

A New Historicists Analysis of J. A. Annobil's Abotar

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Abstract: This paper aims at employing the New historicism theory in analyzing J. A. Annobil's *Abotar*. The New Historicism theory, as propounded by Stephen Greenblatt, is based on the idea that a literary composition is affected by the author's time and circumstances, however, the critic's evaluation of the work is also affected by his surroundings, beliefs, or preconceptions. The Analysis of J. A. Annobil's *Abotar* captures how a writer's literary composition mirrors his/her milieu. On citing instances from the text, Ghanaian culture (specifically Akan) and aspects of Ghanaian history are well demonstrated and explained.

Keywords: New Historicism, Ghanaian Culture, Akan culture, Historical context.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is understood in a multiplicity of ways. It can be seen as a body of written or oral works such as novels, poetry, or drama that uses words to stimulate the imagination and confront the reader with a unique vision of life. The underlying assumption here is that a work of literature is a creative, universal form of expression that addresses the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual concerns of humanity. According to Angmor (1996), "literature is life" (P.1). In effect, literary works express the day-to-day activities of human life. Thus, literature can be said to be an art that uses language as a means to shape an image to reflect social life and express the author's thoughts and feelings. Lynn (2004) considers literature as "something that speaks to humans, an important part of what connects people to the past, helps to grasp the present, and also sparks people to shape the future". Based on Lynn's view, it could be said that to treat African indigenous literature in its own right, our main focus of attention should be on the established cultural traditions and historical experiences, together with those aspects of the social and political life of the Africans which are the most helpful sources of our inspiration and techniques. Boulton (1979) argues that "all plays need to be seen with their historical background, the theatre of the time, the artistic standards of the time and the general mental and moral climate of the time" (p.171). Baerber & Furniss (2006), in corroborating Boulton (1979), assert that texts do not have exclusively specific textual origins but are produced within historical conditions and linked to a variety of other texts with the spectrum of literary history. The above submissions support the assertion that most literary works, if not all, have manifestations of cultural and historical happenings of the place and time settings in which they are created. For example, most of Shakespeare's literary works are evidence

that literature employs historical facts as resources. Hopkins (2005), through an analysis of *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Julius Caesar*, confirmed that these drama texts exhibit themes that are derived from socio-political events and ideologies. Other studies have also revealed that the socio-cultural and historical happenings of a people serve as resources for literary creativity, thus, this paper examines J. A. Annobil's *Abotar* in the light of the New Historicists literary criticism. This paper examines primarily the cultural aspects of the text. These aspects to be discussed include Marriage and Childbirth, Supernatural powers, and the use of proverbs.

Biography of the author

J. A. Annobil's works, life, and activity has been corned directly or indirectly with Fante oral traditions. He was born in Cape Coast, in the year 1910. He became a teacher and graduate of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London. He was in charge of the literary center for some time, and his literary works were deeply linked with Fante oral traditions. Examples of his literary works include *Mb[bus[m nkyer[kyer[mu (Proverbs Explained, 1935)* and *Ebusus[m (The Akan Family system, 1958)*. His other works include *Mfantse Obiremp]n (The Fante Chief, 1955)* and *Abotar (Patience)*, which describe the strong influence of traditional cultural factors while mixing traditional features with either historical or even contemporary motifs.

Synopsis of the text

Abotar (1958) which literary means *Patience*, is a text that talks about a couple who have been married for three years without a child. They have sort for solutions at so many places but all efforts prove futile. Maame Efuwa Maanan, the mother of Ewura Efuwa (the wife of Yewura Kwesi Papa) believes that it is not normal for her daughter to be married for three years without a child. She thinks it is her elder sister who is working spiritually against her daughter. Maame Efuwa believes that her sister is working against her daughter because her daughter has a good marriage, but her sister's daughter does not have such a marriage. Therefore, she would not allow her daughter, Ewura Efuwa, to have a child. Maame Efuwa then seeing this as a spiritual problem convinces her daughter and her son-in-law to consult traditional healers to find a solution, but all they do prove futile. The couple decides to have patience, consult a doctor who happens to be a friend to the husband. After a thorough check on the wife, she

was given medication. After a few months, there was joy in the house as Ewura Efuwa had her first child.

The New Historicism theory

This paper employs the New Historicism theory as a means of analyzing the text. The appropriateness in the choice of the theory lies in the fact that the theory recognizes the importance of understanding the cultural context in which the text will be analyzed. The New Historicism theory emerged in the late 1970s and developed in the 1980s in the revolt against the marginalization of literature by traditional historians and the enshrinement of literary texts in a timeless dimension beyond history. The New Historicism theory seeks to reveal the relationship between texts and their socio-historical and cultural contexts. It embraces the fact that literature works operate in the time and place in which they are written and should be studied from that perspective.

The theory attempts to keep the reader from assuming a direct comparison with an unfamiliar setting or an event that happened in the past. As Wafula (2004) points out, interpretations of literary works are supposed to be done in the context of time and situations of the author at the moment of writing. However, this should not be confused to mean every interpretation is positive and leads to success in the analysis. What Wafula opines can be interpreted in two ways; firstly, that for the society to bring many positive changes in the institutions created in the society such as marriage and chieftaincy, it must look behind in time and see what has changed, and secondly weigh how the change would affect one's interpretations of the institution. New Historicism suggests that an era in history affects the actions of the societal members as well as the way they view change. This has some effect on the interpretations they give, and it affects the mindset of future generations.

The New Historicism theory also evaluates literature through a comprehensive analysis of the social and cultural events that surround the events being described and so much more on how these socio-cultural events help to build the event. In essence, New Historicism aims at understanding intellectual history through life and literature through the cultural context surrounding the historical event. From the foregoing discussion, the New Historicism theory suits best the analysis of J. A. Annobil's *Abotar*, since the cultural aspects in the novel reflect the author's time and place.

Data collection procedure

This study is a library-based one. The data for the study was taken from a novel by J. A. Annobil, *Abotar*. The novel was read, transcribed, and analyzed thematically by the researcher.

Analysis of the text

This section analyses the cultural aspects of J. A. Annobil's *Abotar* from the New Historicists' perspective. The analysis is thematized under the following headings: Marriage

and Childbirth, Supernatural powers, and the use of proverbs. Furthermore, the setting of the text was in Cape Coast, the Central Region of Ghana, and the cultural aspects in this text were from the Akan culture, specifically, that of the Fantes. Thus, it will be of great importance to know who the Akan are, since most of the references will be taken from the Akan culture.

The Akan

The Akan are one of the largest ethnic groups in Ghana. The name refers to both the people and their language. Akan has many tribes including Agona, Ahafo, Ahanta, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Aowin, Asante, Assin, Fante, Kwahu, etc (<http://www.twi.bb/akan>) The 2010 population census reports that the Akan constitute about 49% of the total population of Ghana. They are mainly found in the southern and middle parts of Ghana. However, some minority Akan population is found in Ivory Coast. The traditional occupation of the Akan is farming and fishing. However, Omenyo (2001: 26) explains that as a result of the movement of people from one region to another in search of jobs, some Akan may be found in other parts of Ghana engaged in different occupations other than farming and fishing. Traditionally, the Akan are matrilineal. However, according to Pobee (1979), the only exception to this form of inheritance is the Akuapem of Larteh and Mampong; although the Akwapim is Akan, they are patrilineal.

According to Awuah-Nyamekye (2014:60), the worldview of the Akan people is "the sum-up of their core ideas about the universe and their role within it". In the Akan worldview, the world comprises of supernatural (or the spiritual) and the living (physical), with the supernatural having control over the affairs of the living. For a human to enjoy the good things in life (such as fertility, bumper harvest, good health, etc.) and avoid all the negative things of life (including sudden deaths, incurable diseases, accidents, etc), they have to comprehend the diverse constituents of both the spiritual and the physical aspects of the universe and how to relate to each (Ameh, 2013).

As far as the Akan are concerned, occurrences in the life of human beings have spiritual dimensions, and their interpretation is of utmost importance to every tribe. They believe that behind the visible is the invisible, and nothing occurs by chance. This means that spiritual beings decide on what happens in the physical realm. Essentially, the Akan interpret or view occurrences around them more spiritual than physical. Thus, in every circumstance or situation, they believe that a supernatural force has a hand in it, and this transcends in all aspects of their lives such as the natural, physical and social occurrences in their environment.

Marriage and Childbirth

Marriage is the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship. Many factors including love, commitment, trust, time, attention,

good communication, sex, children, etc. contribute to a satisfying marriage. The ultimate of these factors in the Akan setting is children. Due to this, if a couple is late in giving birth in their marriage, the Akan through their worldview see this either as a curse from the gods, or the couple is being bewitched. Usually, they conclude that the woman is barren; and this could be a result of an offense she committed such as cheating on the husband, incest, telling lies, or not sacrificing to the gods. Whereas the issue of birth might be explained as the cause of illness or as a result of unsafe abortion or damage in the womb, the Akan believe witches have taken the womb of the woman away, although they do not have any proof of it. Every Akan marriage must therefore produce children. Birth and procreation on the part of the Akan woman are so significant that there are certain wise sayings and maxims in the language which refer to how the people themselves conceptualize these issues. Examples of such expressions are as follows: *Awo ne wo yam 'Birth is what has taken place in your womb'*, and *Esie animouyam ne mmire 'The glory of the anthill lies in the mushroom it produces'*.

In the text, it could be seen that Ewura Efuwa's mother believes that it is her elder sister who is bewitching her daughter which is why she is not giving birth. Her reason is that her daughter (Ewura Efuwa) has a good marriage, but her elder sister's daughter is not yet married, not to talk of having a husband. Maame Efuwa thinks that her daughter's inability to bear children is not only physical but spiritual. She (Maame Efuwa) would therefore do anything possible for her daughter to get married. This could be seen in the text in a conversation between Maame Efuwa and her friend, Aba.

Efuwa, ntsi Ewura Efuwa ne yafun no nny[[yie a? ... Mo nua,]rek[fa no hen? Atamfo betsie me ba yi ma oenya ba etur no? Ana saa wiadze y[hu d[m, Aba? Na s[obi b[s[[m'adze a, nna nky[mara mo nua a menye no fi egya na na kor a?]se emi me ba enya awaryie na nedze nenam gyangyan. M'amandzehu nye yi o! Beebi a meb[fa biara w]b] mo nua yi dzin d[]no na]rey['].

'Efuwa, has Ewura Efuwa not conceived?...my sister where is she going to get that from? Will my enemies allow my daughter to have a child? Is that how dangerous the world is? If someone will destroy me, should it be my sibling from one mother and one father? She said my daughter has a good marriage and hers is just walking around aimlessly. This is my problem! Wherever I go her name is mentioned that she is the one working against me' (Page 3-4).

From the above conversation, it could be seen that Maame Efuwa is attributing the cause of her daughter's predicament or infertility to her sister. She thinks her sister is working against her because her daughter (Efuwa's niece) is not yet married; thus she won't let Efuwa's daughter give birth so that they take all the glory associated with good marriage and childbearing. She thus decides to find a solution to the situation. The statement: *Ana wiadze y[hu d[m, Aba? 'is that how dangerous the world is, Aba?'* shows that Maame Efuwa

thinks there is more to this problem than just looking at it with a physical lens. She made mentioned that, wherever she goes, the name of her sister is mentioned (that she is the one working against her). So to her, the issue goes beyond the physical realm to the spiritual realm. Therefore, a spiritual source will be needed to solve this puzzle. It confirms the worldview of Akans, and their cultural background as they see the world on two sides, the physical and the spiritual.

Again, regarding the Akan culture, specifically the Fantes, it is believed that every woman was created to give birth; unfortunately, they also see no fault with the man when it comes to childbearing. Thus, even when the man is the cause of the childlessness, it is difficult to convince him to go for treatment; they always associate problems with childbearing with the woman. All attention is therefore given to the woman to resolve the problem. This is evident in the text where a conversation ensued between Maame Efuwa Maanan and her friend, and Maame Efuwa, and her daughter.

- A. *Efuwa, ntsi Ewura Efuwa ne yafun no nny[[yie a? 'Efuwa, has Ewura Efuwa not conceived yet?' (page 3).*
- B. *Me ba, wiadze yi mu w]b]]]baa biara]wofo, ntsi]ba no d[]baa bi w] h] na]nnwo a, nna biribi ntsi a. Bi a nna yarba, na ne k[se nye d[nna obi na]rey[wo.... 'My child, every woman on this earth was born to bear children. So if a woman is not able to conceive then there is a cause. It could be sickness, but most often, it may be someone who is working spiritually against such person' (page 11).*
- C. *Me ba, [y[mb]b]r ae! Minnyim d[saa ey[abofra d[m. Ntsi innyim d[wo fie na w]rey[wo ma ebaa awar yi innyaa ba nntuur no yi? Me ba, w'as[m y[me mb]b]r papa.' 'My child, you are so pathetic! I never knew you were still a child. So don't you know that your family/household is the cause of your childlessness since you married? I pity you (page 12).'*

This conversation confirms my earlier assertion about the Akan that the woman is the focal point of childbearing. Now we can say that because they inherit from that matrilineal side, the fertility of a woman is more important to them than anything else. From conversation A, which was between Aba (Maame Maanan's friend) and Maame Maanan, we realize that Aba did not ask how the couple is doing or what they are doing about the marriage, but rather she asked if Ewura has still not gotten pregnant. Strangely, although it is two people who got married, and are supposed to bear children, whenever there is a problem of childlessness, the concentration will only be on the woman. Nonetheless, the man might be the cause, but this is not the concern of the Akan.

In addition, we can deduce from conversations B and C, which were between the mother and daughter, that Efuwa was not in support of her mother's belief that there is someone behind her infertility. Her mother thus tries to explain to her

that indeed her family is behind her infertility. Her mother explains to her that she is bewitched, and thus, needs to be redeemed. In the process of explaining the situation to her, her mother ridicules her that she is behaving like a child. However, Maame Efuwa, knowing that the cause of the childlessness may be from some sickness, disagrees with her mother that her situation is more spiritual than physical. Nonetheless, her mother also disagrees with her that her situation is could be resolved by using orthodox medication.

In another instance, it was evident in the text that the Akan believe that when a woman marries, she is supposed to give birth to continue the lineage of her family. This portrays the matrilineal system of the Akan. Thus, if the woman fails to bring forth, then it means that the particular family from which the woman comes is cursed. This can be seen in the text during a conversation between Maame Efuwa Maanan and her in-law, Yewura Kwesi Papa.

'Mo wura, tsie ma menka m'as[m nkyer] wo. Mo wura, me ba ara nye Ewura Efuwa. D[mbr] wo ara inyim, s[Ewura Efuwa anwo a, nna m'ase ekum. Iyi ntsi na]baatan biara ne babaa k] awar a, nna]kyer[d[nna n'enyi da kwan d[]b[wo no. S[]ba no nya ba a, nna]kyer[d[n'ase ay[yie' (Page 39).

'My in-law, listen to my problem. Ewura Efuwa is my only child, as you already know. If Ewura Efuwa doesn't conceive then it means I have lost my lineage. That is why every mother looks forward to her daughter conceiving as soon as she gets married. If her daughter gives birth, then that becomes a continuation of the lineage'.

The above statement from Maame Efuwa shows that truly, she is worried about her family lineage. She gave birth to only one lady, Efuwa. Therefore, if Efuwa does not give birth then her family is wiped off. So, she is doing all she can for Efuwa to give birth so that the lineage of the family is protected. Also, Maame Maanan does not want to be a laughing stock in society; that is why she is doing everything possible for Ewura Efuwa to bring forth. Maame Maanan believes that one person does not make a family, and her daughter is her only hope; therefore, she expects her to get her grandchildren who will make up her own family. There is an Akan adage that: *{w} me ne [w] y[n ny] p['something belonging to me, won't be the same as that belonging to us'*. This explains Maame Maanan's worry that Efuwa cannot take other people's children to be her own. No matter how good they will be to her since they are not her blood, she is should strive to get her own.

Finally, on the issue of marriage and childbirth, whereas the couple thinks they should have patience and wait upon God, Maame Efuwa inculcates fear in her daughter. She tells Ewura Efuwa that her husband might leave her and go and have a child with another person if she refuses to find a solution to her childlessness. Due to this reason, Ewura Efuwa finally gives in and decides to consult traditional healers for a

child against her will. This points to the fact that lack of childbearing can cause divorce in the Akan society.

To sum up, on the issue of marriage and childbirth, we can say that indeed drawing from the Akan setting, and based on their culture, specifically, marriage and childbirth, the pressure is more on the woman than the man. This is evident in the text where the father of Efuwa is not even mentioned all but Maame Maanan takes the sole responsibility of finding a solution for her daughter. Although Efuwa is married, her mother does not think that Efuwa's husband can be the problem, but rather her concentration was on her daughter. This is certainly due to the worldview of the Akan, that the man has no problem when it comes to childbearing. In addition, Maame Maanan attributed Efuwa's childlessness to her elder sister whom she thinks is bewitching Efuwa.

Supernatural powers

As far as the Akan are concerned, occurrences in the life of human beings have spiritual dimensions and their interpretation is of utmost importance to every tribe. They believe that behind the visible is the invisible, and nothing occurs by chance. This means that the spiritual beings decide on what happens in the physical realm. They believe that the spiritual beings worked through some agents (physical beings) like traditional priests, herbalists, and traditional healers who possess great powers and become mediators between humans and spirit beings. These people, especially the traditional healers, are believed to consult the spiritual beings before they heal anyone with their medicines. In other words, they sort permission from the spiritual beings that are believed to have control over the herbs and other materials which can be used to heal the person. Thus, these traditional healers are believed to be closely associated with spiritual beings. At times, if these traditional healers work on a sick person whom they believed should be healed in no time, and it happens that the healing process delays, they will attribute it to some spiritual forces. They then consult the gods or ancestors for proper diagnosis. The problem is dealt with spiritually after the diagnosis before they apply the herbs physically. Before the introduction of orthodox medicine, the only thing the Akan resorted to when one was ill was herbs; and they believe these herbs are created by the Supreme Being, and therefore have spirits behind them; thus, the potency of these herbs.

The belief in supernatural powers was revealed in the novel when Maame Efuwa Maanan consulted traditional healers to solve her daughter's predicament. She believed that the traditional healer has powers that can help them to see beyond the physical realms. Therefore, if her daughter is taken to them the solution to her problem will be revealed. This is seen through the conversation between Maame Efuwa and her friend Aba as stated below.

Dza mara matse na mehu yi a, Aba, menngye minndzi d[oye d[meb[ma]ak] asopiti. Mbom, menya banyan nunsinnyi bi a meb[p[d[]hw[no, ntsi moroboaboa moho na mak] mak]hw[Ewura Efuwa nye no aba.

'Due to what I have seen and heard, Aba, I don't think it is good for me to take her to the hospital. Rather, I have one traditional healer that I want him to treat her, so I am preparing to go and bring Ewura Efuwa here' (page 5).

From the above statement, it could be observed that Maame Efuwa strongly believes that orthodox medicine will not help her daughter. This is because she sees the problem as that which is beyond the physical realm; and thus, the only thing she can resort to is getting a traditional healer who sees beyond the physical realm to treat Efuwa. It was also further revealed, in the course of the conversation, that Maame Efuwa has already made up her mind to consult a traditional healer no matter how her friend tries to prevent her.

In another instance, it was seen that most of the elderly fear the traditional healers, and they believe in everything they say, even if it is a lie. This was depicted in the conversation that ensued between Ekuwa Mbor]ba and his father, as stated below.

Ewuraba, miyii m'asomu yie na mey[[p[nn d[miritsie ... As[m a me papa kaa kyer[[me nye d[, Panyin no mifi guamu bae b]too no d[]nye no tse h] no se obi fi me na n'ebusua mu eyi m'enyim esuma, ntsi obiara ba d[]rob]war me a, nna mese moronwar... Adze a]y[[me ahobow nye d[muhun d[me papa gye as[m a panyin no kae no dzi. Nna mohw[a n'enyi aber ara yie. Nna me maame dze, bobor abow no.

Madam, I listened attentively ... What my father told me was that the man I came to meet when I returned from the market said someone from my mother's family has taken my face; that is why I am refusing to accept everyone's marriage proposal. What surprises me most is that my father seems to believe what the man said, and as for my mother, she is frightened' (page 34).

This statement from Ekuwa explains how she felt when her parents accepted the news that she is being bewitched when the news is coming from a total stranger. Before this conversation, Ekuwa had refused a suitor her parents wanted for her because she felt she needed to marry someone of her age, not someone who is as old as her father. And the information from the visitor who was also a traditional healer seemed to explain Ekuwa's refusal to accept that proposal. Her parents believed the man, and this inculcated fear and worry in them as they thought someone was working spiritually against Ekuwa. They then accepted the medicine the man brought for Ekuwa to use, and her parents insisted that she used it. Eventually, it happened that what the man said was a lie. This adds to the fact that the Akan had absolute faith in these traditional/spiritual healers, and that, they accepted whatever they said, even if it was a lie.

Again, there is the belief that the spirits do not lie. Therefore, the people they speak to do not also lie. In the text, we realized that the Ekuwa did not use the medicine given to her but she still had a young handsome man coming to marry

her. In another instance, although the traditional healer, B]nnyinab]to, was full of lies, Maame Maanan and her family pretended they did not see it. This was portrayed in the way he conducted himself, and also when he wrongly declared that it was Ewura Efuwa's grandmother who was bewitching Ewura Efuwa. Meanwhile, there was no old woman left in Ewura Efuwa's family; her grandmother died a long time ago. It was noticed he had not seen anything, and that he was just deceiving them; but because they did not want to disgrace him, they just left quietly without arguing with him, as depicted in the following excerpts.

A. *Ekuwa yii ano d[da a banyin nunsunnyi no bae b]kekaa d[m ns[m no, biribi dwirii no do d[oridzi ak]hwis[m... "Mapaa, mbr[medze edur no ko gui no, h] ara nna ogu. Mammfa me nsa annka bio d[seseiara banyin no bisaa" ... Me ba, wo hu ay[me hu. Seeseiara ahy[me gyafu nunsunnyi no f[r dodow* (page 46).

'Ekuwa replied that the day the traditional healer came, she felt he was full of lies... "Father, the medicine has been kept untouched till the traditional healer asked of it" ... My daughter, I am even scared of you. You have made the traditional healer is very ashamed now'.

B. *Nnunsunyi no enntum ennhu d[Panyin Anan too no brada aber a]kaa d[aberwa w] ne fie no. H]n aberwa kor a]kae owuu dadaada ansaana Ewura Efuwa rowar. Panyin Anan ammp[d[]nye nunsunnyi no dzi anok]nk]n biara* (page 62).

'The traditional healer did not notice that Mr. Anan was making fun of him when he said there is an old lady in his house. The only old lady left in the house died before Ewura Efuwa got married. Mr. Anan didn't want to argue with the traditional healer.'

C. *Ns[m a]kae nyina y[ak]hwis[m. Menngye mindzi d[]y[nunsunnyi a onyim dza]rey]. Nyimpa biara a Nyame adom no d[onyim ahataw no,]nnkasa. Edur no ara nna]hw[mu y[* (page 66-67).

All he said was a lie. I don't think the traditional healer knew what he was doing. Anyone gifted with herbal medicines doesn't talk too much. All he does is use the herbs to heal.

In excerpt A, it was realized that Ekuwa did not use the medicine given to her by the traditional healer, and her father was surprised at her. This incident got into the traditional healer as he felt disgraced before Ekuwa's family. This is because he was already boasting that it was as a result of his medicine which is why someone has come to ask Ekuwa's hand in marriage. He was therefore shocked when Ekuwa brought his medicine back to him, and this silenced him. In excerpt B, Panyin Anan, Ewura Efuwa's uncle, was surprised at the traditional healer's actions. He saw that what the traditional healer said was all lies, but he could not argue with him. The old woman he talked about died long before Efuwa got married, but the traditional healer insisted it was Efuwa's grandmother who was bewitching her. This got Panyin Anan

shy and worried to the extent that he did not even know how to face his in-law again because he had supported and pushed the idea for Ewura Efuwa to see the traditional healer. Also in excerpt C, we realize that in a way, Yewura Kwesi Papa got furious with the actions of the traditional healer, but he did not challenge him. It was behind the scene that he could then tell his side of the story that he saw all that the man was saying was full of lies, and that he just needed money because a genuine traditional healer will not talk much, it is their medicines that speak, but this was not so for B]nnyinab]to. He brags too much, and he was full of deceit, yet he charges very high when he is consulted. This clearly shows the differences between genuine traditional healers and fake ones.

Finally, it was revealed that although we have true traditional healers, there are also false ones who just operate because of their stomachs. Even in our contemporary world, these false traditional healers are all over, deceiving people for their properties, money, and other valuables. This was not so rampant during the author's time; there was great respect for these traditional healers, and they worked very hard, although there were few bad nuts among them.

The use of proverbs

Proverbs are an integral part of most African societies, and they form an essential component in the communication strategies of the people. It is composed of ingredients that are embedded in the culture of the society or the people. It is a revelation of the philosophy of the people and the moral values that society holds on to. It is a system that educates people and gives them a guide for their future life. It constantly serves as a reference point for their philosophy of life (Amate, 2011). Proverbs are a repository of a people's language, history, literature, and culture. They are associated with elders who are deemed to be wise with age and not expected to speak in plain language. Meider (1985) defines a proverb as a "short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form, which is handed down from generation to generation" (p. 113). Similarly, Agyekum (2005:9) sees proverbs as "interpretations of traditional wisdom based on the experiences and socio-political life of our elders. The most acknowledged element of communicative competencies of an Akan speaker is his/her ability to use proverbs". This implies that a competent Akan speaker is the one whose conversation or message is full of proverbs. In the Akan context, proverbs are the precious stone of speech, and without them, a speech loses its sweetness. In the novel, it could be seen that proverbs were used by the elderly to advise the younger ones because the elderly ones are assumed to have more experience and know more about the Akan world than the younger ones. The proverbs were either to advise, to lay emphasis on issues, or to shorten a longer statement or conversation which could result in an argument. Below are some of the proverbs used in the text, the context of which they were used, and what they meant.

A. *Erotwe biribi w] sor na]mmba a, nna biribi dze mu. (page 26)*

'If you are pulling something from above and is not coming then it means something is withholding it.'

This proverb is usually used when one is struggling to get a solution to a problem, but all struggles seem to be in vain. In the text, it was Maame Efuwa Maanan who used this proverb while having a conversation with her daughter and her in-law. She said this when she wanted to draw their attention to the fact that Ewura Efuwa's childlessness has spiritual force behind it. Maame Efuwa thinks her in-law has done a lot concerning his wife's state. But if all efforts have proven futile, then something more than physical is behind it.

B. *Ankora pan na]y] dede k]se. 'Empty barrels make the most noise' (page 27).*

This proverb is usually used when a person does not have much but brags a lot about having many in his capacity. Yewura Kwesi Papa used this proverb in describing some traditional healers. In a conversation with Maame Maanan, Yewura Kwesi Papa made mention that most traditional healers are full of lies and brag a lot. Yewura Kwesi used this proverb to inform his in-law concerning the deceit on some part of traditional healers to deter her from going to consult them. He did not want to sound harsh or disrespect his in-law on her decision for them to consult traditional healers, and so he used the proverb to draw Maame Maanan's mind to the fake traditional healer.

C. *Sor boa h]n a w]boa h]n ho 'heaven help those who help themselves (page 30).*

This proverb is mostly used to advise lazy people. For instance, if someone wants to get rich but sits idle and refuses to work, such a person will never get what s/he wishes for. Likewise, if a person is sick and does not find any medication or solution to the sickness but relax and does not do anything about it, the sicknesses increase, and s/he may eventually die. It is therefore important for one to sit up and work hard for a cause. In the text, Maame Efuwa used this proverb in response to her in-law's claim. Yewura Kwesi Papa believes that although there are spiritual forces that work against people, God always protects them. But Maame Efuwa is of the view that although what her in-law is saying is true, one must find a better solution when the person finds out that a spiritual force is working against them; they should not fold their arms and watch a miracle happen. Indirectly, it was seen that Maame Efuwa was trying to give a message to her in-law and her daughter not to sit down and relax, but to look for a solution to their childlessness.

D. *Obi nnyim a obi kyer]. 'If someone doesn't know someone teaches' (page 38).*

This proverb is used when one seeks counsel and s/he is directed to the right source. Again, it is also used when one is not doing something right and s/he is pushed onto the right track or corrected. This proverb is used by Maame Efuwa

Maanan when she was talking to her in-law and her daughter concerning the need to allow her to also seek for solution to her daughter's problem. It was seen that Yewura Kwesi has done a lot over the years to seek for solution for her wife but it was time he allows the family to also come in and help their daughter. This also shows that Maame Maanan was so worried about her daughter's situation and in order not to explain herself that much she used the proverb to help her in-law understand her.

E. *W]wo wo a nna w]awo wo tamfo. 'When you are born, your enemy is also created for you' (page 52).*

This proverb is mostly used when someone is maltreating another person. Another instance could be when things are not going well with someone in life. Such persons mostly believe it is their enemies who are working against them that is why they are not succeeding in life. This assumption applies to the Akan worldview. The Akan believe that if things are not working right for people in their lives then there is someone behind their calamities, and this person is seen as an enemy. Maame Maanan, therefore, uses this proverb in her conversation with Panyin Anan to prove that we have enemies in life, and every person has a particular enemy who wants their downfall. Now Maame Maanan explains to her brother saying that, Ewura Efuwa's enemies are from her household. She explains further that the last time Ewura Efuwa came for a visit, the way her family members related to her showed that they do not like her, and gives the impression that they are her enemies and the ones behind her predicament.

F. *Abotar na w]dze y] edur (it takes patience to heal) (page 56)*

This proverb is used when one is on medication but wants to get their healing very quickly. People around them usually advise healing goes through a long process so they should exercise patience. This proverb was used by Yewura Kwesi Papa in a conversation with Payin Anan. Payin Anan questioned Yewura Kwesi on what he has done on Ewura Efuwa's issue, and he replied they are on it. He said Ewura Efuwa has been put on medication but it will take time before things work out well. He then explained further that it takes patience for the medication to work since she has to go through a lot of processes and if they should rush things, it would not yield a good result for them. He then pleaded with Payin Anan and his family to have patience with his wife and give them some time because he believes that things will work out for them soon. This is true because time heals, and if we rush on things we may not get the results we want; but when we have patience in everything we do, we may get a better result.

G. *Awar o, awar o, Jnye mba. 'Marriage is all about childbearing' (page 57).*

Childbearing is very important to the Akan, and they prioritize that in their marriage. In effect, successful marriage to the Akan is a marriage with children. This proverb is used when a

family realizes that their daughter who has been in a marriage for some time has not conceived. All attention is then pushed on the woman to find a solution in getting a child because marriage is all about children. This proverb was used by Payin Anan when he was advising Yewura Kwesi Papa and the need to find a solution to their predicament. He explained to his in-law that marriage is full of problems and there can be a time that the couple would want to seek divorce when things seem to be bad for them. But his advice is, once there are children, the couple will consider the children and stay together, but once there is no child they are all likely to go their separate ways. This is true even in our contemporary times; it does happen. Most marriages today collapse as a result of childbearing, especially, in the Akan setting. Mostly when there are no children in the Akan marriage, pressure is mounted on the man to divorce his wife and marry another wife to give him children. This shows clearly how the Akan value children in their marriages.

From the ongoing discussion, we can say that Akan proverbs are more than wise sayings. They have a wide range of uses, and the users are deemed intelligent and well educated in the customs of the Akan people. From the text, we realize it is grown-ups or mature people like Maame Maanan, Payin Anan, and Yewura Kwesi whose speeches were characterized by proverbs. Most of these proverbs were used in the form of advice as they tend to guide prescribed and proscribed attitudes and behaviours of people at personal, group, or societal ends. Again, we can say that proverbs were used more often in the author's time as compared to this contemporary time. In the author's milieu, an elder's speech was full of proverbs, which signifies a sense of maturity and wisdom, but these days it is not common, especially, among the youth. Proverbs are used these days on special occasions, on radio programs during competitions, and also at the palace. It is also observed that most people do not use proverbs these days because they do not understand them, and even with the little they know, they find it difficult to use them appropriately. This, therefore, becomes a hindrance in promoting the Akan language, especially through the use of proverbs.

II. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper analyzed the cultural aspects of J. A. Annobil's novel, *Abotar*, through the lenses of the New Historicism theory. The aspects discussed included Marriage and Childbirth, Supernatural powers, and the use of proverbs. It was observed that from the Akan setting, marriage and childbirth are bed-fellows; and they are always prioritized. Unfortunately, if a woman is not able to conceive after marriage (for whatever reason), she is considered as being cursed, or an enemy is working against her. On the issue of supernatural powers, the worldview of the Akan is in two folds: the spiritual and physical aspects. Thus, if there are any misfortunes, they are looking for solutions from two aspects, the physical, and the spiritual. If they don't get any remedies physically, they turn to the gods or ancestors for spiritual

solutions. Lastly, on proverbs, it was observed that the speeches of the grown-ups were characterized by proverbs, and most of these proverbs were used to express their feelings, thoughts, and more importantly, to advise the young ones. We can say that through the New Historicists' view, these aspects discussed are seen differently from today as a result of modernization, education, and religion. We can, therefore, say that the author's milieu had an influence on his writing and the cultural aspects of his set were seen playing a major role in the text.

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