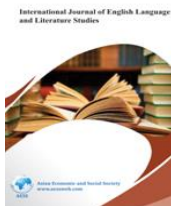




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### THE THEME OF BETRAYAL OF FRIENDSHIP IN AKAN FOLKTALES

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper is a critical analysis of the theme of betrayal of friendship as a human experience in four selected Akan folktales (Afs). It leans on the Horatian view of literature as useful and pleasurable and also on the Performance Theory which considers the folkloric tale-text in its entirety as oral literature. Apart from the human beings, the other characters of the four selected Afs are animals and supernatural beings that are personified. Therefore, betrayal in the stories actually reflects what occurs in human society. The paper attempts to find the dimensions of betrayal of friendship as to the causes, consequences and lessons. An individual can betray an individual or a group, whether that individual or group is high and mighty or low and vulnerable. In all the Afs studied, betrayal of friendship stems from greed and manifests itself in several ways such as disloyalty and cheating. The consequences are grave and can lead to ingrained hatred and chaos. The betrayed gets hurt and revengeful while the betrayer may suffer punishment or shame. However, betrayers sometimes escape punishment whereas their accomplices usually get punished. An agreement between friends may be based on trust only, but it is better that the terms and conditions are clearly stated. Unarguably, integrity and loyalty are sine qua non in an agreement if betrayal is to be avoided and friendship sustained, thereby maintaining social harmony and cohesion. It is noted that the Akan society, like others, abhors betrayal of friendship and indeed all betrayal-related vices such as greed and corruption. This is invariably expressed by the audience as captured during the performances of the selected tales. It is concluded that the Afs are a powerful medium for examining betrayal of friendship as well as society's disapproval of betrayal and its associated social cankers.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Friendship is important in society, family and other human groupings. Since folktales invariably reflect the human society, it is understandable that friendship is a common subject of many folktales. Friendship, however, sometimes breaks down as discovered by Dundes (1971), who used the idea as a structural frame to categorise African folktales in his work: “The Making and Breaking of Friendships”. This sad situation can often be traced to violations of trust or betrayal on the part of a trusted friend(s). As Jackson (2000) observes, trust is a very necessary ingredient of life and so life without trust is unimaginable. Trust allows “the formation of bonds of utility, community and intimacy” (p. 89). Yet trust can be abused in friendship causing a friend to feel betrayed.

As a theme, betrayal of friendship has appeared in various stories both oral and written. Stories pointing to betrayal (especially of trust) are popularly observed in the Bible, and also in some other literary works in English and French, among other languages, for example, the biblical story of Samson and his wives, and that of Judas and the death of Jesus (Judges 14: 15-20; 16: 4-21 and John 18: 2-5 (Dickson, 2011); the story of “The Farmer and the Viper” (Aesop, 2003); the story of “Julius Caesar”, and “Othello, The Moor of Venice” in those eponymous plays (Shakespeare, 2006); the story of the animals in *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1999) as well as the story of “Le Villageois et le Serpent” (La Fontaine, 1993); and the story of the Boy in *Une Vie de Boy* (Oyono, 1970). In the Afs, Rattray’s 1930 Collection entitled *Akan-Ashanti Folk-tales* contains some tales which could be said to depict betrayal of friendship and of trust, for example, the story of *Apupuo* the Fresh-Water Mussel and her colleagues in “Why the Apupuo (Fresh-Water Mussel) which made her Rivers flow Itself lies on the River Bank” (Rattray, 1969).

However, while Rattray collected, transcribed and translated some Afs, he, like other scholars (Hutchison, 1994; Gyesi-Appiah, 1997; Owusu-Sarpong, 2002; 1998) who have collected and or studied some Afs (Danquah, 1944; Yeboa-Dankwa, 1988; Opoku-Agyemang, 1999; Asante, 2004) did not analyse the tales as betrayal of friendship. This work is an attempt to fill that gap. The objective is to find out the dimensions of betrayal of friendship as to the causes, the consequences and the lessons. It is therefore a further contribution to the knowledge that the Afs are useful as a source of pleasurable instruction (Horace, 1998). (As a form of literature), “poetry”, according to Horace, is not enough as beautiful, but “it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer’s mind wherever it will” (p. 100). Performance Theory is also considered because the tale-text used for the analysis in this paper captures the dynamics of the folktale performance as far as possible, in particular, the narrator-audience interactions (comments, remarks, questions, answers, songs, etc.). As a form of oral literature, the folktale is better appreciated in performance, which also is mainly the result of interaction between performer (storyteller or narrator) and audience (listeners and potential storytellers), a view shared by African oral literature scholars such as Finnegan (1970) and Okpewho (1990).

This paper critically examines the theme of betrayal of friendship as a human experience in four Akan folktales (Afs), specifically Tales 17, 19, 36 and 49, selected from the folktale collection

of Mireku-Gyimah (2011) which captures performance of tales (narrator and audience participants interactions) to find out the causes, consequences and any lessons that could be learnt through the literary medium of Afs. The plots, the characters and, as previously hinted, the audience reactions are all considered in this critical analysis.

Apart from the human beings, the selected tales use personified animals and supernatural beings to tell the stories of human beings and human society. Tale 36 involves two individuals, Tale 19 involves an individual and a group, Tale 17 involves an individual and a group and also two individuals while Tale 49 involves an individual and a family. *Kwaku Ananse* the Spider, the most popular trickster in the Afs, is the protagonist and betrayer in the first three tales while Dog features as the protagonist and betrayer in the fourth.

Although the Collection contains both the English and Akan versions of the tales, because of limited space, only the English version is included in this paper: Tale 36: "The Origin of Cobwebs" (pp. 210-217); Tale 17: "*Kwaku Ananse* the Spider's Friendship With *Ɔsono* the Elephant" (pp. 108-110). Tale 19: "*Kwaku Ananse* the Spider and (*O*)*Kusie* the Rat's Drum Language" (pp. 121-122); and Tale 49: "It is Bad to Reveal a Secret" (pp. 328 – 331).

It is to be noted that, for ease of reference, the tales have been reproduced in the Appendix to this paper, but the pages containing the tales are different from those in the original collection. In the Appendix, the pages are the following in brackets: Tale 36 (pp. 16-21), Tale 17 (pp. 21-23), Tale 19 (23-25) and Tale 49 (pp. 25-28). These are the pages referred to in this paper.

## 2. THE SELECTED AFS IN BRIEF

### 2.1. Tale 36: The Origin of Cobwebs

In this tale, Nsia, Skygod's mother is announced dead. Kwaku Ananse promises to make the royal funeral really grand. He would come and wail, very professionally, at the funeral ground, through his mouth and through his anus. He hatches a plan and solicits the help of his friend, Kwaku Lekule, to accomplish it: Kwaku Lekule will hide in Ananse's anus and provide accompaniment to Ananse's wailing. The plan is excellently executed: Ananse, camouflaged as a "solo", wails to the admiration of everybody - through his mouth and through his anus. Impressed, Skygod rewards him handsomely with His choicest bull, and Ananse promises to return later for the performance of the fortieth day rites. Back home, Ananse consumes the meat alone totally forgetting about his partner and friend. Skygod sends a reminder to Ananse about the imminent fortieth day rites for the dead mother. Ananse again solicits the help of his friend so as to enable him repeat the excellent "solo" wailing to grace the occasion. Lekule cheerfully agrees to Ananse's appeal. This time around, Lekule asks to be transported in Ananse's anus right from home, which is agreed. However, midway to the venue of the event on the D-day, Lekule asks to be dropped so that he can attend to nature's call. He is released from Ananse's anus. Lekule goes away and never comes back to join Ananse for the much expected wonderful performance. Without Lekule's melodious accompaniment from Ananse's anus, Ananse is obviously unable to wail to expectation. Ananse's plan thus foiled, his trick becomes evident and he is exposed. Consequently, he is

arrested and punished: at first, he is imprisoned and, later, thrown into a river instead of fire when Ananse tactically hints that he would drown since he has never crossed a river and so would prefer to be hurled into fire. The people have been afraid that cunning Ananse might slip off from the fire but, sooner than later, Ananse actually escapes from drowning by clinging onto a branch and, there and then, he starts weaving cobwebs. Thus cobwebs came into the world.

## **2.2. Tale 17: Kwaku Ananse the Spider's Friendship With Osono The Elephant**

In this tale, Kwaku Ananse once visits Father Elephant who is critically ill. The wife and the children have tried every physician and every drug recommended to them as potent but to no avail. Ananse promises to cure Elephant and demands that the family cuts and roasts a chunk of Elephant's flesh for him to use in preparing a potent concoction to heal Elephant. The wife and children do as Ananse tells them. Kwaku Ananse leaves the house with the meat but does not call again or bring any medicine to heal Elephant. The suffering Father Elephant sends emissaries to Ananse on two occasions, one after the other, to inquire about the promise but, each time, Ananse does not open the door to the messenger. When Ananse refuses to receive the first messenger, who is a young child of the Elephant, the wife follows up. Rather, Ananse cynically sings to taunt them, each time. In his lyrics, he insinuates that he has cut some of the roasted meat – “the father's bottom” and, later, “the husband's bottom” - for a friend, and also cut a portion - which he has already “eaten”. Mockingly, Ananse also observes to them in the song how very tasty their dear one's meat is: “it even surpasses the taste of beef” (pp. 31 & 32). When this is communicated to the languishing Father Elephant, he is seized with so much anger that his wife suggests that he gets bundled and sent to Ananse's house. On reaching there, Father Elephant gathers all his remaining strength, bangs Ananse's door and furiously charges at Ananse who, sensing trouble, quickly escapes into the cobwebs in the rafters.

## **2.3. Tale 19: Kwaku Ananse the Spider and (O) Kusie the Rat's Drum Language**

In this tale, Kwaku Ananse approaches a chief and his elders in a certain town and convinces them to offer him the sheep earmarked for an impending ritual sacrifice. In return, he promises to offer himself for the sacrifice at the appointed time. Ananse then carefully works out a plan and enlists the services of Rat, his good friend, to help him escape his impending death. He promises to enjoy the sheep with Rat when the plan is successfully executed. Ananse instructs Rat to burrow an underground hole all the way to the Chief's palace into the special room, where the talking drums are stored. Then, just before the time slated for the sacrifice, Rat is to beat the talking drums very carefully to sound a warning to the Chief to free Ananse for the simple reason that Ananse's blood is most unsuitable for the sacrifice. Rat expertly plays the drum seriously warning that killing Ananse will bring disaster, but freeing Ananse will bring prosperity to the town. The plan works out perfectly well and Ananse escapes execution. A short while later after gaining his freedom, Ananse runs home to announce to his family that he has found a very big Rat. With his children,

Ananse arrives at Rat's hole, where Ananse supervises the smoking out of Rat and gets him killed. Ananse enjoys the carcass of Rat with his family as food.

#### **2.4. Tale 49: It is bad to reveal a Secret**

In this tale, Rabbit one day meets Dog and his comrades, being all the other animals, at a secret place and teaches them a song, which they all swear an oath to keep secret. Dog has the sweetest voice then. One day, Dog's landlady feeds him with very delicious food and asks probing questions about the daily activities of Dog and his comrades. Dog tells her everything about them and also sings the song to her. So he ends up revealing the secret of the animals. The comrades learn about what their friend has done. They summon him and confirm the information. He is found guilty and his colleagues punish him severely. They torture him by slitting both sides of his jaw thereby disabling Dog from ever singing again.

### **3. DISCUSSION OF BETRAYAL, THE CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND THE LESSONS**

This discussion examines the betrayal, the cause(s), the consequences and the lessons in each of the selected tales. In discussing the betrayal, the paper analyses the partnership and the agreement as well as the obligations and expectations.

In the story of Tale 36, there are two friends: Kwaku Ananse (KA) and Kwaku Lekule (KL). KA and KL consent to do something together in order to produce excellent results, that is, they agree to wail in symphony, orchestra-style, and impress Skygod at the funeral of His mother, Nsia. Thus the partnership is at the level of two individuals. We note the obligations: while KA wails normally from the mouth, KL will wail from the anus as accompaniment. However, they do not state any terms and conditions of their agreement as to how to share any possible rewards. In fact, from our story, it is doubtful that KA himself or KL knew there would be a reward at all. So it is understandable that they do not, for example, establish how each will benefit from what each will do in the deal.

Even though it is true that both KA and KL were unsure of certain benefits at all, it could be observed that KA highly expected that an excellent performance on his part could trigger the benevolence of the good Skygod to open his bountiful treasures and offer something as a reward, which He fortunately did. So, it would also not be far from right to surmise that KL accepted to join KA because he also thought of the possibility of the Skygod offering something to KA from which he, as a friend and helper, could benefit. Hence, somehow, each of the partners had some expectations for some form of rewards and, therefore, having worked, KL quite justifiably counted on KA's good sense of friendship to be part of any rewards that may be given. Moreso, being friends, KL could be said to have trusted KA to consider him just as he managed to consider him when KA badly needed his help in the first place in order to excel. However, KA tells KL straightaway that he will not offer him any part of the bull, indeed not even part of the mere fur. Unable to believe his ears, KL draws KA's attention to the need for him to receive part of the

reward when he says to KA: “Had it not been for me, would you have received that fine gift?” (p. 25). Still, KA is unyielding; he is so wickedly resolute as to add that he will not offer KL even part of the shit of the bull.

By totally neglecting KL and refusing to offer him any part of the meat (bull), even when he was pushed to the wall to gather boldness – somehow against traditional etiquette - and actually ask about his share, KA betrays KL. Though KL did not think KA was that serious about disappointing him this way, KA carries his threat through. Thus, either way, there is betrayal, which reveals itself as cheating and KA’s disloyalty to KL’s trust. This is obvious despite the fact that the agreement is not clearly spelt out as to what might be called benefits or “consideration” (Anon, 2013).

For the consequences, KL quickly wises up after being fooled once, giving credence to the saying “Once bitten twice shy” and the other saying “First fool is not a fool”. But it is observed that, after the disappointment, KL also planned in his heart to deal KA a similar or worse blow. KL’s consciousness and subsequent reaction to wise up portray just a kind of revengeful consequence of the betrayal he has suffered at the hands of KA.

It is observed that, in the second part of the story, the partners go into their first type of agreement again. KL agrees with KA to repeat the “duo-for-solo” wailing plan at the fortieth day celebration of the funeral: KA will wail through the mouth and KL through Ananse’s anus to give that special touch. Again, the story is silent on possible rewards (though it is highly probable that Skygod’s gift might surpass the first bull if the performance is exceptionally spectacular), but before they set out, this time around, KL dictates his own terms and ensures that he is carried in KA’s anus right from home. Then they actually set off but, in the course of this second journey, KL deserts KA half-way through, thus disappointing and showing disloyalty to KA. Now, by abandoning KA, KL also betrays KA.

However, KL’s betrayal clearly becomes a consequence of KA’s earlier betrayal of KL’s trust. It is a kind of “you-do-me-I-do-you” situation and, with it, it is clear that the harmony that existed between the friends has now given way to distrust and revenge because of the betrayal started by KA, a trusted friend. The story says that, when later KA is unable to perform to expectation and his previous tricks are exposed, he is punished even though he escapes later. KA therefore suffers twice for betraying his friend; not only is he abandoned by KL but also he is arrested, imprisoned and thrown into the river. So, KA enjoys (a bull) once, but he loses his helpful friend, suffers physically and psychologically, and his end is more or less a disgraceful one since he is compelled to leave his fellows and live a solitary life in the cobwebs. This is serious considering that, in Akan society, disgrace is considered a worse form of punishment than death. Greed is observed to be the main cause of betrayal of friendship in this story. Greed leads to dishonesty, deception, duping and untrustworthiness on the part of KA.

It is also pertinent to observe that, in the first place, KL’s agreement with KA in this story amounts to connivance – a negative kind of agreement. By agreeing to KA’s unholy proposal and allowing himself to be hidden in KA’s anus to produce the beautiful wail, as if KA was acting alone in his capacity as an excellent performer, KL aided and abetted KA. Therefore, the betrayal

he suffers at the hands of KA could be said to serve as KL's punishment and also the consequence of his action to corrupt himself (just look at the awkward place where KA hid him!)

It is noted among other things that betrayal is not good and greed neither, for it is observed in this story that greed triggers dishonesty, deception, untrustworthiness and unfairness in KA. But if greed is not good, so also is aiding and abetting. One should, therefore, not condone wrong-doing even if the deed appears good. Or, better still, one should simply not follow others to do wrong. Corrupt individuals could be hovering around seeking whom they can attract into their corrupt ways and one must beware of them. In addition, partners need not rely on the good sense of a party. Details of agreements must be clearly stated and followed through by all partners in order to maintain peace and harmony and thereby friendship.

In the story of Tale 17 also, two friends are involved as confirmed in the title "Kwaku Ananse the Spider's Friendship with ... Elephant". Kwaku Ananse (KA) and Mr Elephant (ME) are the obvious friends. Here, the partnership is at the level of KA as one party and ME and his wife and children as the other party, that is, an individual and a family. The agreement involves a give-and-take affair: there is mutual assent, there are obligations and some benefits or consideration, so there is a valid contract between the two parties. On the one side is KA taking the flesh of ME and promising him a cure. On the other side is ME and his family expecting a cure and a relief through KA's ability to restore ME to good health. It is noted that KA's promise goes beyond the expectation of just ME alone to ME and his family as a whole even though it is only ME's health, which is at stake. This is understandable since the entire family is in distress and that when cured, Elephant together with his entire family, would enjoy the peace of mind. As previously noted, in this story, we have a contract; the details of the agreement are clearly stated with the obligations and expectations of each partner very well known, yet one party (KA) decides not to follow them through: whereas ME and his family do their part of the bargain, KA refuses to do his. His promises and assurances to the family are now empty.

By not providing a cure for ME, KA breaches the contract. He betrays the family. On top of everything, KA refuses to offer any apology to mollify the offence he has caused ME and his family. Rather, he decides to mock not only the Elephant child but also the Elephant wife, further showing gross disrespect, insensitivity, heartlessness and roguery. KA's betrayal of ME in this story becomes an even more serious one in the sense that not only does it involve a life-and-death situation or a friend in untold pain, but also a family in frustration, distress, and extreme worry. We therefore find KA's betrayal of ME and his family as a fraud, a calculated attempt to dupe an unsuspecting, trusting friend. It is wicked, mischievous and fiendish, to say the least. So, again, betrayal in this story is being disloyal to a person's trust, but it is also revealed as breaking a promise. In addition, greed happens to be at the base of betrayal of friendship in this story; again, it leads to dishonesty, deception, duping and untrustworthiness on the part of KA.

The consequence of the betrayal is that, once more, KA loses his friend and is also forced to abscond, out of disgrace, something worse than death in his society. Another consequence is the feeling of hurt and the desire for revenge which are stirred in the victim, ME. ME's reaction in

fury, which he is compelled to display, is noted to be an attempt to destroy KA, and ME becomes somehow justified in this. Hatred, revenge, destruction and disunity now replace the initial harmony and friendship.

It is important to note that ME's family acted foolishly by agreeing to a foolish contract. Even though ME's health condition was critical and distressful, they should have thought twice about a medicine man's promise premised on cutting and grilling the flesh of the sick for preparation of a drug to cure him! It sounded too bizarre. Therefore, it is necessary to critically examine every situation and idea in order to separate the genuine from the quack before acting so that one is not duped, or does not become unnecessarily gullible in life's agreements. Additionally, the terms of agreement, even if clearly stated, must necessarily be obeyed by all partners before peace and harmony can thrive and friendship endure. This means that, an agreement or a contract needs commitment from the parties to succeed.

In the more complex story of Tale 19, there are two sets of partners and agreements. In the first place, the partnership is at the level of an individual, Kwaku Ananse (KA), and a group, comprising the Chief and Elders (CE) of a town. The agreement is clearly spelt out, so here again, there is a contract showing the obligations and the considerations: it is mutually agreed that CE should give their ritual sheep for their sacrifice to KA now and KA will give his body for the ritual sacrifice in place of the sheep, at a later specified day. CE as a group gives the sheep to KA and expects KA to surrender himself to be sacrificed on the set date. CE, therefore, fulfil their part of the agreement as a group. KA cunningly refuses to fulfil his part. By finding a way of escape and actually avoiding being sacrificed, KA breaches the agreement. Therefore, in simple terms, he betrays CE and frustrates their plans.

In the second place, there is a partnership at the level of two individuals. It is between this same Kwaku Ananse (KA) and his friend, Mr Rat (MR). The agreement is that MR should help him escape death, by acting in a certain way to ensure that KA is not sacrificed. Specifically, MR is to dig a tunnel all the way to the palace store room, expertly play the special drums - *fontomfrom* - and wisely communicate the serious message of the unsuitability of Ananse's blood for the impending sacrifice. Thus considered an abomination, CE will immediately stop sacrificing KA and he will escape death. On his part, if he is not killed, KA will share the sheep (which he has already taken in exchange with his own life) with MR. Hence, this agreement is also clear and both friends are aware of their obligations and the mutual benefits or the expectations at stake. MR excellently fulfils his part of the agreement. As a result, Ananse is not sacrificed; he escapes imminent death thanks to MR's singular effort. However, we do not find or even hear of KA making good his promises to MR in this story.

By refusing to honor his promise and denying MR part of the sheep, KA betrays MR. But that is not all about the betrayal of MR by KA in this story. By also conspiring with his children and exposing MR to enable his enemies (here KA's own children) to kill MR, KA betrays MR on another front, in a manner that reminds one of the betrayal of Julius Caesar by Marcus Brutus in the eponymous Shakespearean classic, *Julius Caesar*. Moreover, by plotting and supervising the whole



project of hunting and killing MR, the betrayal of MR by KA is total. In this story, KA's betrayal of MR becomes not just a betrayal of trust or a "promise and fail" affair but also pure treachery and depravity, the practice of pure evil.

For the consequence, we observe that there is no punishment for the betrayer (KA); neither in the case of his betrayal of the group (CE) nor of his friend (MR), most probably because he is not found out. In fact, his evil deeds remain his own secret, having eliminated his accomplice MR, who knew too much about them. Although there is no punishment in Tale 19 for KA, the traitor, one could suppose that, as far as CE are concerned, KA is a *persona non grata*; he will become a public enemy and an outcast forever, especially if he should be found out later. Thus, although the story looks simple, it is rather a complex example of betrayal in all its forms: it is not only breaking a promise, or being disloyal to a person's trust; it is also disclosure of a secret, confidence, etc. and it is handing over or exposing one's friend treacherously to an enemy (Anon, 1987).

It is important to note that CE also acted foolishly by agreeing to what would be called a foolish contract. CE should have thought deeply about the feasibility of what KA was bringing on board. Similarly, KA should not have made a promise which he could not keep in a million years unless, to him, it was just a meditated plan to defraud the gullible. Is it that easy for an individual to offer himself as a sacrifice even if he consumes a whole fattened sheep?

In the case of MR, he suffers the very capital punishment which, ironically, he assists his friend to escape. Why? This is probably because, like KL, MR condones and connives with KA. MR aids and abets KA to avoid fulfilling a promise, which KA has made to CE. Worse still, MR is after his own benefit of sharing the booty, which is the sheep. It may be argued that MR did a good thing by helping a friend to escape death. However, MR's motive, like that of KA, remains one of greed. Greed sears the mind and heart of KA to deal so ruthlessly with MR, his friend and helper. Here again, this greed is observed to lead to KA's dishonesty, undependability and unfairness.

Apart from the need to avoid greed, another lesson to learn here is that, sometimes, wrong-doers do not get punished; rather, those who help carry out the evil plans that evil-doers hatch are the ones who get caught and severely dealt with – obviously because their accomplices consider them as knowing too much. This story also proves that it is not enough to state clearly the terms of an agreement or a contract. What matters most is the will for each partner to go by the tenets of it all. This is the only way to ensure that peace and harmony flourish and friendship lasts.

In Tale 49, the partnership is at the level of an individual, Mr Dog (MD) and a group comprising his friends. MD is part of this group. The agreement is for all members to keep secret their song and singing activities. The obligations are clear. Here, an oath of secrecy is even sworn, an action which is obviously meant to seal the agreement further. Despite the lengths the partners go to ensure that the agreement will succeed, MD foils everything by breaking the rules. For the rewards, they are only implied. There are no tangible benefits or expectations but what is at stake is that, a partner (a member) is safe as long as he keeps the agreement or obeys the rules. Despite the fact that there is no written code, the rule is implied and amply clear.

By singing the song to his landlady and also disclosing the secret activities to her, MD does not keep the rules; he thereby exposes his disloyalty and thus betrays the group. What is worse about MD's betrayal of his friends is that his disloyalty stems from pure individualistic desire to please himself at the expense of the general good.

For the consequences, MD's comrades make sure they punish him severely by disfiguring and disabling him totally. MD has to face disastrous consequences of not only getting mutilated but also losing all his friends - which is a serious thing to happen to a member of a community - as well as his sweet voice, which is his most treasured possession. The depth of MD's humiliation becomes visible in the story as, henceforth, he is condemned to live with his new grace to grass condition. MD's betrayal is also linked to the social vice of greed. He is portrayed as greedy for food and his greed makes him untrustworthy and unreliable. For these shortcomings, he suffers humiliation and physical punishment for life, proving that greed often results in self-destruction.

It is noted once more that betrayal is not good. The moral lesson is captured succinctly in the screaming title: "It is Bad to Reveal a Secret". In other words, it is bad to betray others. It is also observed, once again, that betrayal stems from greed, a social vice that can trigger other vices to undermine social harmony and cohesion. Moreover, it is noted that greed leads a partner to deceive the other, making one become unreliable or untrustworthy as a partner. Furthermore, it comes out clearly that, in agreements, loyalty and integrity are *sine qua non* for continual peace and harmony as well as a lasting friendship.

Besides the above-noted, the revelations from the analysis of the four tales show that it is common to get betrayed by someone you have really reposed your trust in, which confirms the observation that, indeed, "For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first" (Collins, 2013). It also alerts one to the view that "The worst pain in the world goes beyond the physical, even further beyond any other emotional pain one can feel. It is the betrayal of a friend" (Brewer, 2013). Further, it prompts one to the knowledge that since betrayal is very hurting to the victim, making it "easier" for one "to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend" (Blake, 2013), betrayal has the potential to spell perpetual hatred for the betrayer and that an act of betrayal "ruptures trust and contaminates relationships for both parties" (Jackson, 2000).

It would appear that betrayers, from Judas Iscariot and Delilah (Samson's wife) in the Bible, through Shakespeare's Marcus Brutus and Iago to the Viper/Serpent in the fables of Aesop and La Fontaine respectively, to Rattray's Fresh-Water Mussel and the anthropomorphized characters in our four tales are, to borrow the words of Carswell (2013), simply "nasty", "cantankerous" and downright evil and cruel". Surely, "... the thing that is worse than death is betrayal ... (Malcolm, 2013). Betrayers could be said to be, generally, dishonest, deceptive, duping, ungrateful and disloyal; they are just unreliable, undependable, untrustworthy and unfair in their dealings with others, even close friends. All the same, Kenyon (2013) thinks that "Everyone suffers at least one bad betrayal in their lifetime. .... The trick is not to let it destroy your trust in others when that happens. Don't let them take that from you" (p. 3). Beta (2013) also advises that "If you're

betrayed, release disappointment at once. ...., that way, the bitterness has no time to take root” (p. 5).

#### **4. SOCIETY’S ABHORRENCE OF BETRAYERS AND DISAPPROVAL OF BETRAYAL AND ASSOCIATED VICES**

By their interjections, sometimes as individuals and other times as a group, the audiences present at the performances of the selected Afs, reveal society’s abhorrence of betrayal of friendship in whatever situation. They take advantage of the opportunity offered by the tale to freely comment on or react to situations and events unfolding in the tale stories as the narrators are at it.

Two main characters feature distinctly as protagonists and betrayers in the four tales, that is, KA in three (Tales 36, 17 and 19) and MD in one (Tale 49). We observe a certain negative reaction of the audience participants towards these two major characters as betrayers *vis-a-vis* the other characters who are their accomplices but become their victims in the stories. For example, as a result of the misdemeanour of KA and MD in the tales, there is plenty of humour despite the great suffering they encounter. We notice that, mostly, the audience participants have no pity whatsoever for MD (in Tale 49) even though the storyteller vividly describes MD’s horrific mutilation as punishment for MD betraying the friends. Clearly, this attitude of the audiences can be said to confirm not only their abhorrence of betrayers but also their disapproval of betrayal of friendship together with all the vices such as corruption and greed that lead to betrayal. A detailed study of the audience comments and reactions from the selected tales, especially Tale 36, confirms this view.

In Tale 36: “The Origin of Cobwebs”, when KA goes up to KL’s place to get him to carry out a wicked plot to deceive people, one of the audience participants is so astonished that he exclaims “Really?” showing his disapproval of such a connivance at corruption for personal gain. More importantly, we do not fail to observe that when the storyteller states that when KA actually approaches KL and makes the request that KL plots with him to do something as appalling as that, that is, to deceive Skygod, his people and his august guests at a funeral as grand as His mother’s, not just a participant but rather almost all the audience participants become so surprised and cannot hide but voice their bewilderment when they exclaim “Is that so?” By that expression, we find that the immediate reaction of the audience, individually and severally, on learning that KL wastes no time but gets ready, joins KA and actually sets off with him for the funeral, is one of disgust at the mere thought that the two have actually agreed to carry out such a corrupt practice, which should not be even mentioned in their society. The audience participants now wonder how anyone can be that mischievous as to do that shameful thing in their society. Indeed, even when the plot is successfully executed and the audience exclaim “W-o-w/Oh yeah!” (p. 17) at the spectacular show which the two schemers are daringly able to put up to the admiration of all at the funeral, the audience participants are still expressing astonishment more than admiration for the accomplices. In view of the fact that the two have seriously gone ahead to practice their deception, “W-o-w/Oh

yeah!” is simply a metaphorical question: so these people have carried through this fraudulent deed?

Therefore, the comments the audience participants make and their attitude towards these two corrupt ones clearly show the dissatisfaction of the audience with the two dubious characters and points to the fact that the society finds corrupt practices unacceptable and so disapproves of them. This will become even clearer as the story continues and betrayal as an offshoot of the corruption of KA and KL sets in against each other, first KA against KL, as a result of disloyalty and cheating arising out of the greed of KA. The audience describes KA in very uncharitable terms, for example, “dangerous” when they exclaim once more while apostrophizing the absent KA with the words: “In fact, Kwaku you are dangerous!” (p. 18). When KA betrays KL, they call KA “dangerous”. (Here, the name-calling could also go for KL considering that he is also called Kwaku, a common first name for all Akan males born on Wednesday. Therefore, the audience participants could be said to be castigating not only KA but also KL by describing him as “dangerous”). Also, when KL disappoints KA and deserts him in the middle of nowhere, the audience participants are happy about KA’s predicament. Their comment is “A good one there” (p. 19). When KA fails to excel the second time, the audience participants shout “It serves him right” (p. 20) and when the trick is exposed and it is suggested first that KA should be thrown into the fire as punishment, the audience participants echo it’s “Good for him” (p. 20). All the audience comments go a long way to confirm society’s abhorrence of betrayers and disapproval of betrayal of friendship as well as all other social cankers arising out of it, in particular, greed and its twin vice, corruption.

In Tale 17, the only audience comment is a question posed to the narrator/storyteller: “You mean the bottom of the Elephant?” (p. 22) to which the narrator’s response is: “Yes. And Ananse’s proposal was agreed upon” (p. 22). By their question, the audience expresses amazement as to how a proposal like that could not be seen through by ME and his family as dubious. Thus, the need to be more careful in life, especially, in the face of extreme hardship, is hinted at.

In Tale 19, a participant again wonders as to how KA’s proposal could be accepted by CE and asks the narrator: “Really?” (p. 24). More importantly, another participant is overwhelmed to know that MR actually connives with KA to deceive CE and really succeeds in making KA escape the gallows. His surprise at this awful connivance is summed up in only one word: “Really?” (p. 24). Moreover, when on gaining his freedom KA gets his children around to go and hunt KL for food, a participant comments and cautions the fellow audience participants against corruption and betrayal with the rhetorical question: “You have seen how he is being paid back?” (p. 25). The various audience reactions and comments as noted of Tales 36, 17 and 19, vividly point to the fact that the society disapproves of betrayal of friendship and also all corrupt practices associated with betrayal.

In Tale 49, when Dog had finished singing the song to the lady as the narrator tells the audience, a participant is so surprised that Dog could go ahead and spill the beans when he had actually sworn an oath. The comment he makes to this effect is simply: “Is that so?” (p. 28). Terse but pregnant with meaning, this comment further underscores the audience’s abhorrence of betrayal and its related vices such as corruption and greed. Another participant, observer of the bait used to

buy MD, which is grasscutter soup, shouts “Grasscutter soup! A delicacy!” (p. 26) as soon as the narrator mentions the meal. By his reaction, he also shows the other listeners that a trap was set for MD and it had to do with food – greed. Finally, in fact, most of the participants concluded the story themselves when they uttered the words and thereby affirmed that: “It’s no good to reveal a secret” (p. 28). This final reaction of the audience participants came even before the narrator finally ended his own tale and also stressed the same point with the words: “It’s never good to reveal a secret” (p. 28). The audience and the narrator had spoken against betrayal of friendship and all betrayal-associated social cankers; they had spoken for the society.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the theme of betrayal of friendship in the Akan folktales (Afs), one of Africa’s most popular verbal arts and our cultural heritage, using four selected Afs from the folktale collection of [Mireku-Gyimah \(2011\)](#), which incorporates the audience reactions captured during the performance of the tales. It is concluded that betrayal of friendship comes in many colors as disloyalty, cheating, dishonesty, deception, and duping; and unreliability, undependability, untrustworthiness and unfairness. It may involve individuals (as in Tale 36 and Tale 17), or an individual and a family (as in Tale 19) or an individual and a group (as in Tales 17 and 49). An agreement may not have its terms fully stated and so depends solely on the good sense or trust of the partner (as in Tale 36), or it may have its terms clearly spelt out (as in Tales 17, 19 and 49) and an oath sworn to bind the partners (as in Tale 49). Betrayal sets in when one partner fails to honor his part of the agreement, whether spelt out or not, sworn to or not. Hence, although the terms of an agreement (or a contract) may be stated, honesty and integrity are necessary to ensure cordiality and thereby sustain friendship.

All are at risk of becoming victims. We must therefore beware since the high and mighty could be betrayed (as in the case of royal CE in Tale 17 or even the most high and powerful Skygod Himself in Tale 36) just as the desperate, poor and vulnerable (as in the case of the critically ill ME and his family in Tale 17). Accomplices, more than the real originators of evil, usually get caught and dealt with (as in the case of MR versus KA in Tale 19). It is always wrong to join someone to do a wrong thing, no matter how good and attractive it may seem, for that may spell one’s unenviable end. There is surely nothing like a free lunch.

The consequence of betrayal is destruction of the friendship. The initial situation of calmness and peace give way to feelings of hatred, distrust, revenge and disunity, which obstruct social harmony and cohesion needed for development of the society. Greed, together with its related vices such as disloyalty, lack of integrity and cheating, is always behind betrayal of friendship (as noted in all four tales).

Four lessons are learnt about the victims: they wise up (as does KL in Tale 36), or they get so hurt and revenge or seek revenge (as does KL in Tale 36 and ME in Tale 17), or they die (as does MR in Tale 17), or they suffer irreparable harm, which they will live to regret (as in the case of MD in Tale 49).

Unlike the other tales studied in this paper, in Tale 49, it is pertinent to observe that it is no longer the notorious KA as a party against another. Rather, we have a new protagonist (as an individual, partner or party) and that is MD. But he is as greedy as the stereotyped KA, which shows that anyone can be a betrayer. As Shakespeare's line goes "There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face" (Shakespeare (2006), *Macbeth* Act 1: Scene IV, lines 13&14).

Generally, betrayal breeds societal disharmony, and so must be avoided in human relationships, especially friendship. In a society that is traditionally communalistic, bad friends and associates are a liability and constitute a drawback in development since they obstruct teamwork. Ideally, friendship should lead to a good end and mutual benefits for the parties involved. A friend could be better than a blood relation as underscored by a famous Akan proverb: "Yɔnkoɔ bi sene onua". It is good then that the tale, as a cultural heritage, highlights some of the frequent causes of bad blood between two or more people or groups but, more importantly, those who hitherto have been good friends and neighbors. Trust is very necessary in life, but everyone must be watchful since trusting entails some risk. In all cases, traditional wisdom seems to teach the lesson often learnt too late in an individual's life that one must not trust a human being totally. Betrayal of all sorts must therefore be prevented, first and foremost, by a show of genuine love and concern in dealings among people, especially friends. Unarguably, honesty, fairness, loyalty and dependability will remain the keys to harmony and the sustainability of friendship among people(s). The lessons learnt from our selected tales therefore constitute education for survival and caution in life. After all, is it not said that "to be forewarned is to be forearmed"? The accumulated wisdom of our elders about the main causes of friendship breakdowns, expressed through the literary medium of the tale, ought to be imbibed by the new generation. No doubt, then, that the Akan folktales (Afs) teach life skills for personal as well as national growth and development while it provides great entertainment, especially for the young, thus fulfilling the Horatian idea of art being useful and pleasurable – "utile et dulce".

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## APPENDIX

### Tale 36: The Origin of Cobwebs

Source: [Mireku-Gyimah \(2011\)](#).

*Narrator:* Doesn't the *Ananse* story/spider tale say that...

*Audience:* Tell us yourself what it says (We load it on your own head).

*Narrator:* Don't we say that once there lived this same *Kwaku Ananse*. At that time the mother of *Nana Nyankopɔn* the Skygod died and *Kwaku Ananse* went and promised him that at the time of the funeral he, *Ananse*, would be present to wail in a very unusual way through the mouth and also the anus.

*Audience Participant:* As for *Ananse*, he is very tough!

*Narrator:* So Skygod and all his elders agreed that when the time came *Kwaku Ananse* would be informed in order for him to come and wail with both the mouth and the anus and make the funeral spectacular.

*Audience:* He is tough! Really tough!

*Musical interlude (led by narrator):*

*Adedende ee Kwaw ee 2x*

*Father Hunter I find your soup enjoyable*

*But your clothes (I find) too dark*

*(Chorus: The whole of the song is repeated in a different style; "too dark" may be substituted for "too red" for the second stanza).*

*Narrator:* Now, when the time finally came, Skygod sent an emissary to notify *Kwaku Ananse* that it was time for the funeral.

*A Participant:* Yes, But *Ananse* is too tough!

*Narrator:* So he should come and assist him by wailing through the mouth and the anus to ensure success, and also give the ceremony that special touch.

*A Participant:* He is not only tough but also wonderful indeed.

*Narrator:* *Ananse* asked the emissary to take the lead and go back to inform Skygod that he would soon follow. Well, *Ananse* dressed up neatly. When he got to the place where his friend *Kwaku Lekule* lives he told him all about it.

*A Participant:* Really?



*Narrator:* He said, “Father *Kwaku*, I am in trouble. Try to help me by accompanying me to the funeral. *Kwaku Lekule* did not waste time. Indeed, he dressed up gorgeously in his native funeral attire. He joined *Kwaku Ananse* and they set off to the funeral.

*Audience:* Is that so?

*Narrator:* So they left. When they were nearing the town and were roughly at a distance no more than from here<sup>1</sup> to *Odaho*<sup>2</sup> and the post office, *Kwaku Ananse* stooped and *Kwaku Lekule* entered *Ananse*’s anus.

*A Participant:* There he goes again, *Kwaku* the amazing one. He has hidden *Kwaku Lekule*.

*Narrator:* As soon as he got to the outskirts of the town, *Ananse* started wailing. (*To audience: When I sing a verse you as chorus will respond “Hwintin”*). The wailing was as follows:

### **The Dirge:**

*Narrator:* *Skygod’s mother, Nsia, is dead oo*

*Skygod’s mother, Nsia is dead ei*

*Yes indeed Kwaku Ananse ee*

*I am coming to wail through my mouth and*

*Through my anus*

*Narrator:* *Kwaku Lekule*

*Audience:* “*Hwintin*”

*Narrator:* *Kwaku Lekule*

*Audience:* “*Hwintin*”

*Narrator:* *Kwaku Lekule*

*Audience:* “*Hwintin*”

(*Response/chorus: “Hwintin”*)

*Narrator:* The scene was extraordinarily super. Thanks to *Kwaku Ananse*’s intervention, the funeral celebration became very spectacular.

*Audience:* W-o-w/Oh yeah!

*Narrator:* When offered a seat, *Kwaku Ananse* refused to sit down saying (*through his nose*), “I won’t sit down; I have come to ensure the grandeur of the funeral on behalf of *Nana*, His Excellency. How then do I sit down?” So he continued with the wailing and he wailed unabatedly. At this juncture the situation was critical. *Skygod* wanted him to sit down so that, at least, *Kwaku Ananse* could be offered some water to drink. He tried as much as he could but *Ananse* refused to sit down; if he did, *Kwaku Lekule* would actually die.

*A Participant:* It’s true.

*Narrator:* Truly speaking, it was impossible for *Kwaku Ananse* to sit. Try as they did, *Kwaku Ananse* could, at best, drink “fanta” while still standing. Indeed, he remained standing until the end

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<sup>1</sup> Narrator is referring to the venue for the tale/story telling session (of Tales 35 to 50)

<sup>2</sup> *Odaho*: the “twin town” of *Onwe*

of the funeral celebration. At last, he asked permission from Skygod to return home. Immediately, Skygod sent to the pen to select the fattest bull with an enormous hump. This was brought as a reward to *Kwaku Ananse* who, excitedly, dragged the fat bull along behind him. As soon as they got to the outskirts of the town, he dropped *Kwaku Lekule* from his hiding place. He drummed it into *Kwaku Lekule*'s ears that he should not expect to enjoy any share whatsoever of his prized bull, not even the fur.

"So *Kwaku*, you mean what you are saying?"

"I mean exactly what I've said", replied *Kwaku Ananse*. "I tell you frankly that even if the shit of the cow touches your lips, I will be a liar<sup>3</sup>, take it from me", he added.

*Audience*: In fact, *Kwaku* you are dangerous!

*Narrator*: "*Kwaku Ananse*, is it me you are addressing this way? I was relaxing somewhere (I was sitting my somewhere). It's you who pleaded with me and sought my help. Had it not been for me would you have received that fine gift?"

"I swear that as for the "thing" (the gift/the bull) your lips would not touch even the mere fur," *Ananse* insisted.

*Audience*: He would not give him (*Kwaku Lekule*) any share of it. After all, he's already got what he is after.

*Narrator*: *Kwaku Lekule* did not think *Kwaku Ananse* was that serious. Together, they walked back home very slowly.

*A Participant*: *Nana*, who or what is *Kwaku Lekule*?

*Narrator*: A bird-like creature the size of a bush fowl but not as big as this hen here (*he points at a hen passing by*).

*Some Audience Participants*: Do they still exist?

*Narrator and Some Other Participants*: Yes, they can even be found around here, not far away from where we are now. If you listen attentively at dawn, you will hear them. When the male sings saying "*Kwaku Lekule*" the female replies: "*Hwintin*".

*A Participant*: *Nana*, please hold on. (*This participant raises a musical interlude as follows. The response/chorus is "Soo Nyamaa"*)

### **Musical Interlude:**

*Soo Nyamaa, I fear Nyamaa,*

*"Soo Nyamaa"*

*I really fear Nyamaa*

*"Soo Nyamaa"*

*Kwaku I fear-o-*

*"Soo Nyamaa"*

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<sup>3</sup>A style of speaking emphasising the speaker's determination NOT to do something. Here *Kwaku Ananse* is saying that he will not give any share of the bull to *Kwaku Lekule*, not even its shit.

*I really fear-o-  
Soo Nya-m-a-a  
Soo Nyamaa.*

3-5x

*Narrator:* They arrived home eventually. When *Kwaku Ananse* slaughtered the bull, true to his word, he did not mind *Kwaku Lekule*. He chopped the meat into chunks and gave some to the wife to prepare some tasty soup. He bought a fine, hefty piece of kenkey. He never gave *Kwaku Lekule* a part of the meat. Mindless of *Kwaku Lekule*'s presence, *Kwaku Ananse* gobbled the food and chewed every piece of the meat. *Kwaku Lekule* stood up and went away to prepare some *akaw*<sup>4</sup> meal for himself.

*Audience:* Oh what a pity!

*Narrator:* As he ate his dish of *akaw*, phlegm kept running through his nostrils. He had no choice; he has done an unrewarding job.

*A Participant:* He has toiled in vain.

*Narrator:* Meanwhile, *Kwaku Ananse* had promised Skygod to return to the fortieth day celebration and to wail, once again, through the mouth and through the anus.

*Audience:* Imagine that.

*Narrator:* Soon, as is often the case in *Ananse* (Spider) stories, the fortieth day fell sooner than later. *Kwaku Ananse* went in for *Kwaku Lekule*, once again. As soon as he arrived at his friend's place, they exchanged greetings and *Kwaku Lekule* offered him a seat saying, "Here is a seat, take it and sit down". *Ananse* said to him, "Father *Kwaku* Dear, it's happening again!"

"Okay, I understand. Then please sit down again. I'll be right back", *Kwaku Lekule* said.

*Kwaku Lekule* got ready and said to *Kwaku Ananse*,

"At the moment, I have a problem with my knee so you'll have to carry me in your anus right from here till we reach the venue otherwise I won't go."

Immediately, *Ananse* got him inside his anus and set off. "They" walked briskly. When they were close to the town, say from here to the post office, *Kwaku Lekule* pleaded with *Ananse* to release him so that he could go to the toilet. He was going to empty his bowels and *Kwaku Ananse* should wait until he returned. *Kwaku Ananse* dropped him. Father *Kwaku* entered the bush. I am yet to know when Father *Kwaku* will return.

*A Participant:* A good one there.

*Narrator:* *Kwaku Ananse* waited and waited till very late. Poor him! What could he do? He had no option but to continue the journey without *Kwaku Lekule*. As soon as *Kwaku Ananse* arrived at the outskirts of the town, he started wailing. (*The dirge follows, but it is without the old response/chorus (i.e. Kwaku Lekule's "Hwintin")*):

*Skygod's mother, Nsia, is dead oo*

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<sup>4</sup>*Akaw*: a relatively poor meal of (tiny) cocoyam boiled in the husk and eaten with hot fresh pepper sauce, usually with no fish or meat.

*Skygod's mother, Nsia is dead oo*  
*Yes indeed Kwaku Ananse ei*  
*I am coming to wail through my mouth and*  
*Through my anus*

*Narrator: Kwaku Lekule*

*(No Response /Chorus): -*

*Narrator: Kwaku Lekule*

*(No Response/Chorus): -*

*Narrator: Kwaku Lekule*

*(No Response/Chorus): -*

*Narrator: This time, Kwaku Ananse did his best but his best was not good enough.*

*Audience: It serves him right.*

So it became apparent that *Kwaku Ananse* had played a trick on *Skygod*; he had hidden *Kwaku Lekule* in his anus. That is why he was able to perform marvelously the previous time. If this is so, then they will have to arrest *Kwaku Ananse*. So *Kwaku Ananse* was arrested and imprisoned. *Skygod* and his elders held a meeting. The long and short of it is that *Kwaku Ananse* must be thrown into fire.

*A Participant: Good for him.*

*Narrator: Some suggested that Kwaku Ananse should be beheaded.*

*A Participant: Oh no!*

*Narrator: Others said that as for Kwaku Ananse he is bad. He is so cunning that if you attempt to behead him, he can mysteriously jump and escape.*

*A Participant: What a character!*

*Narrator: So they stood by the suggestion that he should be put into fire.*

*Audience: That's terrible!*

*Narrator: Still some suggested that he should be thrown into a river. All this time Kwaku Ananse was listening to the proceedings.*

*A Participant: The proceedings! He was listening to them.*

*Narrator: When he heard the suggestion that he should be thrown into fire, he knew they would by all means implement it. Some had suggested he should be thrown into a river. He therefore decided to come in else he could truly be thrown into fire. All of a sudden, from his prison, Kwaku Ananse shouted frantically as he wailed, "Dear me! Dear me! I'd prefer to die in the fire. How could you throw me into water, a river? As for water, please... I am unable to cross a river."*

*A Participant: Indeed this man Kwaku!*

*Narrator: "Throw me into the fire". Kwaku Ananse kept repeating this plea. The elders drew attention to the sayings of Kwaku Ananse. "He claims that ever since he was born, he has never crossed a river. Then we should be careful not to throw him into fire for fear of unexpected consequences. Cunning as he is it is possible that he can find a way around the fire."*

*A Participant: Ah this guy Ananse is very clever.*

*Narrator:* What this means is that if it happened this way *Kwaku Ananse* would be able to escape.

*A Participant:* He would become triumphant.

*Narrator:* So they lifted *Kwaku Ananse* and carried him bodily to the riverside where they dropped him into the river, *puu*. He dived only to resurface downstream!

*Audience:* Incredible!

*Narrator:* Father *Kwaku* was gone; he had escaped. Some people conspired to wait for him at that end of the river so that they could grab him immediately he arrived downstream.

*Audience:* Yes.

*Narrator:* On getting there, Father *Kwaku* discovered some branches, jumped onto them and started weaving his cobweb the next minute. This is how cobwebs came into the world. It is this same *Kwaku Ananse* who brought cobwebs about.

*A Participant:* Wonderful! If so then he has helped us?

*Narrator:* And has also given us (hand) woven cloth to wear.

*A Participant:* *Nana* (grandfather), are you saying he has given us woven cloth to wear?

*Narrator:* If he had not woven the cobweb, the *Bonwire*<sup>5</sup> artisans would not have seen it and learnt the art of *kente*-weaving.

*A Participant:* *Nana*, tell us more about that.

*Narrator:* It is the same cobweb *Ananse* wove that the *Bonwire* cloth weavers studied and copied to weave cloth like this one<sup>6</sup> (that) I'm wearing. It is the cobweb *Ananse* made that has helped to provide the skill used in weaving cloths such as *kente*.

And now my *Ananse* story that I have narrated (to you), whether it is sweet or not, let some go away and let some stay. I transfer the load on to the head of Father *Ananse/Spider*.

### **Tale 17: Kwaku Ananse the Spider's Friendship With Osono the Elephant**

Source: [Mireku-Gyimah \(2011\)](#).

*Narrator:* This is what the (folk) tale says...

*Audience:* We ask you to tell us what it says.

*Narrator:* (It says that) *Kwaku Ananse* the spider once made friends with Elephant. One day Elephant became sick and his family searched for a potent medicine everywhere in order to cure him of his illness but try as they did they could not find any such medicine. It was then that *Kwaku Ananse* assured the family that he would be able to cure him. However, *Ananse* demanded that the children prepared a great fire and grilled part of Elephant's bottom in it. He said that he would use a piece of the "meat" to prepare the potent medicine that would heal Elephant.

*A Participant:* You mean the bottom of the Elephant?

*Narrator:* Yes. And *Ananse's* proposal was agreed upon.

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<sup>5</sup>*Bonwire*: a town in Ashanti famous for its association with *kente*

<sup>6</sup> He points at his own woven cloth which he has on as an example.

A Participant: *Ananse* story-telling session hates noise making<sup>7</sup>. (This comment makes other participants in the audience stop the noise they are making in the background).

Narrator: *Ananse* got the roasted bottom of Elephant but he never returned to them with the medicine and, as Elephant was still suffering, he sent his son to *Kwaku Ananse* to send his bottom back to him. When the son got to *Ananse's* door, he knocked and *Ananse* inquired in a song about who was knocking at his door and what the one wanted. The Elephant child also responded by singing. Their song went like this (The chorus is "*Ale che che sum ale che che*"):

Song:

Narrator (*Ananse*): *Who is knocking at my door?* 2x

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (Child): *Your dear Father Elephant's child* 2x

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (*Ananse*): *My dear Father Elephant's child* 2x

*And what do you want?*

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (Child): *I want my Father's bottom* 2x

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (*Ananse*): *Half your father's bottom is better than beef*

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (*Ananse*): *I've cut a part and chewed it. I've also cut a part and given it out.*

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (continues the narration): *Ananse* refused to open the door and so the son went back to tell Father Elephant who, this time, sent a younger child to *Ananse*. The young boy also left on the mission. When he also knocked at the door, *Ananse* sang back and they exchanged the lyrics of the song as in the first instance saying:

Narrator (*Ananse*): *Who is knocking at my door?* 2x

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (Child): *Your dear father Elephant's child* 2x

Audience: *Ale che chesum ale cheche*

Narrator (*Ananse*): *My dear father Elephant's child* 2x

*And what do you want?*

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator: *I want my father's bottom* 2x

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

Narrator (*Ananse*): *Half your father's bottom is better than beef*

Audience: *Ale che che sum ale che che*

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<sup>7</sup>A technique in statement form employed by any of the audience participants to get other members to pay attention to the teller and the proceedings, generally.

*Narrator (Ananse): I've cut a part and chewed it. I've also cut a part and given it out.*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (continuing the narration):* Again, Ananse did not bother to open the door so the young boy left and told the father who then sent the mother Elephant. She also came and knocked and Ananse went on again in song while she also replied in song:

*Narrator (Ananse): Who is knocking at my door? 2x*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (Wife): Your dear father Elephant's wife 2x*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (Ananse): My dear father Elephant's wife 2x*

*And what do you want?*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator: I want my husband's bottom 2x*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (Ananse): Half your husband's bottom is better than beef*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (Ananse): I've cut a part and chewed it. I've also cut a part and given it out.*

*Audience: Ale che che sum ale che che*

*Narrator (continues the telling):* Still Ananse did not open the door let alone give back Elephant's body to be sent to him. Therefore, the woman also left and informed the husband. She requested that Elephant be bundled and carried like a load and deposited at the doorstep of Kwaku Ananse. Elephant kicked Ananse's door only once - *pan* (bang) - and it flung open. Immediately it opened, Kwaku Ananse jumped and landed in the cobweb in the ceiling. That is why Kwaku Ananse lives in cobwebs.

Now this story that I have told you, whether it is sweet or not, let some go and let some come. I elect for the next performance, anyone who is ready for it.

### **Tale 19: Kwaku Ananse the Spider and (O)Kusie the Rat's Drum Language**

Source: [Mireku-Gyimah \(2011\)](#).

*Narrator:* According to the (folk) tale ...

*Audience:* We ask you to tell us what it says.

*Narrator:* Once a certain chief was about to celebrate a festival and Kwaku Ananse went to this chief to request for the sheep which had been tied onto a post in readiness to be slaughtered for the celebration. He said to the chief that he should give him the special sheep so that when the day of the festival finally arrived he would offer himself as a sacrifice; he would rather be slaughtered for the celebration of the festival. So he said this and his suggestion was taken.

*A Participant:* Really?

*Narrator:* So about three days to the day of the festival, Kwaku Ananse met Kusie the Rat and told him his story. He said that Rat should help him to celebrate the festival when the time was up

because he had taken a sheep and was going to share it with him and chew the meat with him. Rat said he had heard him; he agreed to the proposal of *Kwaku Ananse*. That very night, *Kwaku Ananse* showed him the directions to the chief's palace to exactly where the various talking drums had been packed and Rat carted them into the hole in which he lived. So when the time finally arrived for *Ananse's* execution and he had been dressed up in a piece of cloth *kɔɔda*<sup>8</sup> style, Rat played the drum whose language went like the following:

*Song/Drum language:*

*Narrator: I detest Ananse's meat so very much "kɔkɔkɔkɔ" 2x*

*(Some Participants laugh in low voices: "Ho ho ho").*

*Narrator: I detest Ananse's blood so very much "kɔkɔkɔkɔ" 2x*

*(Most Participants laugh)*

*Narrator: If you execute Kwaku Ananse, the land will see devastation 2x*

*If you set Ananse free, the land will progress*

*Will progress and see prosperity: Frɔm-frɔm-frɔm-frɔm" (From-from-from-from)*

*Narrator:* The chief said, "Let me listen to the drum message well." He listened as Rat played the talking drum once again:

*Narrator: I detest Ananse's meat so very much "kɔkɔkɔkɔ" 2x*

*I detest Ananse's blood so very much "kɔkɔkɔkɔ" 2x*

*If you execute Kwaku Ananse, the land will see devastation 2x*

*If you set Ananse free, the land will progress*

*Will progress and see prosperity:*

*"Frɔm-frɔm-frɔm-frɔm" (From-from-from-from)*

*A Participant (whispers):* It's the sound of the *fɔm-tɔm-frɔm* ("*fontomfrom*")<sup>9</sup> drum; oh yes: It's *fɔm-tɔm-frɔm* ("*fontomfrom*").

*Narrator:* Nana the chief said, "If so goes the message then let us stop the execution of *Ananse*. Let us set him free."

*A Participant:* Really?

*Narrator:* When *Kwaku Ananse* went back home he gathered his children – *Ntikuma*<sup>10</sup> and the others – *Kwaku Ananse* said to them, "You guys cannot imagine the very big Rat I have spotted under the chief's palace building."

*A Participant:* You have seen how he is being paid back?

*Narrator:* So they focused on the Rat. His hole was set on fire and fanned incessantly making the noise *papapapa*. As Rat attempted to say "Thank you", *Kwaku Ananse* gave the command. He said, "Kill him!" And they killed Rat, but before he died, he was pushing the legs back and forth "like this" (*Narrator* gesticulates with the leg to demonstrate the dying action of the Rat). This is why

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<sup>8</sup>*Kɔɔda* (or *kɔɔla*): Casual/freestyle of wearing a piece of cloth by tying the two ends around the neck.

<sup>9</sup>*Fɔm-tɔm-frɔm* ("*fontomfrom*")": talking drums

<sup>10</sup>*Ntikuma*: a variant of *Ntekuma*.



when you see the Rat being killed you will see it kicking its legs: Like this! Like this! (He demonstrates it with his legs). What he is saying in effect is, “*Ananse*, I thank you, *Ananse*, I thank you.”

*A Participant*: Is that so?

*Narrator*: And so this story which I have narrated to you whether it is sweet or not let some go and let some stay. I ask so and so to perform the next story.

#### **Tale 49: It is Bad to Reveal A Secret**

Source: [Mireku-Gyimah \(2011\)](#).

*Narrator*: The tale [*Ananse* (Spider) Story] has it that...

*Audience*: We charge you to tell it (the tale/story) to us.

*Narrator*: If you charge me to tell it, the tale/story goes like this:

*Kraman* the Dog, together with *Odwan* the Sheep, *Abirekyie*<sup>11</sup> the Goat and most of the other animals went to the bush.

*A Participant*: This is *Nana*'s story (This *Nana* is the current story-teller and is the Youth Leader).

*Narrator*: When they went to the bush, there was an animal called rabbit, which knew how to sing well and when he taught the others how to sing, he would say to them that, “When you go back home and anyone asks you, don’t say it is I who taught you the song or better still, don’t even sing it to anyone.”

*A Participant*: Rabbit said that?

*Narrator*: Rabbit said that. And so they arrived in the bush and Rabbit started to teach a song.

Another Participant: *Nana* (Narrator), tell us; how do we sing the chorus (of the song)?

*Narrator*: *Soo Nyamaa*.

*A Participant/Questioner*: *Asuo Nyamaa*? (“River *Nyamaa*”?)<sup>12</sup>

*Most of the Participants plus the Narrator*: No, “*Soo Nyamaa*” NOT *Asuo Nyamaa*. “*Soo Nyamaa*” – that is the chorus of the song.

*Narrator*: So when they got to the bush, Rabbit started to teach the animals a song which they did not know before. He sang:

*Song*:

*Narrator*: *Opete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*Opete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator*: *I fear Nyamaa*

*Audience*: “*Soo Nyamaa*”

*Narrator*: *Kwaku I fear o*

*Audience*: “*Soo Nyamaa*”

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<sup>11</sup> Goat: *Abirekyie* also *Apɔnkye*

<sup>12</sup>Reference to the powerful River Deity *Nyamaa*

*Narrator: As for me I fear o*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa"*

*Narrator: Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa-a-a-a"*

*Narrator (alone): "Soo Nyamaa!"*

*Narrator:* When he had finished teaching the various animals the song, he asked them not to tell anybody. Then Dog went and caught a grasscutter for his landlord to prepare a meal of *fufu*, large enough to fill a room; he had given a portion to Dog to eat, he had given him pieces of the meat also (to chew).

*A Participant:* Grasscutter soup! A delicacy!

*Narrator:* Dog gulped it all. Then the landlord asked him saying, "Dog, you unusually stayed in the bush for quite a long time today. You were away in the bush for so long. What actually happened to make you and your friends stay so long in the bush today?" Dog wagged his tail round and round and round: *frɛdefrɛdefrɛde*. He thought for a while and decided to himself that, "I won't say it." But it was because he had not become very conversant with the song; he would not be able to sing it even if he attempted to. Note that it is Rabbit's song that we are talking about. He would not be able to sing it well; therefore, he did not say it. He would go back to the bush and listen to it well. So the animals went back to the bush another time to meet. There Dog said, "Nana/Sir Rabbit, sing your song to us again." Then Rabbit raised it:

*Song:*

*Narrator: Opete pre prepreprepre e-e-e*

*Opete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator: I fear Nyamaa*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa"*

*Narrator: Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa"*

*Narrator: As for me I fear oo*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa"*

*Narrator: Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience: "Soo Nyamaa-a-a-a"*

*Narrator: Soo Nyamaa!*

*A Participant:* Nana/Teller, our ears are tingling<sup>13</sup>

*Another Participant:* The tale/spider story is sweet.

*Narrator:* So he listened well and quickly got the song right in his head and then he rushed back home. As soon as he arrived home – that day, he brought along with him a very big deer – it was

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<sup>13</sup>Literally "our ears sweet us" A way of saying we are enjoying your song and story. The audience is thereby commending the storyteller.

more than expected. His landlord prepared the meal, Dog stuffed himself well with the food. Then the landlord called and said to him, “Dog, come. So what did your group go to do in the bush?” Dog replied, “We went to learn a song.”

“Who taught you a song? What song?”

Now, in those days, Dog was the animal with the sweetest voice. Indeed, in those days, Dog was the best animal singer in the whole world.

*A Participant:* Really?

*Narrator:* Y-e-s! He launched into the song:

*Song:*

*Narrator:* *ɔpete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*ɔpete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator:* *I fear Nyamaa*

*Audience:* “*Soo Nyamaa*”

*Narrator:* *Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience:* “*Soo Nyamaa*”

*Narrator:* *As for me I fear oo*

*Audience:* “*Soo Nyamaa*”

*Narrator:* *Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience:* “*Soo Nyamaa-a-a-a*”

*Narrator (alone):* *Soo Nyamaa!*

*Narrator:* “So when you went to the bush, you learnt this beautiful song?” the woman noted.

Now, all this while that animal called goat had been watching proceedings and had heard it all. Goat informed Rabbit saying, “Dog has betrayed us concerning the song you taught us.” So Rabbit intentionally played a trick on Dog. Rabbit said, “I like songs so much so I am actually looking for the one who can sing the song to me.” Instantly, Dog raised it:

*Narrator:* *ɔpete pre prepreprepre e-e-e*

*ɔpete pre pre pre pre pre e-e-e*

*Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator:* *I fear Nyamaa*

*Audience:* *Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator:* *Kwaku I fear o*

*Audience:* *Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator:* *As for me I fear o*

*Audience:* *Soo Nyamaa*

*Narrator:* *Kwaku I fear oo*

*Audience:* *Soo Nyamaa-a-a-a*

*Narrator:* *Soo Nyamaa!*

*Narrator:* Dog had finished singing the song!

*A Participant:* Is that so?

*Narrator:* Those days, Dog had a very small mouth. The animals seized him and brought a blade – even in those olden days, there was no blade; a razor, rather - they brought a razor and they split the edge of his mouth, this way upwards (*Narrator demonstrates with the left side of his mouth*) then they also slit that side (*he shows the right side*) of Dog’s mouth upwards. Then they said to him, “Dog, now sing the song again for us.” Dog said, “*Ha ha ha*” (*he had popped out the tongue but could not produce the song or any sound. Here the Narrator imitates the Dog and its plight so well that most of the audience participants have a good laugh as they clap for him.*)

*Some Participants:* It’s no good to reveal a secret.

*Narrator:* Thus, this my story that I have narrated to you, whether it is sweet or not, let some go away and let some come. It is never good to reveal a secret.

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