (1983), Peek (2000) and Vecsay (1981) see him as a trickster, exactly the way the colonial masters used to see the Ghanaian. Asiedu (2011) and Donkor (2007) call Ananse a liar.

We will, however, understand better the character Ananse as we talk about *anansesem* as being a genre. It is a folktale by the Akans, a group of people in West Africa, in the southern part of Ghana and Ivory Coast and just like any normal folktale, it thrives on allegory using personification where the animate and inanimate are made to behave like human beings with respect to the expression of human values and morality (Peek and Yankah, 2004). Ananse is the leading character and whether it is Ananse or any of the characters other than a specific human being, the risk of direct confrontation with the target in the society is avoided and thus the society is able to purge itself without risking unnecessary confrontation. The characterization of Ananse is a literary premium here taking into account the role he plays in representational literature in the Akan folktales and that is why writers who have so far written about *anansesem* spend a lot of energy on Ananse as a character and this paper is not different. *Anansesem* is therefore the combination of Ananse, the leading character and "asem", the word, and so we can loosely put the two together as the word of Ananse which simply refers to the discourse of Ananse text, where Ananse here is story-telling, which, for the purpose of this study, we call the textuality of Anansesem. Ananse is therefore the art and the leading character at the same time and we would like to know in this study if he has so far been properly characterized by his critics as we have seen above.

## METHODOLOGY

The folktale to be used for analysis in this paper was taken from the Courlander's collection of *anansesem* from Ghana in 1957. He started the ethnographic approach by recording and transcribing this folktale and so his work serves as our data. We had recourse to other secondary sources. We used structural analysis, that is, "discovering minimal structural units, and understanding how these minimal units combine into traditional patterns" (Bronner, 2007: 127) to analyze the text. We drew on Bronner on the meaning of minimal unit, a descriptive element in the narrative which has got a topic (Bronner, 2007: 127), what Levi-Strauss refers to as a code. These codes which follow a systemic rule in the narrative foreground interpretation and the interpretations create a pattern and these patterns in turn become discursive units that subsequently contribute immensely to the thematics of the text. The specialists tell us that this approach could either be the God's truth approach, when the text is believed to have its own structures that lead to interpretations or the hocu

pocus approach which says the units are just the figment of the imagination of the critic (Bronner, 2007). Levi-Strauss's dismissed the hocus pocus theory and defends the genuineness of the unit or the code as being inherent in mythology itself (Levy-Strauss, 1970). In that case, the critic cannot import any code and smuggle it into the narrative because all the codes are supported by the text. In fact, there is a crucial need to understand fully what these codes are, how they function and how they contribute to the thematics of the text in question. These questions will be answered as we go along with the discussion.

We also added some ethnographic work and we again draw on Levi-Strauss here who believes that the codes or the units are a signification system for the interpretation of the world they represent (Bronner, 2007: 133). Even though what we have before us is a written text as part of the collection of an ethnographer, we treat the *anansesem* text as performance, an instantiation of a detached text that keeps being instantiated as and when it is needed (Silverstein and Urban, 1996). Relying on this approach, we argue that *anansesem* is a reflection of the Akan society and the Akan society, in turn, is a reflection of *anansesem*. This might sound contradictory but what we mean is that *anansesem* is a reflection of values and philosophy of the society and, at the same time, the society becomes the repertoire from which the Akan community picks values, moralities, ethics and philosophy for their social interactions. This confirms Levi-Strauss's (1988) description of the association between music and myth as being a set of images and reflections which mirror each other. To illustrate this, we have recourse to "All Stories are Ananse's." The full text is provided below.

## ALL STORIES ARE ANANSE'S

In the beginning, all tales and stories belonged to Nyame, the Sky God. But Kwaku Ananse, the spider, yearned to be the owner of all the stories known in the world and he went to Nyame and offered to buy them.

The Sky God said: "I am willing to sell the stories, but the price is high. Many people have come to me offering to buy, but the price was too high for them. Rich and powerful families have not been able to pay. Do you think you can do it?"

Ananse prelied to the Sky God: "I can do it. What is the price?"

"My price is three things," the Sky God said. "I must first have Mmoboro, the hornets. I must then have Onini, the great python. I must then have Osebo, the leopard. For these things I will sell you the right to tell all stories.

Ananse said: "I will bring them."

He went home and made his plans. He first cut a gourd from a vine and made a small hole in it. He took a large calabash and filled it with water. He went to the tree where the hornets lived. He poured some of the water over himself, so that he was dripping. He threw some water over the hornets, so that they too were dripping. Then he put the calabash on his head as though to protect himself from rainstorm, and called out the hornets: "Are you foolish people? Why do you stay in the rain that is falling? The hornets answered: "Where shall we go?"

"Go there, in this dry gourd." Ananse told them.

The hornets thanked him and flew into the gourd through the small hole. When the last of them had entered, Ananse plugged the hole with a ball of grass, saying: "Oh, yes, but you are really foolish people!"

He took the gourd full of hornets to Nyame, the Sky God. The Sky God accepted them. He said: "There are two more things."

Ananse returned to the forest and cut a long, bamboo pole and some strong vines. Then he walked toward the house of Onini, the python, talking to himself. He said: "My wife is stupid. I say he is longer and stronger. My wife says he is shorter and weaker. I give him more respect. She gives him less respect. Is she right or I am right? I am right, he is longer. I am right, he is stronger."

When Onini, the python, heard Ananse talking to himself, he said: "Why are you arguing this way with yourself?"

The spider replied: "Ah, I have had a dispute with my wife. She says you are shorter and weaker than this bamboo pole. I say you are longer and stronger."

Onini said: "It's useless and silly to argue when you can find out the truth. Bring the pole and we will measure."

So Ananse laid the pole on the ground, and the python came and stretched himself out beside it.

"You seem a little short." Ananse said. The python stretched further.

"A little bit more." Ananse said.

"I can stretch no more." Onini said.

"When you stretch at one end, you get shorter at the other end." Ananse said. "Let me tie you at the front so you don't slip."

He tied Onini's head to the pole. Then he went to the other end and tied the tail to the pole. He wrapped the vine all around Onini until the python couldn't move.

"Onini." Ananse said. "It turns out that my wife was right and I was wrong. You are shorter than the pole and weaker. My opinion wasn't as good as my wife's. But you were even more foolish than I, and you are now my prisoner."

Ananse carried the python to Nyame, the Sky God, who said: "There is one thing more."

Osebo, the leopard, was next. Ananse went into the forest and dug a deep pit where the leopard was accustomed to walk. He covered it with small branches and leaves and put dust on it, so that it was impossible to tell where the pit was. Ananse went his way. When Osebo came prowling in the black odd night, he stepped into the trap Ananse had prepared and fell to the bottom. Ananse heard the sound of the leopard falling, and he said: "Ah, Osebo, you are half-foolish!"

When morning came, Ananse went to the pit and saw the leopard there.

"Osebo." He asked. "What are you doing in this hole?"

"I have fallen into a trap." Osebo said. "Help me out."

"I would gladly help you." Ananse said. "But I am sure that if I bring you out, I will have no thanks for it. You will get hungry, and later on you will want to eat me and my children."

"I swear, it won't happen!" Osebo said.

"Very well. Since you swear it, I will take you out." Ananse said.

He bent a tall green tree toward the ground, so that its top was over the pit, and he tied it there. Then he tied a rope to the top of the tree and dropped the other end of it into the pit.

"Tie this to your tail." He said.

Osebo tied the rope to his tail.

"Is it well tied?" Ananse asked.

"In that case," Ananse said, "you are not merely half-foolish, you are all foolish."

And he took his knife and cut the other rope, the one that held the tree bowed to the ground. The tree straightened up with a snap, pulling Osebo out of the hole. He hung in the air, head downward, twisting and turning. And while he hung this way, Ananse killed him with his weapons. Then he took the body of the leopard and carried it to Nyame, the Sky God, saying: "Here is the third thing. Now I have paid the price."

Nyame said to him: "Kweku Ananse, great warriors and chiefs have tried, but they have been unable to do it. You have done it. Therefore, I will give you the stories from this day onward."

## DISCUSSION

As indicated earlier, Ananse is the art and the leading character at the same time and for the purpose of this study, we will look at both. Ananse represents an entity whose unconscious logical order is the configuration of the world. This has two major implications that inform this study. As an art, he is the system that governs the ordering or the creation of the world around himself. As the leading character in the narrative, he navigates and exposes the weaknesses in the world he lives in.

### Ananse as Art

The society reflects Ananse and here we are talking about the cultural concept Ananse as a figure and not as a character. The Akan society does not only see him as the composite of cultural expression but a system or art that operates the culture. By art we mean structures of a work that communicate patterns expressing intrinsic excellence or beauty meant to be appreciated as a social concept (Carter, 2004). Ananse is a mimetic figure, what is usually referred to as a mythical figure, who in reality is a small insect but is personified in this narrative like in all *anansesem*. Through his ingenuity, he controls his environment and in the end constitutes the center of *anansesem* world. This section unpacks the meaning of Ananse being an art by investigating the system of engagement he uses. This system orchestrates the coding system that lends itself to interpretations that reveal social realities irrigating the foundation of youth character training of the Akans.

He has a very powerful system of engagement and that every character who is part of this engagement is under his influence. He makes any character who comes his way behave as he, Ananse, prescribes. In the text, he "yearned to be the owner of all the stories" so this takes him to the owner of the stories, the Sky God. This pairing is interesting because the Sky God is a celestial being and Ananse is a

terrestrial being. In the Akan tradition, the celestial being is superior so the firmament is where the Oboadee, the Creator, referred to here as the Sky God is. Even the birds and animals on top of the tree share similar mystical superior powers. A few examples are the “Ananse and the Queenmother Crocodile” in which the squirrel was able to beat Ananse in the game of wits and was about to kill Ananse had it not been for the intervention of the Queenmother Crocodile, another powerful marine mystical figure. In “Otan Hunu”, baseless hatred, it is the gorilla on top of the tree who comes to the rescue of the lamb when he was nearly devoured by the lion. He, Ananse, is a terrestrial being and going to the Sky God indicates a structural unit of a terrestrial being and a celestial one because of the asymmetrical nature of power between the two; Ananse is set in a binary opposition to the Sky God. The Sky God, however, is seen as potential energy, powerful but not active until Ananse humbly approaches him, using his usual manner of engagement, a seeming innocent demeanor. So it is Ananse who makes him react, even though it could be said that he orders Ananse. Ananse takes his instructions to bring the hornets, the python and the leopard. This unit is indicative of the fact that Ananse submits to a superior power and needs to consult him before he, Ananse, can relate with the other terrestrial beings. The social reality among the Akans that God, whom they refer to as the “kokromoti a yensan noho mmə pə”, the thumb without the assistance of which renders it impossible to tie the knot, is the source of all strengths and that there is nothing one can do without Him. If he wants to own the stories of the world, the Sky God, due to his spiritual superiority, is the one to go to.

The task to capture all these wild animals and bring them live to the Sky God is an impossible one and the Sky God attests to that, “Rich and powerful people families have not been able to pay. Do you think you can do it?” But the Sky God does not say intelligent families have not been able to do it. This takes us to the second unit, and the elements are Ananse and the hornets. The hornets, admittedly, are small insects but as a group are very dangerous and they kill any animal that confronts them. Meeting them ordinarily would imply death and Ananse is aware of that but this is where Ananse uses his manner of engagement as indicated earlier; seeming innocence. And perhaps, he goes beyond pretending to be an innocent person to engage; he uses the system of dissimulation, an aspect of the Cartesian theory in which the mind-body duality treats the mind as a separate entity from the body and in which the mind uses the body for its games (Baker and Morris, 1996); the mind uses the body to hide its intentions.

He is able to make them believe that it is raining and it is time they took cover in the gourd. On the surface of it, Ananse is a good Samaritan whose offer becomes irresistible. In reality, it is not raining and yet, the hornets naively believe what Ananse is saying and all of them enter the gourd. The encounter between Ananse as one element and the hornets who number thousands is very significant here; the intelligent versus the unintelligent or the strong versus the weak. Outwitting them is the paradox of social expectation and it is exactly this seeming impossibility the narrative

seeks to resolve; intelligence can solve what looks impossible and that impossibility is only what meets the eye.

In his next encounter with the python, the difference in muscular strength is very obvious. This unit or pair between Ananse and Python is asymmetrical and one would expect any exchange to go to the benefit or advantage of the strong, the Python. First, he applies his manner of engagement: innocence. He is talking to himself and that attracts anyone who sees him. But he has Python in mind because he is the only one around. Quite expectedly, Python’s attention is drawn to the rather bizarre behavior of Ananse. This attention-getting technique automatically brings the two into contact. One basic rule of engagement of Ananse is that due to his diminutive figure, he does not apply force for any engagement. He operates at the mental level for attention and subsequent influence. Once he has the audience of Python, he moves to his next strategy, dissimulation, hiding his real intention and making Python do exactly what he wants. His dissimulation technique is flattery. Ananse tells Python that his wife “says you are shorter and weaker than this bamboo pole. I say you are longer and stronger.”<sup>1</sup> Python feels flattered and wants to prove that what Ananse is saying is true. And that is where the trap is. Ananse hides his real intention behind the flattery and knowing how vain Python is, Ananse is sure to have him fall into the trap. This is also a very important social critique. In the Akan community, flattery and flyting are an important aspect of cultural communication. The Asafo company, the soldiers marching to the battlefield raise their spirit by flyting themselves and traditional leaders also enjoy being praised in appellations or praise poetry. At what level, however, does such praise singing become flattery? A member of the community may commit an offence that deserves a serious punishment but if he knows his way around cultural communication, he could resort to praising the traditional leader and there have been instances in which the leader would say “I am going to give you a higher punishment but because you mentioned the name of my great ancestor and the great things he did, I have reduced the punishment.”<sup>2</sup> This is a common practice among the Akans and so they say, “wonim wonsa ho hohor a, wo ne mpanimfoɔ didi”, to wit, you eat with the kings if you know how to wash your hands. The art of praising has been weaponized here. And Ananse is weaponizing the art of praising to get Python to do his bidding. This analysis disinters the meaning of the text as a warning against dealing with people who come your way praising. The analysis goes further that being careful with praise singers is a warning members of this community must take seriously because flattery, when weaponized, has the potential of making them vulnerable to manipulations.

There is another social reality that comes up in this analysis and that is a feminine critique of the Akan society. The Akan community is a patriarchal one and women are generally made to play subaltern roles. But Arthur’s (2014) research on the position of women in contemporary hiplife in Ghana shows that the Akan patriarchal community does not only recognize the brain power of the woman and contain it but leverage it to the advantage of the patriarchal system. Ananse’s reference to the wife that Python is weaker

is the truth and proof of the wife's higher mental capacity and Ananse is going to prove it because that is his line of thinking. Again, Ananse and Python is a unit of apparently the strong and the weak. The woman is criticizing the contradiction in social expectation when anybody with huge frame of body is accorded respect irrespective of his brain power. Python is an example of this walking social contradiction but he does not know and wants to prove that the woman is wrong. He lies on the bamboo pole, exposes his weakness and gets trapped by Ananse and Ananse is full of praise for the wife that "My opinion wasn't as good as my wife's." In other words, Ananse's wife is saying, "forget about his externalities, he is less introspective" and this runs counter to Ong's concept of oral culture's association of heroism with "heavy figures and of the bizarre" (Ong, 2002: 69) which postulates that such figures are better memorized in oral cultures. Critics like Geertz (1973), Clifford (1988) are not very comfortable with this position of permanence in culture because they believe that culture is a process. In this context, it is not true that the oral culture always hails externalities and we are inclined to follow Geertz and Street's approach to culture (Geertz, 1973) which defines culture as a contextual phenomenon rather than the fixity approach of Ong because even though what Ong is saying may be correct, there seem to be some overgeneralization. Indeed, the Akans have a proverb to support the wife of Ananse's position that "akwadaa na ohu koto eni a ose abaa", to wit, not all that glitters is gold. We dare use the proverb as support even though some school of thought doubt its scientific validity but the work of Yankah (1967) has more than proved that proverbs can be academic resources. These materials bring to the fore why Ong's position must take into account limitations in his presentation such as what the wife of Ananse is pointing out here. Again, this analysis resolves the problems involved in the social expectation of the encounter between the strong and the weak and the husband and the wife. These binary oppositions show on the surface that certain things are impossible but the deep structure, using the structural analysis approach also proves that there is nothing impossible once intelligence is used and that is why Ananse, a small being, is able to capture Python, a hugely built being.

Ananse as a traditional artistic expression never ceases to amaze us demonstrating the power of intelligence in traditional culture. After the adventure with Python and all the interpretations the text offers, Ananse moves on to his last assignment and that is to capture Leopard for the Sky God. At this point, we ask the question whether Ananse is providing the narrative structures for the *anansesem* or that *anansesem* provides the narrative structures for Ananse. In other words, is Ananse's action guided by the art of story-telling or that the art of story-telling is guided by the actions of Ananse? Both are possible but the answer in the context of our discussion is the latter. Ananse moves and the story moves. He is the plot. He plans and executes them and the plot is the result of his execution. Where Ananse is that is where the story is. And as said earlier, what he wants is what is done. He decides all and that is why we say he is the art

himself and not just a character and he proves it with his encounter with Leopard.

The physical contrast between the pair is very striking. Let us look at size. Ananse is almost negligible in the presence of the huge frame of Leopard. Then we come to looks. Ananse is a sight of a mere fingerling but Leopard looks very intimidating and fearsome. And we look at strength. Ananse is very fragile while Leopard has very powerful muscles all around him. And speed. Ananse crawls but Leopard is the fastest of all animals in the forest. Quite frankly, the gap between the two with respect to appearance is just too wide and there is no way Ananse can stand Leopard in any physical struggle. The task to capture Leopard certainly seems impossible, at least that is what the surface structure of the narrative says. But Ananse is a craft, maybe that is why people refer to the leading character Ananse as being crafty; he is conscious of the fact that human behavior also has structures, be they in appearance, in movement, in acting and most importantly in thinking because all these are structures that come together to express that intrinsic excellence of the individual. In that case, appearance is just an aspect of personality. He therefore orchestrates the rule of engagement and changes the engagement from appearance to thinking. As we have already seen in previous encounters in this text, he would establish the basis of engagement, resort to dissimulation and accomplishment of intention. This time, he is dealing with a very dangerous counterpart or opponent and any mistake on his part will spell his doom. In fact, Leopard feeds on smaller animals and any posture of Ananse that gives him away as deceiving Leopard would be the necessary reason for Leopard to have Ananse as his meal. Ananse follows the same steps as provided above and comes up with an entirely different strategy at each step. To engage Leopard, he, this time, resorts to guerrilla tactics to make sure he is not within the reach of the dreadful Leopard; no verbal encounter. He resorts to security approach and goes for a pattern of behavior Leopard is involved in. Ananse discovers that there is a path Leopard "was accustomed to walk." This is a wonderful site for a trap: he digs a deep trench and covers it with branches and leaves and makes sure there is no suspicion that there is a trench there. True to his expectation, Leopard walks that path and unknowingly falls into the trench. Even though the trench is a deep one, he still stays away from Leopard knowing very well Leopard is very strong and one cannot rule out an escape. For this reason, Ananse stays overnight to be sure Leopard cannot escape. In the morning Ananse visits the trap and Leopard is still there; he is now sure he has incapacitated the king of the forest. We should note that previously, he would move to his victims and start the conversation and he does the same here. This is where he starts his mind game or dissimulation. He promises to save Leopard while his real intention is to kill him but Leopard who fails to see the real intention of Ananse does all that Ananse tells him to do: "tie this to your tail", Leopard complies; "Is it well tied?" asks Ananse and Leopard replies, "Yes, it is well tied" and little does Leopard know he is signing his own death warrant. This is a good process analysis: every action is step by step, making sure that there is abso-

lute caution and not the slightest spillage. Ananse is still at a safe distance from Leopard. He cuts the rope from the other end and the tree to which the other rope is tied straightens up, bringing Leopard out of the pit but well tied to the rope, his head hanging downwards, completely helpless. Ananse can now execute the third stage of his approach and that is to accomplish his aim but dares not to get closer to Leopard and that means that Ananse cannot send Leopard to the Sky God alive as he has been doing to the previous victims so he has no option than to kill him and send Leopard to the Sky God. Mission accomplished!

The power of intelligence, as mentioned earlier, obviously rules in this encounter. Ananse is seen as a gradualist and this term is used in the sense that the bigger the victim, the higher the intelligence. He uses the same approach: engagement, dissimulation and accomplishment, but he varies his strategy to suit each encounter. He spares the life of the first two victims because they do not present the danger Leopard does so out of absolute necessity he kills Leopard. The indication here is that Ananse does not kill for fun but that, as a matter of fact, he has to do it to save himself; he is not as cruel as thought by other critics. Killing here is part of his versatility: behave according to the situation or being a pragmatist, if you like. Again, the wife of Ananse's concept of treating appearance and reality separately receives a boost here. As described earlier, in appearance, there is no way Ananse can stand Leopard but Ananse changes the principle of engagement from appearance to thinking and it becomes evident that all is not appearance but the most important aspect of human relation is thinking.

The pair between Ananse and various beings; Ananse and the Sky God, Ananse and the hornets, Ananse and Python, Ananse and Leopard forms various units or structures that help to reveal the intrinsic values in the narrative. Ananse is the main *agent provocateur* in all these units, causing the narrative to move or develop. This central force for this development is not an agent of art but an art in itself using the other characters as research materials to give us results. Thus between Ananse and the Sky God, we learn that there is an impossible task and this problematizes the hidden truths or the intrinsic values the text espouses and Ananse proves that according to Akan philosophy, if one weighs well a situation and applies the right thinking, there is no mountain one cannot climb; just that one needs to be wary of flattery. Ananse is an art (Ong, 2002; Tonkin, 1982; Dundes, 1965; Benedict, 1931; Boyer, 1990) and a reflection of the society, the unwritten categories of the Akan society. He is a whole signifying system, the set of laws, the social construction of the Akan community. This confirms what Kwame Osepetreku Osei, 69, a culture resource person to a radio program on Sika FM, refers to as "amammre", the laws of the land and "ammanie", the way of life of the people<sup>3</sup>. That intelligence is a vital means for problem solving in the Akan community is a very cherished value and Ananse is a symbol or a reflection of such a value, a vital part of the ethos in the Akan society. Ananse is therefore a microcosm of the social macrocosm, housing the "amammre" and "ammanie" that informs the unwritten categories or the traditions of the

Akans and that in turn informs their behavior (Levy-Struass, 1962b: 173-174; Doja, 2016). The Akans use *anansesem* as a repository to house the values discussed above and Ananse houses the art. The art, using structures to serve as mnemonics (Ong, 2002), help the community to repeat these values from generation to generation without losing them (Lord, 1960; Havelock, 1983; Tonkin, 1982) and as the old ladies keep narrating these stories to the young ones, they also automatically commit them to memory and repeat them when they also become old.

### Ananse as a Leading Character

The Akans are conservatists and that means that *anansesem* gets repeated from generation to generation so that values are used as learning materials in forming the character of the youth and helping the old to evaluate their lives. *Anansesem* is therefore used on different times, in the past and in the present to fit modern situations. (Boyer, 1990) The values are timeless so they are re-enacted in the present so we have *Anansesem* in which Ananse is a footballer, a driver and even a scholar.

At this stage, the dual nature of Ananse presents a lot of instances for comparison and contrast. It is an educational material and the learning outcomes are taken from the art. And here we are talking about the pairing or the units. While in Ananse being the art, Ananse is the center of attention in a unit and this structural analysis of this art reveals the hidden truths, Ananse as a leading character is not the core of our study. He is only a catalyst to help us evaluate the other characters whose weaknesses expose the weaknesses in the society. As a character, he is a product of a creative process and not a creator as in Ananse as art. As a creator, he constructs the plot and has no direct role in the narrative but as a character he is the director of the play. And this one of the main characteristics given by Sutherland in her concept of Anansegoro (Sutherland, 1985); he is the stage director and an actor at the same time. His being a stage director is metaphorical of the fact that he is the culture and knows all the corners of the culture to be directing people what to do to be identified as a members of a cultural community. We have said enough about this symbolic role. Again, as an art, Ananse engineers the forces of causality but as a character he is a product of forces of causality. Examples abound in the text. The desire to own the stories is a sufficient cause to make him go to the Sky God. Again, the tension between this desire and what he is required to do to satisfy this desire constitute the main conflict that drives the entire plot. Again, the desire to capture a very dangerous being like Leopard necessitates stepping up his thinking capacity and he does exactly so. Quite frankly, being a character subjects him to the dictates of the plot so we see him in direct exposition, interacting with the other beings; in interior monologue or soliloquy, in this instance, speaking to himself about the inter-text provided by the wife; in (dramatic) action, moving here and there to achieve his aim just like any character. He acts in a setting and within a time frame. But what makes him different from the remaining characters is that where he is, that is where the action is. Another point to support the



above is that he causes the other beings to behave the way they do. And that is why he is the leading character.

The units or the structures provide the opportunity for the characters to interact, specifically for Ananse to come into contact with the other characters and the results of such interactions are lessons to take home and these lessons are the taboos of the society. It has been presented in another work that he is the examiner, evaluating the intelligence level of other characters. When he goes to the other animals, he sets his exams and if their intelligence level is low, they fail and pay heavily for failing. Let us get it right. For Ananse, there is nothing like trial test and if you do not perform, that is your doom; a reflection of real life situation. When he wants the stories, he goes to the Sky God and the sky is a symbol of authority in the Akan culture (Arthur, 2020). He therefore goes for not only permission but inspiration as well. As for the Sky God, he stands for the Supreme Being, the “Obɔadɛ” who created heaven and earth and all we do is to please Him and He, in return, give us what we want. When he meets the hornets, we learn of the consequences of naivety and credulousness. The hornets are not alert. They are only interested in what meets the eye, only the surface structure. On the surface, Ananse was able to simulate rain as part of his dissimulation tactics but just a little bit of the quest to ask some questions could have saved them. In fact, the Akan culture as an oral culture does not operate on the lines of the Cartesian concept in which Descartes even doubts his mind until all questions are resolved through thinking. We call that critical thinking and just a bit of that exposed Ananse. Some critics like Jack Goody and Walter Ong would like to make us believe that one of the characteristics of the written culture is its ability to do critical thinking. They are supported by Karl Popper (1962). In this context, we see that the only way to avoid Ananse’s trap is to do critical thinking. In fact, in another story in which the Crocodile did critical thinking, Ananse nearly deceived her into thinking that he was going to help her when he was really going to kill her. It is only the smartness of the Crocodile, who unleashed a heavy blow with her tail resulting in severing the head of Ananse from his body, and according to that *anansesem*, that is why Ananse carries no head. It is therefore not cast in stones that Ananse always succeeds in deceiving the other characters. The hornets fail because they lack a virtue: carefulness and discernment. For their punishment, they are captured. Again, when he meets Python, it is Python’s weakness of pride or vanity that gives him away. Why does he want to prove to Ananse that he is taller and stronger? The comparative adjectives, “stronger” and “taller” are indicative of power. The quest to satiate this sense is what makes him fall into the trap. Let us remember, Ananse usually looks for a permanent attribute or behavior before he crafts his trap and knowing very well that the Python is proud and vain, Ananse made mincemeat out of him. In addition, the vanity in Python makes him believe so easily. The fact that somebody says something contrary to what he believes, he instinctively presses his pride button to set the records straight. As indicated earlier, we should desist from allowing ourselves to be carried away by flattery but more importantly, Ananse as a character is allowing Python

to expose the vices of credulity and vanity. Ananse therefore brings home the fact that we walk on a very slippery ground if we allow passion in the form of pride and vanity to rule our head and that if we do, we open ourselves to vulnerabilities that have the potential of killing us.

Furthermore, as a character, his encounter with Leopard is worth analyzing. He plays his cards well knowing very well how dangerous Leopard is; he observes the necessary distance in terms of contact to avoid any fatality. This position by Ananse is the result of Ananse being a character who knows his fellow character and what his fellow character is capable of doing. He also takes advantage of the predictability of Leopard to trap him. Predictability is systematicity and to Foucault (1977), systematicity is a key ingredient in power manipulation. Ananse is able to read the security details of Leopard and apply a guerrilla warfare tactics to trap Leopard. The question is: what about if Ananse does not know that Leopard always plies that path? Of course, he might resort to other means, and the work might not be that easier. Again, Leopard is credulous in thinking that Ananse has any good intentions for him and that is why he believes Ananse and ties the rope to the tail. If Leopard does not credulously think that Ananse is up to something good, another character might walk around, see his plight and save him because Ananse cannot get into the pit to bring Leopard out. But, at least, some other character might shout for help and Leopard could have his head on his neck.

As indicated earlier, the text under study is just one instantiation of a detached text that has existed in the past and keeps being re-instantiated from time to time. Let us be clear that the text we are talking about is the permanent artefact, written by hand or printed by machine but performance is unique, never-be-repeated realization of the text (Barber, 2003). In other words, it is a myth that is re-enacted or re-invented in a particular situation for a specific purpose and like any other myth, it could be for historical, political, judicial, entertainment or educational purposes (Bauman, 1975, 1977). We will, however, know the function of this *anansesem* performance when we have considered the framing of the performance that brings out the interpretive context that provides guidelines for the genre (Bateson, 1972, quoted in Bronner, 2007).

Before we can really follow the performance of this *anansesem*, it is important we consider it as a genre. Indeed, all that we have said above are the products of *anansesem* being the genre it is but for this paper, starting the discussion with the generic aspect of *anansesem* would have risked throwing the discussion too open. This section is only interested in how the genre frames and forms narratology and the thematics of *anansesem* as indicated by the results of structural analysis or the stylistics. The elements of literature mentioned here are common in all literary genres but they are framed in a special way by each genre, be it oral, written, detective, picaresque, psychological, historical, poetic and so forth. Bauman therefore insists that in dealing with the genre, the text seems to say: interpret what I say in some special sense: do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey (Bauman, 1977). The burden

of analysis here, therefore, is how *anansesem* constructs its textuality; the narrative, that is the nature, the patterning and the keying of performance (Bauman, 1977). These provide the precipitates for a culturally specific genre that is in contradistinction to any other genre, local or foreign. What makes this performance unique is predicated upon the following questions: Who is performing? To whom? Where he is performing? What is he performing? Why is he performing and through which means is he performing?

In the Akan community in Ghana, we usually have three kinds of performers: the peers and the professionals and most importantly the old lady. In the twilight, children come into the open and play. They play “kwaakwa” (hide-and-see), “anhwe-woakyire” (don’t look at your back), “hwehwe-muna-yi-wo-mpena” (choose who is your lover) and so forth. And one of the major twilight recreational activities is telling *anansesem* among teenagers for entertainment. They take the narrator’s role turn by turn and this socialization equips each teenager with a whole repertoire of *anansesem* and when he or she grows up into an adult, especially becomes an old lady, she will have enough repertoire to select from for certain purposes other than entertainment. The professionals are adults who take narrating ananse stories or *anansesem* as a profession. They are hired to practice their art during funerals for purposes of wake-keeping and are invited by chiefs to perform to commemorate certain traditional events. We have already mentioned groups in Ekumfi Atwea whose profession it is to perform *anansesem*. The third performer is the old lady. And even though we are not told by the one who did the collection, it is most likely it was an elderly person in the Akan community, most likely an old lady who performed the story that is being used for analysis in this paper. Culturally, she is most recognized to perform *anansesem* because women are supposed to be with children most of the time. Perhaps this is not the main reason. In the Akan community, old ladies are known to be very knowledgeable in cultural affairs (Arthur, 2014) and are believed to be in the best position to train children in the ways of the community. Bauman’s (1977) observation that the performer is responsible to an audience for a display of communicative competence is absolutely right because the performer is not just any member of the society but a member who knows how the genre communicates to the Akans. She gathers the grandchildren in the house around the hearth every evening and tells them *anansesem*. The setting is of cultural significance. The children are believed to love food which is also a symbol of their growth. The hearth is in the kitchen, the office of the mother and the grandmother and the tripod of the hearth presents an indexical Akan meaning of the three stands sustaining the pot and that if an individual takes one stand away, the remaining two cannot support the pot, which is the food, the symbol of growth. These are culturally specific ideologies communicating why the children congregate by the hearth or the fireside for *anansesem*. There used to be a popular story telling programme on GTV<sup>4</sup> called “By the Fireside” which replicates this performance. The children gather in front of Maame Dokono<sup>5</sup> who tells them the tales and once in a while the story is acted out to provide flash-

backs, flash forwards and interior monologues to the plot. After the narration, she would ask the children what they learnt and contribution of these children could be amazing. This was because they could resonate well with the overt and covert messages, which have been best expressed using the genre *anansesem*.

Another element of performing this *anansesem* worth mentioning here is the audience. The problem is that because we have this oral narration in the written form, we do not have a live audience so we will consider the general behavior of the audience for *anansesem*. Theirs is to evaluate the manner in which the genre communicates (Bauman, 1977). Some of them even know the story being narrated but they lack the skill the performer has<sup>6</sup> and in following the narration therefore, it is not a question of just consuming but evaluating the skill of the narrator as well because the message is in the skill. Let us get this clear. When it has to do with good ideas, we have a lot of genres like the proverb, the epic, the dirge and so forth that have them but as indicated earlier, these good ideas are expressed on different occasions for different purposes. The ideas and the ideologies about the fact that intelligence carries a huge premium, that flattery can be weaponized, that our behavior should be situation-guided, and that there is the need to avoid pride, vanity and gullibility and be more discerning as expressed in this *Anansesem* are community specific. Agha and Frog put this in more lucid terms that the themes in this *anansesem* are “ideas and ideologies that link language as whole to an imagined language community (Agha and Frog, 2015). They are referring to Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined community, a community which exists in the mind and which in this study, is bound by certain language registers that are specific to the performer and his audience. Again, these themes are common to all kinds of people but in this context, the Akans have their own interpretation and use of them. Here, it is the audience that validates the performer’s role. Another role the audience plays is how best the performer expresses the communication of the genre. How appropriate are these ideas being expressed using this genre? How appropriate is this situated language being used within the context of the Akan social context? How appropriate is the plot? How appropriate is the characterization? How appropriate are the themes? How do the situated language and other literary structures make them, the Akans, different from other group of people? And without the audience, there is no performance and that is why we had to say earlier that in case of oral narration presented in the form of written text like what we are studying, things are a bit difficult because we have taken the performance out of its natural context. We do not have a live audience. But that is why textual analysis is necessary; to rework all the lost elements in the real performance. Again the purpose of this analysis is also to demonstrate how “‘language’ are organized or re-organized into specific register formation” based upon the fact that *anansesem* constitutes a “metasemiotic data...that distinguish specific register” (Agha and Frog, 2015: 16) and it takes a collaborative effort between the audience and the performer to identify these registers of culture that are specific to a language. But it takes only the

audience to indicate how effective the use of such language or discourse, that is the ideologies expressed in this story, has been. To demonstrate this role of the audience, we will see in a subsequent paragraph which talks about how *anansesem*, is like the SQ4R reading process in which the fourth R is reaction. The audience picks lessons from *anansesem* and converts them into perceivable behavior and at that point, you get to know how far the audience receives, evaluates, adapts and adopts the ideas and ideologies of the stories.

But why should the Akans invest so much in *anansesem* as a cultural practice? First, as indicated earlier, the youth use it as means of both socialization and entertainment. Second, adults use it as a profession. Third, and more importantly, the Akans and all people who have Akan origin conserve their cultural values and ideologies through *anansesem* and these values and ideologies are used to train the youth in the way of the Akan culture. As indicated earlier, *anansesem* reflects the society by providing the necessary mirror for the society on one hand and on the other, the society reflects *anansesem*. Values like intelligence, discernment and the need to eschew vanity and gullibility as seen in the text are inculcated in the youth so that when they grow, they will demonstrate acceptable social values. The youth are taught to follow positive values and eliminate negative values from their lives or be punished for it. This supports B. F. Skinner, a cognitive psychologist, who in the stimulus and response theory postulates that negative reinforcement is when we have aversive stimuli and that when one does something negative, one should expect a negative response. When the hornets behave gullibly, they pay with their lives by being captured by Ananse and by that mistake lose their freedom. Python also behaves naively by believing that Ananse considers him to be tall and wise and his punishment is being captured and his fate is now in somebody's hands. Leopard also let down his guard while dealing with Ananse and pays with his dear life. So what Skinner says is true: you reward desirable behavior and punish undesirable ones and naivety is a negative value Akans do not desire to have and by repeating these values in *anansesem* to the youth, the youth are being conditioned culturally. The Akan culture has every comparable structure to the Western type of education. Western education requires a class room and *anansesem* symbolically prefers the fireside or the kitchen to the classroom. Western education has syllabus and the old lady selects the right type of *anansesem* for her lessons. And she selects contingent upon the moral development of the children. Western education has a teacher and the old lady is the teacher. Western education has examinations and the examination for *anansesem* is real life. You listen, acquire socially acceptable behavior and become a true member of the community. When you do what the society expects, people refer to you as, "woho twa", to wit, you are smart and that means that you portray cultural excellence.

When *anansesem* is used as a means of education, you have perceivable behavior from the listeners. As stated earlier, these values might be universal but the Akans have a way of constructing and producing perceivable behavior out of them. Kweku Wusu, 27, a nurse had this to say in connection with the *anansesem*-induced behavior:

**We would run errands for our grand mum and our grand mum had a unique way of making us happy when she sent us on errands. She would tell us stories<sup>7</sup>.**

By implication, all the children in the house are conditioned by the stories the old lady is telling them and the result is they obeying what the elders are telling them to do. The researchers probed further the effects of these ananse stories on them and he intimated:

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

**Kwaku Wusu: We did not want to behave like Kwaku Ananse so that we find ourselves in trouble. So it has impact on our childhood<sup>8</sup>.**

He is only confirming Skinner's concept of negative reinforcement that what is undesirable is to behave contrary to "ammanie" and "amammre". Kweku Wusu's position on *anansesem* is corroborated by an 87 years old, Aba Wu, who revealed that but for *anansesem*, raising ten children would have been an almost impossible task. This is what she said:

**Thanks to the ananse stories I used to tell them, they followed my advice and did what I wanted them to do<sup>9</sup>.**

The values that this text treats use *anansesem* as a site to educate the youth because *anansesem* as a genre elicits certain perceivable behavior as witnessed by Kwaku Wusu and Madam Aba Wu. The story under discussion is not a true story but a metafiction that tells you, "I am going to tell you a lie but this lie is about a social reality that intelligence is needed in all human interactions or relations." Therefore this metafiction or metanarration, a story about a story, is a communicative frame within which the story is supposed to be understood (Bauman, 1977) and also within which certain cultural behaviours are carried out and in this case we see that the values treated in the text would not only be consumed by the audience but would serve as educational material to train the youth and to correct the old as well.

## CONCLUSION

Babcock says that folktales have been neglected in literary studies because it is believed the stories are produced by primitive people (Babcock, 1977). In Ghana, the academic status of folktale worsens due to the fact that the text is locally produced and it is believed that it cannot serve as a model for learning good English. But all has changed now. The introduction of stylistics and structural analysis of texts have conferred a new status on a folktale like *anansesem* and it can now be studied and analyzed like any Metropolitan literary text. In this text, pairing the characters creates units of binary opposites; every unit comprises Ananse being intelligent and the other character being unintelligent. But we learn that Ananse is himself the art, the symbolic communication of the Akan culture expressing all the "ammanie" and "amammre", the traditions and the customary laws of the land. As the art or the symbol of the culture, he gives us the do's of the social ethics; be intelligent, be yourself and judge the social demand of every situation before you act. As a leading character, he gives us the taboos of the social ethics of the Akan commu-

nity; do not be gullible, do not be vain and do not be predictable. These values are repeated during ananse story telling sessions just to drill them into the youth of Akans so that they grow up to become good Akans and to the Akan adults, the message is that the foundation of a good society is wisdom. The study therefore concludes that *anansesem* is still relevant in the Akan culture. It is not only a source of entertainment and relaxation after the day's work. It is a pedagogical tool, a source of traditional philosophy among the Akans and wisdom is drawn from it for constructive social interactions.

## END NOTES

1. See story provided above
2. See story provided above
3. A cultural radio programme on Sika FM, Kumasi, 14/03/2020.
4. Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Television
5. That is her pseudonym. Her real name is Grace Omaboe and she is a huge icon in the film industry in Ghana.
6. This does not apply to peer narrators of young people who group and use *anansesem* as a means of entertainment. They are all amateur story-tellers.
7. Interview with Kweku Wusu, Yamoransah, Central Region of Ghana, 22/07/2017
8. Interview with Kweku Wusu, Yamoransah, Central Region of Ghana, 22/07/2017
9. Interview with Aba Wu, Yamoransah, Central Region, Ghana, 22/07/2017

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