Revisiting Formalism from a West African Perspective: Konkomba Folktales across Generations and Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

The following dissertation explores form (in formalism) from an Afrocentric perspective by employing an oral performance-sensitive new formalist criticism of folktales of the Konkomba people of northern Ghana. Among other things, the research interrogates, by teasing out classical and contemporary formalistic thoughts, the applicability of Global North concepts of form (and formalist approaches generally) in predominantly orally-based contexts like the one from which Konkomba folktales emerge. It, thus, explores the nature and workings of form in situated oral contexts such as the KKB one in order to ascertain the interactions between form and orality and form and performance. Such an investigation, geared toward formulating an oral performance-sensitive critique and expansion of new formalistic currents, ultimately offers further illuminations on the operations of form and unearths certain structural patterns pointing to similarities and/or differences as well as the core variables inherent in these Konkomba folktales as far as their formal aspects and renditions are concerned. The foregoing, eventually, helps in gaining a better understanding of how various literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms contribute to shaping these folktales and the KKB milieu from which they emerge. Above all, such an investigation productively boosts decolonization efforts and detextualizes studies in form – and for that matter formalism.

Dedication

To the loving memory of my late dad, John Tidorchibe,

My mom, Esther Ama Kumah,

and

My siblings, Joseph, Michael, Cecilia, and Felicia

for all your prayers and support.

Acknowledgments

Research in minor forms and their poetics has contributed to broadening "understandings of what constitutes literatures of the world" (Phalafala 195) and enriched various critical traditions and theorizations (Ngũgĩ 73). Yet, conducting such research, especially documenting, translating, and/or studying oral forms and their poetics, has never been easy. This PhD project was no exception. My attempt to study the oral tales of the Konkomba people from an oral performance-sensitive new formalist perspective initially seemed like a 'mission impossible.' The three-year journey – started in January 2021 – has been challenging; but it has also brought a fair share of exciting adventures and illuminating insights. Most importantly, it has been very rewarding.

As I compose this piece, I can hardly believe that barely a few years ago I arrived in Germany at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to commence my PhD program at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Sitting at my desk this morning, I am full of gratitude that throughout all the ups and downs, God has been good and gracious to me. I look back with a heart flooded with joy that my toils have finally yielded a dividend: I have completed a dissertation which, following the trailblazing works of African researchers, authors, scholars, and theorists such as Léopold Senghor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, Chinua Achebe, Kwabena Nketia, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, and Ama Ata Aidoo among others, contributes anthropological, cultural, and formal insights aimed at further boosting the decolonization agenda.

I owe my success to the above forerunners and several other cultural, form, narratology, and translation theorists and scholars such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Eugene Nida, Lawrence Venuti, Verena Theile, Heather Dubrow, Caroline Levine, Ansgar Nünning, Birgit Neumann, and Eva Ulrike Pirker, among others, whose theorizing and scholarly engagements laid a solid foundation for my project. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Dr. Birgit Neumann and Prof. Dr. Eva

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Augustine Kidisil, his wife Solace Akuki, and their wonderful children, Gaki and Libiin. Thank you all for your moral support and prayers. You guys are the best; I love you all.

To all of you herein acknowledged – from my wonderful supervisors and mentors to KAAD through to my family and friends – I say NI NI LITULN PAM! THANKS A LOT! DANKE SEHR! This dissertation is our baby. We did it together. God richly bless all of you.

Table of Contents

A general introduction to the study

Even though extensive studies have been carried out in orature and their poetics, several oral art forms, especially those of minority and marginalized ethnic groups, though also embedded with literary features worth studying, remain largely undocumented and "are far less widely known and appreciated" (Finnegan, *Oral Literature* 3; also see Phalafala 194 and Onuora xii). This assertion is particularly true of the oral art forms of minority African ethnic groups such as the Anyimere, Bimoba, Dompo, and Konkomba of Ghana; the Eotile, Abidji, Esuma, and Loma of Ivory Coast; the Aku, Bambara, and Mangajo of the Gambia; the Ikpeshe, Aduge, and Ghotou of Nigeria; the Anyanga and Koussountou of Togo; the Bamali of Cameroun, the Kahe of Tanzania, the Taveta of Kenya, and the Dema of Mozambique, among others.[1]

These minority ethnic groups' oral literatures, languages, and cultures increasingly face extinction due to rapid processes of urbanization and transculturation. The endangered state of these oral works, languages, and cultures has been worsened by the systemic promotion of some cultures over others by "governments and other politically motivated institutions, which … [sometimes] decide to censor or promote [certain cultures and] works" (Munday 143) over other so-called minority ones with the aim of "serving the interests of specific groups" (Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* 29).

Out of the worst affected by these processes of urbanization and transculturation, coupled with unjust government and institutional policies, of particular interest to the following study are the oral art forms of the Konkomba (KKB) people of Ghana, especially their oral tales which are increasingly losing their appeal to the younger generation. Although access to these oral tales is in danger of being severed, the thought world informing them continues to signify, to shape individual thought and social life. Most importantly, the tales and the oral performance context

from which they emerge could be very useful in offering further insights into orature and their poetics as well as our diverse literary theorization efforts, especially our attempts (in formalism) to theorize forms and comprehend their operations in texts and their contexts. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has helpfully pointed out "scholars … [have often] tease[d] out the various theoretical possibilities inherent in the elements and features that constitute the oral aesthetic and reason" (73). The following dissertation is another of such attempts, as it theorizes and offers illuminating discussions on the nature and workings of forms from a situated West African context – the Konkomba oral one.

Hypothesis and research questions

The oral performance-sensitive formal engagement contained in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation is based on the hypothesis that theories or concepts travel and that once they do, they can be modified, reconfigured, and used in new ways for various localized purposes. As Edward Said aptly observes in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, "ideas and theories travel" (226) and can be transformed in new ways within diverse milieus depending on "the conditions of acceptance or … resistances" (227). Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning authenticate this assertion in their *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*, wherein they make the helpful observation that "[t]he journeys of theories are characterised by selective appropriations, productive misunderstandings and discontinuous translations according to historical and local circumstances" (5). From a performance theory perspective, Richard Schechner (the godfather of performance studies) also gestures to this theory or idea mobility when he asserts in *Performance Theory* that "[p]erformance studies … transgresses boundaries" and that "it goes where it is not expected to be," thereby refusing to be "pinned down" (360). Drawing on these scholars' assertions on traveling theories or concepts, the following study poses and proffers answers to such questions as:

1. Can some of the concepts of form – extensively explored from diverse perspectives in the Global North academy by scholars such as Plato, Viktor Shklovsky and his Russian formalist counterparts, and new formalists such as Heather Dubrow, Marjorie Levinson, Stephen Cohen, Caroline Levine, Verena Theile, Fredric Bogel, and Anna Kornbluh, among others, largely in textual analyses – be migrated to and productively applied in a situated oral performance-based Global South context like the one from which KKB oral tales emerge?

2. If yes, transported to the oral situated Konkomba context explored in this study, what results will the formal method's approaches to form – whether the radical reductionist approach of traditional formalists or the liberal, more encompassing, pluralist approach of new formalists – produce, especially considering the orality and performance-dependence of orature such as KKB folktales?

3. Are there forms, at all, operating in orality and performance, especially in primary orature such as KKB oral tales and others of similar properties across the globe?

4. If yes, what insights do they offer into orature such as KKB folktales and similar others, their oral performance contexts, and most importantly, the nature and workings of forms in verbal arts and their contexts or cultures?

Objectives and methodologies

To explore and answer these questions, the following dissertation carries out a formal study of some Konkomba oral tales, known in Likpakpaln as *itiin*,[2] from an oral performance-sensitive new formalist perspective to gain a better understanding of how various forms contribute to shaping these folktales and the Konkomba (KKB) milieu from which they emerge. Most importantly, the dissertation seeks to ascertain the nature and workings of forms in situated oral contexts such as

this KKB one. Thus, the formal discussions in this study, especially in chapters two, four, and five, do not only shed light on a complex culture like the Konkomba one and its values but also offer insights into the operations of forms in orally-based literatures such as these Konkomba oral tales.

Over the decades, studies in form have been overconcentrated on written verbal arts and the textual contents of unwritten forms to the disadvantage of the oral and performance domains of these oral works. This has created a single story, of sorts, and the attendant dangers echoed in 2009 by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in a talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story" – a talk that has, over the years, also turned into a single story, so to speak.[3] As a result, as a contribution against this single story syndrome, the formal discussions in this study explore form not only in relation to the textual contents of KKB folktales, but also – and most importantly – in relation to the oral and performance contexts from which they emerge. The dissertation employs an oral performance-sensitive new formalist method to explore how various literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms contribute to shaping the contents of KKB folktales and the KKB milieu itself. Ultimately, the formal engagements in the succeeding chapters, especially chapters four and five, are aimed at bringing to the fore the relationship between form and meaning in these folktales and gesturing to the nature and workings of forms in situated oral contexts such as the KKB one – and, hopefully, others of similar properties across the world. The discussions, especially in chapter two, bring to the fore certain structural or emic patterns pointing to similarities and/or differences as well as the core variables inherent in these KKB oral tales, as far as their structural aspects and oral renderings are concerned, which are then employed in subsequent chapters such as chapters four and five in exploring the nature and operations of forms in these oral materials, their oral performance context, and the KKB milieu as a whole.

A more practical but no less important objective or aspect of this dissertation is that it translates these Konkomba folktales into English and German through a collaborative project with students of the MA program Literary Translation at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf – samples of which (specifically, the English versions) are attached in the Appendix. The tales were translated employing an oral- and performance-sensitive translation method called oragraphic translation, which draws on aspects of the foreignization and domestication methods (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 20) and digital technology to translate not just the textual contents of these KKB oral tales, but their oral performance aspects as well. Thus, the study does not only provide an Afrocentric perspective on the discourse on forms and their operations, it equally documents and preserves, through these translations, an indigenous or primary oral art form that is currently endangered in the Konkomba culture due to the younger generation's lack of connectedness to it. Most significantly, the discussions in chapter three offer insights into an oral performance-sensitive translation method that could be very useful in translating and preserving primary orature such as these KKB folktales and others of similar properties across the world.

The study's sub-objective of translating these tales into English and German raises questions about what is culturally translatable considering that cultural translators Paul Moon and Sabine Fenton have argued that "Once the divide between two cultures includes great power disparities, culture becomes untranslatable" (41-42). As they have shown by drawing on Maori-English translations (for example the "Treaty of Waitangi"), not every cultural context or material is culturally translatable. Certainly, this raises questions as regards what aspects of the Konkomba culture and these oral materials are translatable and the implications thereof as far as methodology and reader reception are concerned – for as Gayatri C. Spivak rightly notes in her preface to her translation of Mahasweta Devi's stories in *Imaginary Maps,* any translated piece always "faces in

two directions, encounters two readerships …" (xxiii). Attempts to navigate these challenges (in chapter three) eventually lead to my proposal of the oragraphic translation method – an oral- and performance-sensitive translation method, it bears repeating, that renders not only the textual contents of orature but also their oral and performance aspects through in-text translator commentaries and embedded audiovisual materials.

Research data: nature and methodology

To effectively carry out this study and ultimately achieve its objectives of engaging with form through orature and translating orality and performance ethically and productively, the participatory-observer approach was employed in gathering oral data from Chamba and Saboba and their environs in Ghana, as discussions in chapter two will soon reveal. The dissertation relies largely on this primary data collected through observation, participation, and ethical one-on-one interviews – what Spivak terms "ethical singularity" in her "Translator's Preface" in *Imaginary Maps* (xxiv-xxv) – as well as some secondary data relevant to the research. To ensure a high degree of authenticity and reliability in the collected oral data, the services of elders (both political and religious) within selected communities were relied on to ascertain the credibility of informants or interviewees before the one-on-one interviews were conducted. The choice of the method of ethical singularity was informed by the insight into the fact that "when we engage profoundly with one person, the responses come from both sides: this is responsibility and accountability" (Spivak xxv), which eventually results in openness and detailed, truthful responses. Spivak succinctly puts it thus: "… in such engagements we want to reveal and reveal, conceal nothing" (xxv). According to her, it becomes a kind of "secret encounter" (xxv) where trust is built. The application of such a method produced detailed and valuable data for this study and, in fact, groundbreaking data of

about 100 folktales that could be used for other qualitative investigations of the Konkomba culture, language, and literature across disciplines.

Due to the oral nature of these folktales and the interviews that were conducted, a tape recorder and a camera were employed to capture various interviews and oral performances. Notes were equally taken when necessary and/or possible. After gathering the requisite data, the tales were subsequently translated into English – and later German by some MA Literary Translation students at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf[4] – on arrival in Germany. These English and German translations were occasioned by the necessity to guarantee the accessibility of these folktales for a wider readership, especially English and German readers – a decision grounded in and validated by Susan Bassnett's assertion in *Translation* that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o started translating his works from Gikuyu into English "in order to reach a broader international community of readers" (43), and further by Caroline Levine's claim that a documentative medium such as "print extends and transforms a folktale's audience" (*Forms* 13). After translating the stories, they were subsequently subjected to the critical formal engagement contained in this dissertation.

Theoretical framework

The study draws on the Russian formalists' reductionist or literariness-centered approach to form and the new formalists' liberal, more encompassing, pluralist concept of form to discuss and demonstrate that the literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms operating in the textual contents and oral performance context of KKB folktales offer very interesting illuminations on the nature and workings of forms. Among the various theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter one (from Russian Formalism to Czech Formalism to New Criticism to New Formalism), the dissertation particularly grounds its formal discussions in Verena Theile's new formalist

postulation that a formal literary scholarship that focuses on "a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective" (17; qdt. in Dinkler 4). In addition to hers, the discussions are also pivoted on Levine's assertion that a modern formalist critic, "informed by several decades of historical [and cultural] approaches, [will] … take stock of the social and political conditions that surrounded [a] work's production, and she would work to connect the [work's] forms to its social world" (*Forms* 1). Advancing from the foregoing theoretical framework, my dissertation pushes for the detextualization and decolonization of studies in form by engaging critically with not just the textual forms, but also the oral and performance forms operating in KKB folktales, in order to give equal attention to the oral and performance forms operating in primary orature such as KKB folktales and similar others the world over.

Results and conclusions

This critical engagement has yielded remarkable results in my five-chapter dissertation – details of which I will leave to readers to find out in the succeeding chapters, wherein in an attempt to develop a theoretical framework, I explore the evolution of formalism and its concepts of form to date (in chapter one) and expend chapter two on giving insights into the KKB oral culture, especially the performance and structural esthetics of its folktales. While in chapter three I discuss my translation practice using the oragraphic translation method I propose for translating primary orature such as KKB folktales, chapters four and five engage directly and rigidly with form. Chapter four presents elaborate discussions on the various literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms at work in KKB folktales and their context, particularly highlighting the behaviors and affordances of these forms, while chapter five offers a summary of these discussions and the conclusions drawn from them thereof.

In a nutshell, the five-chapter dissertation that follows engages with form from a situated oral context with the ultimate aim of pushing for a detextualization of studies in form so that the interactions between form and orality and form and performance will receive equal attention as the interactions between form and literary texts and their sociocultural contexts have received over the years. This agenda fittingly commences with a state-of-the-art survey on formalism and its concepts of form as explored in various geocultural settings in the Global North and some commendable formalist engagements from Global South contexts such as Africa in the chapter that follows. The various formalist schools, concepts of form, and practical formalist engagements explored in this first chapter effectively lay the foundation for later discussions on the nature and workings of forms in primary orature such as Konkomba folktales.

CHAPTER ONE

Formalism through the ages: a diachronic survey

1.0 Schools, theories, and practice

Formalism, with its scientific approach to literary scholarship, has courted a lot of controversy, generated divergent views, and received critical attention since its rise to prominence in Russia in the second decade of the twentieth century. It is imperative that at the outset of this research, which seeks to explore the applicability of its approaches – specifically, its concepts of form – in a situated orally-based West African context such as the Konkomba one, I define and trace its evolution through time and space, spanning shortly after World War I from Russia to Czechoslovakia through to the United States of America to its contemporary state. To kick-start such a diachronic survey, it must be stated unequivocally that *formalism,* as used in this dissertation, encompasses all the strands of the scientific approach to literary study that have emerged over the decades in opposition to extrinsic criticism as well as the radical, reductionist ideals of the Russian formalist school itself – ideals which gradually assumed the name "the Formal Method," as Boris Eichenbaum famously labeled it (Matejka and Pomorska 3).

1.0.1 The Russian formalist school and its formal method

The formalist school and theory flourished in Russia in the 1920s – approximately between 1921 and 1925 – mainly through the scholarly activities of the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 and the 1916-founded Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz) of St. Petersburg. These scholarly activities were embodied in the works and theories of young Russian literary scholars and linguists such as Petr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson, Grigory Vinokur, Boris Eichenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, Osip Brik, and Yuri Tynyanov, among others, who were influenced by "philosophers of science like Edmund Husserl [who sought] to

isolate objects of knowledge in their unmixed purity" (Rivkin and Ryan 3). They were also partly influenced by the Futurists' rejection of the then 'decadent' bourgeois culture and the spiritualistic literary scholarship of the Symbolist movement in poetry and by extension the visual arts (Selden et al. 30; Rivkin and Ryan 7). Selden et al. opine that these young Russian intellectuals, influenced by the Futurists' emphasis on "the artist's role as (proletarian) producer of crafted objects," especially Dmitriev's declaration that "the artist is now simply a constructor and technician, a leader and foreman" (30), embarked on a theorizing adventure that saw them formulate theories of literature relating to literary study and artistic craftsmanship.

Exerting their influence in Russian intellectualism (especially literary scholarship) in this regard, the formalist school and its members soon gained renown for their radical avant-garde theories, models, and methodologies as regards literature and literary study but were unfortunately suppressed in 1930 by the post-Revolutionary Russian regime of Joseph Stalin due to ideological conflicts. Several of its exponents were either silenced, forced to recant their ideologies, or forced into exile (Lodge 16; Richter 750). Norbert Francis corroborates this in his "The Trotsky-Shklovsky Debate: Formalism versus Marxism" when he writes that "by 1930, all [formalists] who were still in the Soviet Union had either recanted or moved on from the discussion; from 1920 Jakobson was in Czechoslovakia" (21). According to Peter Steiner, following the Communist revolution the two major Russian formalist groups, namely the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the Opoyaz, were incorporated into Soviet institutes of higher learning such as the State Academy for the Study of the Arts and the State Institute for the History of the Arts respectively ("Russian Formalism" 12).

That notwithstanding, these two formalist groups' groundbreaking theoretical concepts and methodological postulations on various aspects of the literary system and its study had already

taken root in Russia and gradually diffused across the West, affecting such areas as literary theory and criticism, literary history, literary composition, pedagogy, and textual linguistics, among others. This effect, despite its heterogeneity, has persisted to the present day even though over the last couple of decades many literary scholars, critics, teachers, and students have tended to shy away from formalist debates – hence the need for my current effort to revisit formalism from a West African perspective in order to renew and further broaden the debate on its scope and character.

As regards scope and character, at its infant stages, what is today known as Russian Formalism or the Russian formalist school sought to invent a so-called "science of literature that would be both independent and factual" (Lemon and Reis 81) as a remedy to the then-existing traditional philosophical esthetics as well as psychological and historical approaches to literary scholarship. According to Victor Erlich, "[t]he driving force behind [the early] Formalist theorizing was the desire to end the methodological confusion which prevailed in traditional literary studies, and to establish literary scholarship as a distinct and integrated field of intellectual endeavor" (627-8). Boris Eichenbaum simply puts it in his "The Theory of the Formal Method" that the focus of the group of Russian literary critics, theorists, and scholars who came to be known as the formalists was to determine "what the subject matter of literary study" should be (Lemon and Reis 81). Beyond this simplistic assertion of Eichenbaum's, the Russian formalists' attempts to determine the subject matter of literary study were nothing short of attempting to sever literature and literary study from the traditional mimetic theory of art and psychologism that existed then. But considering that literature is hardly an independent product of its author or society, their quest to formulate a so-called independent and factual approach aimed at decoupling literature and literary scholarship from socio-historical, cultural, or psychological considerations was bound to

be a herculean task that would ruffle feathers and court opposition, as will be noted in later discussions in this chapter.

To undertake the preceding enterprise, these pioneer formalists[5] became engrossed in what Eichenbaum terms understanding and studying "art" (Matejka and Pomorska 5), culminating ultimately in an obsession with literary technique or craftsmanship rather than literary meaning. In *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Uri Margolin notes that early formalists such as Shklovsky particularly argued that "[t]he literariness or artfulness of a work of literature, that which makes it an aesthetic object, resides entirely in its devices, which should also form the sole object of literary studies" (815).[6] Erlich corroborates this in his 1955 groundbreaking study, "Russian Formalism [: History-Doctrine]," where he asserts that Shklovsky postulated that "the literary work is the sum-total of literary devices" (633) – a claim echoed by Selden et al. as well (31).

The assertions of these scholars of great renown notwithstanding, mention ought to be made here without any intent to trivialize Shklovsky's invaluable contributions to broadening this subject of literariness or *literaturnost*, that he was expounding not an original but a Jakobian concept formulated by his colleague Roman Jakobson who had earlier in 1921 theorized that literariness should be the object of study in literary scholarship (Jakobson, "Modern Russian Poetry" 62). The necessity for this clarification stems from the fact that over the years literary scholars, commentators, and critics like Erlich, Margoli, and Selden et al. above have often treated this subject of literariness as though it were Shklovsky's original idea and not Jakobson's – only Eichenbaum and a few others, I dare say, have given Roman Jakobson this due recognition. Undeniably, Jakobson had theorized (before Shklovsky) that the only thing that sets apart a work of art from others is its inherent literary properties – what he termed its "literariness (*literaturnost*)"

(62; Das 78; Matejka and Pomorska 8). However, this debate about the originator of this idea aside, these two pillars of Russian Formalism's theorizing on *literaturnost* fundamentally pointed literary study toward the object of study itself (that is, the text or artwork) and thus gave a significant impetus to the Russian formalists' quest to decouple literary study from the other disciplines.

Indeed, what is today known as Russian Formalism is generally distinguished from other strands of formalism as well as other critical approaches by its postulation that a text should be treated as a self-contained entity whose meaning should be derived employing literary forms of the text rather than relying on extrinsic elements such as historical events, cultural contexts, intellectual contexts, biographical data, or mythological patterns, among other things, as pertained in literary scholarship prior to the advent of the Russian formalists. Eichenbaum writes in "The Theory of the Formal Method" that the "Formalists advocated principles which violated solidly entrenched traditional notions, notions which had appeared to be 'axiomatic' not only in the study of literature but in the study of art generally" (Lemon and Reis 82). These formalist principles Eichenbaum alludes to, as earlier intimated, sought to disconnect literary study from historicism and psychologism, and rather moved it closer to the theory of esthetics – or "the science of art," as Matejka and Pomorska put it (5).

Before the appearance of Russian Formalism, academic discourse and research (including literary scholarship) generally employed "obsolete aesthetic, psychological, and historical 'axioms'" (Matejka and Pomorska 6) – approaches Jakobson and Yuri Tynyanov derisively termed "naive psychologism" (Jakobson, *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time* 25). The consequence of this was the transfer of power and influence from academic scholarship to the "scholarship" of the journals – which were primarily saturated with the works of Symbolist critics and theoreticians (Lemon and Reis 83). This then begs the question of whether the formalists' rejection of the then-

existing approach to literary scholarship and their subsequent attempt to replace it with a so-called scientific literary methodology was intellectually or politically motivated. As Eichenbaum observes in "The Theory of the Formal Method," from 1907 to 1912 the works of Symbolists such as Vjačeslav Ivanov, Andrej Belyj, Merežkovskij, Brjusov, Čukovskij, and others were much more influential than the scholarly studies and dissertations of university professors (Matejka and Pomorska 6). Was it then a coup d'état of sorts to overthrow a powerful establishment (that is, the Symbolists) whose presence threatened the formalists and other academics' authority or influence?

For answers to these pertinent questions, it is important to turn to Eichenbaum's observation in this essay again where he adds that these Symbolists' books and essays, especially then popular Andrej Belyj's *Simvolizm* (1910), were unfortunately subjective, tendentious, and "lacked both a scientific temperament and a scientific point of view" (Lemon and Reis 83; Matejka and Pomorska 6). Based on the above observation of Eichenbaum's, it is only fair, then, to admit that far from political motivations, the formalists' determination to overthrow the traditional mimetic, axiomatic, and psychologism in Russian academic criticism was intellectually motivated and that it was aimed at salvaging academic discourse or criticism (especially literary study) from plummeting to undesirable standards. Thus, Russian Formalism (like any critical tradition) developed as a reaction to (or rather a rebellion against) an older tradition – in this case, the above socio-historical, axiomatic, and psychological character of academic criticism, especially literary study with its tedium and incoherence, in Russia at that time. And the singular agenda was to supplant the subjective esthetic principles of the Symbolists with an objective scientific approach to redeem intellectual criticism.

The pioneer formalists particularly rebelled against the focus on studying the surroundings or forces that shape poetic creation rather than studying poetics itself – a rebellion that would

(fortunately or unfortunately, depending on which side one stands as far as the formal debate is concerned) later be their undoing but which would subsequently occasion the rise of other strands of the *Formal Method* in other parts of the world. However, before delving into these other later strands of formalism, it will serve my purpose herein to delve more into the nitty-gritty of the Russian formalists' efforts to change the then-existing Russian academic landscape (especially literary scholarship) and the oppositions that greeted them. This will productively provide a better glimpse of the scope and character of Russian Formalism itself.

To this end, it is imperative to commence with the fact that the birth of the formalist movement's scientific method as a remedy to the traditional socio-historical and psychological approaches around the apex of the Symbolists' influence in Russia triggered confrontations between the two groups, with the formalists receiving support from the Futurists who at that time "derided the mystical posturing of poets such as Briusov who insisted that the poet is 'the guardian of the mystery'" (Selden et al. 30). Eichenbaum asserts that the Russian "[formalists] entered the fight against the Symbolists in order to wrest poetics from their hands – to free it from its ties with their subjective philosophical and aesthetic theories and to direct it toward the scientific investigation of facts" (Lemon and Reis 83). This assertion essentially authenticates my earlier argument that the Russian formalists' advocacy for a so-called scientific approach to literary study as against the Symbolists' axiomatic methods was purely for intellectual reasons rather than a political struggle to usurp the Symbolists' influence.

Turning to a more empirical approach, the Russian formalists championed an approach "characterized by a new passion for scientific positivism – a rejection of philosophical assumptions, of psychological and aesthetic interpretations, etc." (Lemon and Reis 83). For these pioneer formalists, art is autonomous of any ideological theories or philosophical esthetic

considerations and should be allowed to operate on its intrinsic principles through close reading and scientific investigation – a scientific investigation that reveals specific facts through the internal workings of art devoid of any extrinsic forces or factors. Erlich simplifies it thus: "The Formalist theoretician had little use for all the talk about 'intuition,' 'imagination,' 'genius,' and the like" (628) by eclectics like the Symbolists – and even the literary historians whose works mostly utilized materials from other disciplines like anthropology, politics, psychology, and philosophy, among others.

On this scientific approach, Eichenbaum admits that "[t]he basis of our position was and is that the object of literary science, as such, must be the study of those specifics which distinguish it from any other material" (Lemon and Reis 84). Rivkin and Ryan capture this thus: "For [the Russian formalists], literature would be considered not as a window on the world but as something with specifically literary characteristics that make it literature as opposed to philosophy or sociology or biography" (3). As Jakobson captures it more succinctly in his "Modern Russian Poetry: Velimir Khlebnikov," for the Russian formalists "the subject of literary scholarship is not literature, but literariness (*literaturnost*), that is, that which makes of a given work a work of literature" (62). Among other things, he insisted that the study of literature should be distinct from the approaches of other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and politics, among others.

From the assertions above, it is clear that the Russian formalists sought to establish this distinction by focusing on the structural aspects of texts or artworks rather than the then-existing traditional focus on their extrinsic aspects. However, the consequence of this intrinsic approach (that is, their obsession with literariness) was a rather radical reduction of literary analysis to an investigation of literary devices – an approach which numerous years of investigations, interrogations, and debates have established as flawed in a few regards; or rather as inadequate, as

will be pointed out later in this dissertation based on findings from investigations into one aspect of Konkomba orature – namely, the performance of Konkomba oral tales.

But be that as it may, the Russian formalists' insistence on literariness successfully decoupled literary scholarship from the other disciplines. This decoupling was attained by turning to language, as the Russian formalists worked tirelessly to distinguish between poetic and practical or prosaic language – a distinction Peter Steiner terms "linguistic Formalism" ("Russian Formalism" 21), perhaps because it was much akin to linguists' distinction between cognitive language and emotive language. Even though in his "On Czech Versification" Jakobson attempts to distinguish between emotive and poetic language, he fails in the end to establish any clear boundaries between the two. He rather settles on their linguistic functions as the dividing line while fundamentally admitting that functionality aside, the two are similar in character, as further discussions on poetic language by other Russian formalists (and even Jakobson himself) will soon reveal.[7]

Toward a linguistic formalism: poetic language versus practical language

Leo Jakubinsky is best remembered for taking the novel initiative to lay bare the difference between poetic and practical (or ordinary) language (Yakubinsky 11-12). In his essay, "On the Sounds of Poetic Language," he asserts that if a linguistic pattern is "formed for the purely practical purpose of communication, then we are dealing with a system of practical language (the language of thought) in which the linguistic pattern (sounds, morphological features, etc.) have no independent value and are merely a means of communication. But other linguistic systems, systems in which the practical purpose is in the background (although perhaps not purely hidden) are conceivable; they exist, and their linguistic patterns acquire independent value" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 85). In other words, according to Jakubinsky, practical language is essentially cognitive

in nature in that it is a language that is simple, transparent, and ordinary in structure in order to meet daily communication needs of information transmission. However, poetic language is coded through a skillful linguistic structuring bereft of apparent semantic and communicative values but which produces a special effect – an esthetic one that ultimately "gives satisfaction" (as Shklovsky puts it in Richter 783) rather than merely communicating meaningful thought.

Steiner concurs with my deduction or observation by drawing on Leo Jakubinsky's 1916 theorizing that poetic language is such that the "linguistic combinations acquire *a value in themselves*" ("Russian Formalism" 22). He elucidates that for the Russian formalists, poetic language rests in its ability to evoke images, thereby producing a "multiplicity of meanings. … When this happens language becomes de-familiarized and utterances become poetic" (22). Jakobson solidifies my deduction in his submission that "in poetry, the communicative function … is reduced to a minimum" (qtd. in Erlich 631), while Steiner sums it up in his discussion on the centrality of phones in poetic speech thus: "In poetic texts … the intentional manipulation of sound disrupts semantics, rendering the very linguistic forms noticeable, palpable" ("Russian Formalism" 22). Here Steiner sounds much like Shklovsky in his (i.e., Shklovsky's) postulation that poetic language deautomatizes perception through an artist's ability to disrupt or remove materials from their automatized or familiar forms, images, or visions using strange or foreign diction ("Art as Device" 12; Richter 783). Concurring with Aristotle, Shklovsky states that poetic language "appear[s] strange and wonderful" and that "it is often actually foreign" (Lemon and Reis 31) – a linguistic foreignization achieved through the use of unfamiliar diction.

To further get a better understanding of the strangeness and special effect or independent value of poetic language, it is important to turn to Shklovsky's "On Poetry and Trans-Sense [or Nonsense] Language" where he offers the explanation that in poetic language or speech, words

that appear meaningless at face value are necessary and "trans-" in nature, in that they are often the products of poetic creative processes that normally begin as unintelligible sound patches in poets' minds but gradually get translated into concrete words – as evidenced in the creative process or method employed by Alexander Blok and Mayakovsky (16).[8] As a result, these superficial unintelligible, trans-sense, or meaningless words of poetic speech carry profound associative meanings beyond even the comprehension of poets. In Shklovsky's own words, "The poet does not decide to speak a 'trans-sensible' word; usually the trans-sensibility conceals itself under the mask of some deceptive apparent content so that poets themselves have to admit that they do not understand the content of their own verses" (Shklovsky, "On Poetry and Trans-Sense Language" 16; qtd. in Lemon and Reis 85). According to him, trans-sensibility or 'deceptive' meaninglessness is a common linguistic fact and phenomenon in poetry. He adds that "In the enjoyment of a meaningless 'nonsense word,' the articulatory aspect of speech is undoubtedly important" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 85).

Consequently, Shklovsky's identification of the significance of meaningless or nonsense words pointed to the phonic aspects of poetic speech and broadened the discussion on the character of poetic language. Essentially, in this essay under review, Jakubinsky's initial attempt to distinguish between practical and poetic language is further elaborated by Shklovsky as the latter points out that sound devices are a major characteristic of poetic language and that what may sometimes be perceived as meaningless or "nonsense" words or sounds serve an esthetic function. His assertion will be authenticated later in my discussions on onomatopoeic words and other nonsensical structures inherent in the language of some Konkomba folktales such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist" and "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" among others. In the meantime, it is worthy of note that Shklovsky's postulation above, most importantly, built on the

rather simplistic Symbolist notion that poetic language is solely imagistic in nature as nineteenth-century philologist Alexander Potebnya had earlier sought to suggest when he claimed that "Art is thinking in images" and that "Without imagery there is no art" (Richter 775). For Shklovsky, poetic language is not merely imagistic but is characterized by sound devices as well, regardless of how meaningless words or sounds may appear.

It is instructive, then, to point out here that contrary to the erroneous impression created over the years (by scholars such as Eichenbaum) that the Russian formalists broke from Potebnya's theory on imagery,[9] a closer reading of Shklovsky's essay under review, and most especially his "Art as Technique" (soon to be discussed in the next subsection), indicates that Shklovsky and Potebnya, in principle, manifest a convergence of ideas on the place of imagery in poetic speech. The only point of divergence is that Shklovsky disagrees that imagery is the sole device at work in poetic speech, arguing instead, as indicated in his "On Poetry and Trans-Sense [or Nonsense] Language," (and as will soon be pointed out again in a review of "Art as Technique"), that other devices such as sound devices equally make up poetic language. Shklovsky argues that the beauty of poetic speech lies in pronunciation, in the independent "dance of articulatory organs" (Erlich 631). His thoughts on the phonic aspect of poetic language are summed up in Selden et al. thus: "[poetic speech] is 'speech organized in its entire phonic texture'. Its most important constructive factor is rhythm" (32).

In his "Sound Repetitions," Osip Brik further strengthened the above formalist position that poetic language is not essentially a language of images but of sounds as well. He notes in this essay that as regards the relationship between images and sounds in poetry, sounds or the phonic harmonies inherent in poetic speech are not mere "euphonious accessories to meaning" but serve "an independent poetic purpose" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 86). He points out that sound devices

such as repetition, rhyme, and alliteration, among others, contribute to the general harmony of poetic pieces – that is, they have an esthetic value. One interesting observation worth mentioning here is that what Brik's, along with Shklovsky's and Jakubinsky's, theories on the independent role of sound devices in poetry fundamentally accomplished was a re-evaluation and expansion of sorts of Potebnya's reduction of poetic or literary study to the investigation of images. Thus, the theories ultimately broadened poetic criticism through the unveiling of the phonic stratum of poetic speech. In this regard, it can be argued that right from the outset, the formal method (or the scientific approach to literary study) promised to be both flexible and more expansive than the approaches of Potebnya and other Symbolists.

Toward a more encompassing scientific method: form versus meaning

My claim above regarding the flexibility and expansiveness of the formal method is validated by the fact that in the early 1920s the formalists further modified (or rather broadened) the scope of their theories, especially their position that the beauty of poetic language does not lie "in the absence of meaning but in the multiplicity of meanings" (Erlich 631; Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 22). At this stage of their movement's growth, some of them conceded that a word's semantic value is no less significant than its phonic or morphological value as far as its esthetic effect in poetic speech is concerned.

Thus, having expanded literary study from the confines of imagery investigations to the study of the phonic aspects of language as well, the Russian formalists further sought to include other aspects of language such as semantics. Eichenbaum, for instance, argued that "[t]he aim of poetry is to make perceptible the texture of the word in all its aspects" (Erlich 631), thus underscoring the necessity for the analysis of poetic language (and for that matter textual analysis) to transcend phonetic or morphological structures and cover semantics. Victor Erlich summarizes

this modified position of the pioneer formalists thus: "The 'actualization' of the verbal sign achieved by poetry was recognized as a complex transaction involving the semantic and morphological as well as the phonetic levels of language" (631). Charles E. Bressler also observes that the "[Russian] Formalists redefined a **text** to mean a unified collection of various literary devices and conventions …" (50), including the semantic structure of the word, which can be studied to generate poetic meaning without resorting to extrinsic materials. This novel all-encompassing approach to poetic language (and for that matter literary scholarship) shed better light on the relationship between the semantic and the morphological, as well as the phonetic aspects of poetry, culminating in a shift of focus to the form-meaning correlation in texts. That ultimately laid the foundation for a new approach to literary study that emphasized the importance of various intrinsic devices (or literary forms) in generating and shaping poetry and poetic meaning.

Thus enter the debate on the harmony or otherwise of form and content as the above position of the Russian formalists would become a major area of contention between them and their predecessors – the Potebnyans and other Symbolists. The pioneer formalists rejected the traditional notion that divorced form from meaning by presenting them as separate entities, with form being a mere accessory of meaning – a situation Wellek and Warren describe in *Theory of Literature* as "[cutting] a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form" (qtd. in Erlich 631). The Russian formalists contended that in literary study, premium should rather be placed on how artists employ literary forms or devices in texts to create meaning rather than focusing on meaning and treating form as a companion or an external attachment to meaning. As Erlich explicitly states, they gave premium "not [to] the subject matter,

i.e., the sphere of reality dealt with by the writer, but [to] the mode of presentation" (628). Eichenbaum also discloses in "The Theory of the Formal Method:"

> The Formalists, when they abandoned Potebnya's point of view, also freed themselves
> from the traditional correlation of "form and content" and from the traditional idea of
> form as an envelope, a vessel into which one pours a liquid (the content). The facts of art
> demonstrate that art's uniqueness consists not in the "parts" which enter into it but in
> their original _use_.[10] Thus the notion of form was changed; the new notion of form
> required no companion idea, no correlative. (Lemon and Reis 86-87)

For the Russian formalists, therefore, form is no mere accessory but the core of poetry and should for that matter be the focus of poetic or literary scholarship. Writing in his _The Resurrection of the Word_, Shklovsky gives a clearer perspective on this traditional formalist position on form and meaning when he postulates that "'Artistic' perception is that perception in which we experience form – perhaps not form alone, but certainly form" (11; qtd. in Lemon and Reis 87, and Matejka and Pomorska 12). By implication, Eichenbaum and Shklovsky place form above content, thereby underscoring the fact that the scientific method of text analysis proposed by the Russian formalists requires a study of the various literary forms embedded in a text and how these are skillfully employed to create meaning – what Eichenbaum terms the "original use" of the various parts that enter a work of art (Lemon and Reis 87). He sums this up thus: "... the specific quality of art is shown in its particular use of the material…" and "the perception of form results from the special artistic techniques which force the reader to experience the form" (Lemon and Reis 87; Matejka and Pomorska 13).

In his _Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader,_ Lodge authenticates my assertion that the Russian formalists placed form above meaning when he asserts that "The focus of Russian

formalists upon the medium rather than the message of literary artefacts brought [them] into conflict with the official ideology of post-Revolutionary Russia …" (15-16). Bressler also corroborates this when he writes in his *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* that the pioneer formalists argued that "To study literature is to study a text's form and only incidentally its content" (50), as do Selden et al. who equally observe in their *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* that formalists like Shklovsky argued that literature is "the sum total of all stylistic devices employed in it" (31) and that "form is superior to content" (Bressler 50). Perhaps no one better articulates the position of these pioneer formalists than Caroline Levine who in her *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* offers the very practical observation that if a literary critic wanted to employ a (Russian) formalist text analysis method to study Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, she or he would focus on "literary techniques both large and small, including the marriage plot, first-person narration, description, free indirect speech, suspense, metaphor, and syntax," adding that "Traditional formalist analysis – close reading – meant interpreting all of the formal techniques of a text as contributing to an overarching artistic whole" (1).

As a result of their conviction in the centrality of form in artistic production and analysis, the Russian formalists engaged in theorizations aimed at formulating formal laws on poetic production, thereby leading to a rather "mechanistic Formalism" (Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 18). On the issue of the place of form in artistic production, they worked toward demonstrating that artists often employ special artistic techniques to use form in their literary works so that readers are forced to dwell on form and through their experience of form, gain poetic perception (Matejka and Pomorska 13). On the specificities of the employment of form in poetic production and textual analysis, Shklovsky readily comes to mind.

Writing in his 1917 "Art as Technique," which was later labeled by Eichenbaum as the manifesto of the formal method, Shklovsky provided a groundbreaking perspective on the role of form in artistic creation and analysis by interrogating and clarifying Potebnya's position on imagery and its centrality in poetry.[11] He subsequently propounded the Aristotelian and Romantics-rooted concept of *ostranenie* (variously translated as defamiliarization, estrangement, or enstrangement) of art through "roughened *(harte)* forms" (Richter 783) as against esthetic theorists' artistic economy,[12] asserting that "[t]he technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Richter 778; Selden et al. 32).

In other words, for Shklovsky, a good work of art (especially a text) should present everyday materials, objects, or subjects in a manner that conceals their automatic or known forms, meanings, or connotations at first glance so that the reader struggles to arrive at its meaning so as to gain a poetic experience eventually. He particularly singles out Leo Tolstoy for praise in this regard as he observes that the latter employs defamiliarization by describing each "object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time" (Richter 779; Lemon and Reis 27). Shklovsky particularly makes the practical observation that in "Shame" the idea of flogging is defamiliarized or deautomatized by Tolstoy through a metonymic change of its form without change in its nature in this manner: "'to strip people who have broken the law, hurl them to the floor, and to rap on their bottoms with switches,' and, after a few lines, 'to lash about on the naked buttocks'" (Richter 779; Lemon and Reis 27). Also, he cites Tolstoy's "Kholstomer" to further illustrate his defamiliarization principle by asserting that Tolstoy uses a horse instead of a person as the narrator of this story about private property ownership and that "it is the horse's point of view (rather than a person's) that makes the content of the story seem unfamiliar" (Richter

779), adding that the same defamiliarization or deautomatization is employed in *War and Peace* where Tolstoy employs the technique of presenting "things out of their normal context" (Richter 781) in "describing whole battles as if battles were something new" (780).

Again, citing Nikolai Gogol's "Christmas Eve" where he (Gogol) describes an erotic scene in a picturesque manner (781-2) and Knut Hamsun's "Hunger" where he (Hamsun) writes that "Two white prodigies appeared beneath her blouse" (782) instead of mentioning directly the female body parts involved, Shklovsky elucidates how imagistic and metonymic constructions can be employed to mask familiar objects and make them appear unfamiliar and thus make texts' meaning(s) not obvious so as to force readers to linger on texts in order to gain lasting, deeper perceptions. Additionally, Shklovsky points out that in a Russian epic – which he refers to as 'the legend of Stavyor' – "sexual organs are referred to in terms of lock and key or quilting tools or bow and arrow, or rings and marlinspikes" (Richter 782) instead of the real names of the organs, noting that "Quite often in literature the sexual act itself is defamiliarized" and that "Defamiliarization is often used in describing the sexual organs" (783). Employing Afanasyev's *Intimate Tales*, he further strengthens his argument by pointing out that "the entire story of 'The Shy Mistress' is based on the fact that an object is not called by its proper name – or, in other words, on a game of nonrecognition" (Richter 783), adding emphatically that "Such constructions as 'the pestle and mortar,' or 'Old Nick and the infernal regions' [used in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* in apparent reference to the sex organs], are also examples of the technique of defamiliarization" (783).

For Shklovsky, then, defamiliarization is the chief technique or method that compels readers to linger on objects (or texts) and gain new, deeper awareness of those objects and their sensory textures. From the above corpus of works he draws on to elucidate this theory, he suggests

that defamiliarization can be achieved through a writer's displacement of artistic materials or objects from their automatized contexts. As evidenced from the foregoing practical examples and others used in his essay, this deautomatization can be achieved through the use of roughened (*harte*) forms such as parallelism, euphemism, metonymy – that is, by not naming familiar objects by their proper names through associative descriptions, as pertains in erotic riddles and riddles in general (Lemon and Reis 29-30) – the use of complex "phonetic and lexical structure[s]" (Lodge 27; Richter 783), archaisms, and "disordered rhythm" (Lodge 29; Richter 784), among others.

Shklovsky particularly celebrates Leo Jakubinsky's use of "the principle of phonetic 'roughening' of poetic language in the particular case of the repetition of identical sounds" (Richter 783; Lodge 27) to accentuate his drive for the conscious use of roughened or stony forms – which are characteristic of poetic language even in oral contexts such as the Konkomba folktales herein studied, as will be revealed later in chapters three and four – to deautomatize poetic materials in order to impede reader perception. He then reiterates the distinction between poetic and prosaic language thus: "The language of poetry is, then, a difficult, roughened, impeded language" (Richter 783; Lodge 27). "Poetic speech is *formed speech*" while "Prose is ordinary speech – economical, easy, proper, the goddess of prose [*dea prosae*] is a goddess of the accurate, facile type, of the 'direct' expression of a child" (Richter 784; Lodge 28).

Proffering similar postulations, Yuri Tynyanov in his *The Problem of Poetic Language* asserts that "Poetry, as opposed to prose, tends toward unity and richness ranged around an uncommon object. This very 'uncommonness' prevents the main point of the poem from being smoothed over" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 97). Here Tynyanov fundamentally corroborates Shklovsky's assertion that poetic language is difficult, roughened, and impeded and that it deautomatizes objects in order to delay reader perception and prolong enjoyment. But above all,

both Shklovsky and Tynyanov point to the fact that form deautomatizes material (or meaning), thereby underscoring the unity of form and meaning and re-echoing the formalist position that form shapes meaning and therefore is superior to meaning and finds embodiment in poetic language rather than practical language.

Of the two kinds of language, Shklovsky clearly advocates that poetic language be employed to defamiliarize texts as done by authors such as Leo Tolstoy, Knut Hamsun, Nikolai Gogol, Leo Jakubinsky, and Arnaut Daniel, among others. This defamiliarization advocated by him, Lemon and Reis point out, is not a literary device per se but "a result obtainable by any number of devices" (22) employed in a work of art (especially a text), noting that elements such as point of view, wordplay, rhythm, or figures of speech can individually and collectively make the familiar seem strange and through that offer readers new perceptions about works of art. Selden et al. corroborate this when they assert that "Formalists, unlike the Romantic poets, were not so much interested in the perceptions themselves as in the nature of the devices which produce the effect of 'defamiliarization'" (32). Shklovsky himself asserts in "Art as Technique" that "defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found" (Lodge 24; Richter 781) and advocates that formalists pay attention to all literary devices (or forms) since "no single technique is all-important" (Footnote 9, Richter 777), noting that diverse devices contribute individually and collectively to the defamiliarization process.

Unfortunately, all these devices are rather structural, intrinsic, and text-centered, thereby essentially reducing the formal method's literary approach to the study of literary devices. As Shklovsky postulates, the various intrinsic devices employed in a work of art are more important in offering reader perception or generating meaning than any extrinsic elements – not even the physical object itself. According to him, "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object;

the object is not important" (Lodge 20; Richter 778). Lemon and Reis assert that "the object is unimportant because as art [a] poem does not have to point to anything outside itself; the poem must 'not mean/But be'" (22). They sum up Shklovsky's argument thus: "Poetry is recognized not by the presence of a certain kind of content or of images, ambiguities, symbols, or whatever, but by its ability to make man look with an exceptionally high level of awareness" (22) – an awareness which can only be attained by focusing on the intrinsic devices (or forms) embedded in a poem or a literary text. At the core of Shklovsky's postulations in "Art as Technique," then, is the emphasis on the importance of employing devices or forms to make works unfamiliar so as to offer readers new, deeper perceptions, thus implicitly underscoring the fact that in literary studies the intrinsic forms or devices of a literary text should be employed to reach poetic meaning rather than any other extrinsic materials or considerations.

Broadening the horizon of the formal method: studies in narrative plot

Significantly, Shklovsky and the other pioneer formalists' theories provided impetus as working hypotheses for further investigation and theorizing about the scientific method. As pointed out earlier, these pioneer formalists were more interested in freeing literary study from the trammels of Potebnyaism, and the Symbolists' approach in general, through the development of a scientific method of literary study that focused on studying the special aspects of verbal arts – which eventually led to the distinction between poetic and practical language and the introduction of a new concept of form and its superiority over meaning.

Proceeding from this tangent, the formalists further shifted focus to narrative fiction and sought to study "the specific devices of composition, to inquire about plot, and so on" (Lemon and Reis 88; Matejka and Pomorska 15) in order to challenge Alexander Veselovsky's theory of plot in his "Poetics of Plot." This shift further broadened the scope of the formalists' theorizations as

scholars such as Shklovsky engaged in groundbreaking theories on plot and fiction. Employing such works as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Tolstoy's works, and the *Skaz*[13] among others, Shklovsky in particular pointed out and demonstrated that certain special devices govern plot construction and that plot is the product of careful artistic craftsmanship. Shklovsky in his "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style" proved that plot is a compositional concept and not a thematic concept as Veselovsky and his historical-ethnographic approach to literary study had earlier sought to suggest (Lemon and Reis 89).

Veselovsky, in an attempt to distinguish between motif and plot in folktales, equates plot to theme, asserting that while a folktale motif is "the simplest narrative unit" of a tale, plot is "a theme [comprising] "a variety of motif- situations … woven" together into a tale (qtd. in Murphy 29). This Veselovskian definition of plot unfortunately yokes plot with theme, thereby making plot a mere material or story element rather than a structural element requiring artistic dexterity. One can therefore understand why a literariness-obsessed scholar like Shklovsky would take issue with this posture. Shklovsky theorized that plot is rather the product of a skillful combination of devices and not a combination of a group of motifs as contained in this traditional concept of plot propounded by Veselovsky. He observed that plot had been confused with the description of events – what he termed the "story" – and pointed out that "[t]he story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 92).

Thus, through Shklovsky's theorization, "*plot* was no longer synonymous with *story*" (Lemon and Reis 89) but was regarded as the product of artistic construction achieved through techniques such as step-by-step structure, parallelism, framing, and the weaving of motifs among others. As succinctly captured in Lemon and Reis, "[t]he line between plot as structure and the story as material was drawn" (92-93) in this work by Shklovsky. However, to be fair to

Veselovsky, he got it right that plot requires an amalgamation of a series of motifs. But his rather shallow limitation of plot to just a group of motifs piled on one another, and his unfortunate equation of this structural element to theme, created the notion that plot is fundamentally a narration of events (that is, plot = story), which takes away the creativity or constructional role of the artist and yokes plot with content instead of form.

Inferring from his theorization on plot construction, Shklovsky clearly places a premium on organization (i.e., the careful structuring of literary devices) and adherence to certain artistic conventions rather than the story, the material, or meaning. In his *Theory of Prose* he even argues that even though prose is more expansive than poetry, it should still adhere to organizing principles, employ refrains and parallelism, and manifest complex patterns of contrast and similarities. Formalists like him, thus, emphasized the need to pay attention to the stylistic devices employed to construct intricate plots in fiction rather than focusing on themes as Veselovsky did. Such formalist postulations paved the way for further theorizing on the history, theory, and structural aspects of the novel and the short story (including folktales), as evidenced in Vladimir Propp's influential work on Russian fairy tales – discussed a few paragraphs ahead – and many years down the line, my present attempt to explore the applicability of formalist perspectives (especially the concepts of form) within orally-based contexts such as the Konkomba oral tales under study in this dissertation.

In his essay, "How Gogol's 'Greatcoat' Was Made," Eichenbaum (like Shklovsky) underscores the importance of artistic skill in the structuring of fiction, specifically the novel and the short story, by drawing on how different narrators often narrate the story of the *Skaz* based on their individual structuring of events of the oral tales. He elucidates how Gogol employs "living speech patterns and vocalized emotions," as well as a careful selection and joining of words and

sentences in a manner peculiar to the oral *Skaz*, to structure his tale in a manner that gives it a grotesque tone instead of the humorous tone characteristic of the *Skaz*. He notes that this liberty to pick and choose affords Gogol the opportunity to deliberately replace such devices as the puns and anecdotes used to create humor in the *Skaz* with sentimental-melodramatic declamation in order to give his tale its grotesque tone.

In this essay Eichenbaum is obviously interested in the structural aspects of Gogol's story (and for that matter the short story in general), and like Shklovsky, faults Veselovsky's historico-ethnographic approach for focusing on literary genetics rather than the *telos* of literary devices. Citing Veselovsky's explanation for epic repetition, for example, he notes that Veselovsky's explanation of this device's origin that it was "a mechanism for the original performance (as embryonic song)," falls short of "[clarifying] the phenomenon as a fact of literature" (Lemon and Reis 89), adding that "Veselovsky and other members of the ethnographic school used to explain the peculiar motifs and plots of the *Skaz* [for instance] by relating literature and [culture]" (89). It is therefore understandable why the Russian formalists naturally opposed Veselovsky's 'ethnographism' (90) and rather focused on analyzing "the special characteristic of the literary device …" (90), as Eichenbaum does above. Certainly, the formalists' structural studies are more factual and scientific than the historical, cultural, and philosophical generalizations of their predecessors – as evidenced in Veselovsky for example. Thus, if one seeks to ascertain the difference between the Russian formalists and their predecessors like Veselovsky and Potebnya, one simply has to turn to their preferred object of literary study: the material (that is, content) or the device (that is, form) and its structural function? For the formalists, it was the latter.

As intimated earlier, another important contribution to their structural investigations on fiction came from Vladimir Propp whose *Morphology of the Folktale* opened up comparative and

structural discourse on folklore. In this work, Propp draws on the analogy of organisms of the same species sharing common traits to establish the general structural patterns of fairy tales. Among other things, his work establishes the fairy tale as a formalized literary genre and places premium on the compositional or structural patterns in folklore genres while faulting Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne for focusing on classifying tales "according to the presence of one or another striking incident [or component] rather than "on the basis of the construction of the tales" (Propp 11). Propp insists that "fairy tales possess a quite particular structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category," for which reason their classification must be based on "formal, structural features" (6). Like Shklovsky and other formalists, he essentially underscores the need to focus on structural studies such as the functions of literary forms – for instance, the role of characterization in the shaping of a fairy tale rather than considering it as part of motif as Veselovsky did in his literary genetics studies. Erlich offers the practical observation that Propp's seminal ideas emphasize that any literary study of fairy tales should focus on the role a protagonist, for example, plays in a story rather than his/her identity (632-3).

From the foregoing corpus of literature on the formal method and its evolution, one can tell that the focus of the pioneer formalists was on structural studies, especially the roles of literary devices in literary works. Eichenbaum famously argued that "poetics must explain [a device's] literary function" (Lemon and Reis 90) rather than its origin, noting that one flaw of Veselovsky's literary genetics approach to literary devices is that it "fails to consider the device as a self-determined use of material; it does not consider how conventional materials are selected by an author, how conventional devices are transformed, or how they are made to play a structural role" (90).

The evolution of forms and the history of literature

The interest of the Russian formalists in the *telos* of the device notwithstanding, another notable area of concern to them was the subject of literary form evolution and the history of literature. And like their previous theories already examined in this chapter, this shift in focus was in reaction to yet another old concept – namely, Veselovsky's ethnographic postulation that "new form comes about in order to express new content" (Matejka and Pomorska 17). Contrary to this Veselovskian postulation that new forms emerge each time there is new content, the Russian formalists argued that there is rather a necessary connection between works (and for that matter forms) – a connection viewed as an internal sequence of literary styles and genres rather than a historical one based on past events which require that new forms be developed to express new materials in each age.

According to them, a literary work cannot be viewed in isolation; its form has to be seen "against a background of other works rather than by itself" (Lemon and Reis 90-91). Shklovsky took up this issue in his "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style," where he argued that "[a] work of art arises from a background of other works and through association with them. The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it…" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 90). Reacting to Veselovsky's position on old and new forms, he asserts that the "purpose of [a] new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality" (90). The new form, Shklovsky explains, will usually comprise "features of [a younger or new school] and … features, now secondary, inherited from its predecessors …" (Lemon and Reis 100). As to whether the resultant mutant form from this kind of amalgamation is really a "new" one or not, that is for semanticists to decide. But the crux of Shklovsky's argument is that forms go through mutation not for purposes of expressing

new material, but to better serve an artistic function their predecessors (of the same genus and genre) can no longer serve.

Employing the analogy of the similar characteristics shared by organisms of the same species, Steiner elucidates this formalist postulation on literary form evolution in his "Russian Formalism" thus: "Just as each individual organism shares certain features with other organisms of its type, and species that resemble each other belong to the same genus, the individual work is similar to other works of its form and homologous literary forms belong to the same genre" (19). Thus, Shklovsky and Steiner both underscore the fact that new forms are not required to express new content, rather homologous forms replace obsolete ones. In that regard then, there is a literary form continuity or evolution of sorts where a new form is not necessarily new but only a modification carved out of a previous dominant; and what Veselovsky perceives as new content or material is only an individual work created out of a collection of other works of the same form or genre. This literary works nexus is termed by Ferdinand Brunetière as "the influence of work on work" (Matejka and Pomorska 17; Lemon and Reis 90) – or simply put, a history of literature.

However, in principle, both Shklovsky and Steiner agree with Veselovsky that forms change and that a mutant form is the result of the old one's inability to serve its (artistic) purpose in a new context (and for that matter in a new material). The only divergence is that while Shklovsky and Steiner situate the new, modified form in a lineage of forms for the purposes of their discourse on the history of literature or literary evolution, Veselovsky's rather simplistic declaration that new forms are developed to express new content isolates forms (and by extension works) into individual entities without any connection to other forms or works. That said, Shklovsky and the other formalists' main argument, then, is that works (and their forms) belong to a history of literature and so literary evolution scholarship should delve into sequential literary

style and genre studies (that is, diachronic structural analyses) rather than periodic or historical content probes that ignore the mutative functions of literary forms.

The pioneer formalists' interest in sequential studies, literary form evolution, or the history of literature should however not be misconstrued as an endorsement of a historical approach to literary study considering how averse the Russian formalists were to historical approaches to literary study. As evidenced by the foregoing discussions, their interest was much in the style and genre nexus between literary works and not the historical events that birthed them or were reflected in them. Historical and cultural contexts were never the focus of the Russian formalists' literary evolution investigations. Their investigations or theories, especially Shklovsky's, sought to set forth the "fluidity and complexity of the literary process, in a recognition that a new art form or style is not an antithesis of the preceding one, but its reorganization" (Erlich 633). They regarded it as the displacement of an old form or "a regrouping of old elements," as Yuri Tynyanov famously put it in his *Archaists and Innovators* (qtd. in Erlich 633).

Literary parody became an essential vehicle in this displacement or regrouping of old forms as the Russian formalists promoted the law of the "canonization of the junior branch," which emphasized that "periodically, in order to renew itself, literature should draw upon motifs and devices of [old literary genres or forms and] subliterary genres" such as folk songs, journalism, and detective stories among others (Erlich 634). A practical example of this literary parody was Nikolai Nekrasov's parodies of Yuri Lermontov's poetry in which the former basically combined the latter's "elevated rhythmical-syntactic figures … with an inappropriate material, "low" themes and vocabulary" (Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 21), thereby giving birth to seemingly new works, which were nothing short of reorganizations of the existing Lermontov works. Juxtaposing this theory of literary evolution through parody with Shklovsky's defamiliarization concept earlier

discussed in this segment, one will observe that the "regrouping of old elements" or forms into seemingly new ones as propounded by Tynyanov and practicalized by Nekrasov in his parodies, is nothing but a rehash of Shklovsky's *ostranenie* or estrangement through roughened forms. This is a clear manifestation of ideological continuity within the formal school.

Another significant observation worth mentioning here is that as the formalist movement grew older, the issues that engaged the attention of the Russian formalists simultaneously broadened beyond the initial theoretical poetics of the distinction between poetic and practical language, form and content, and literary devices and their literary functions, to cover other areas such as the relationship between works of art of various genres or forms, as evidenced by the preceding discussions. This expansion was occasioned by an evolution of the formalists' concept of form, according to Eichenbaum (Lemon and Reis 90). Significantly, this expansion points to the evolutionary nature of the formal method – an observation corroborated by Eichenbaum who discloses that "If the material requires [the formal principles'] further elaboration or alteration we elaborate or alter them" (qtd. in Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 17) and again by Uri Margolin who asserts that "Russian Formalism was never a school with a uniform doctrine, whether theoretical, historical, or methodological" (815). But most interestingly, the expansion in focus happened simultaneously with the growth in the membership of the school. Since this is of no significance to my present discussion, I will not delve into it.

I will rather stay the course of my present discussion by adding that having developed the formal method thus far, the Russian formalists then turned their attention to more specialized theorization, theorizing exclusively in specific areas. According to Eichenbaum, "[s]ome of them specialized in the problems of poetry, others in the problems of prose" (Lemon and Reis 93). At this stage, they were interested in maintaining a clear distinction between poetry and prose, unlike

the Symbolists whose attempt to find meter in prose threatened to yoke the two genres together (Matejka and Pomorska 21). Though the pioneer formalists had freed prose from its traditional entrapments, they had still not developed a system of definite theories on verse, save their theories on the characteristics of poetic diction and the linguistic premises of morphological and phonetic structures as well as semantic meaning. But as regards the nature of verse rhythm and its relationship with the syntactic structures in verse or the phonic aspects of verse, there existed a gap. With the ultimate aim of inculcating it into poetic diction, the formalists therefore set about theorizing on rhythm, refusing to distinguish between meter and rhythm.

On rhythm

One major contributor to the discussions on rhythm was Osip Brik, whose "On Rhythmic-Syntactic Figures" lecture delivered to the Opoyaz in 1920, set the tone for the formalists' postulations on rhythm. Brik, in this lecture which was later published in 1927 (in *New Leaf,* according to Boris Eichenbaum), postulated that verse contains syntactic structures that are inextricably linked to rhythm. He theorized that sentence structures in verse manifest marked rhythmic patterns – acoustic and non-acoustic (Matejka and Pomorska 22-23). This disclosure made rhythm "relevant to the very linguistic fabric of verse – the phrase" (Lemon and Reis 93) – as it pointed to the presence of rhythmic patterns in sentence structures in verse, thus rendering meter a necessary structural element in the composition and analysis of verse. Brik then went further to identify and catalog the various kinds of rhythm in verse, inspiring further works in that regard as Viktor Zhirmunsky, who did not really share in the ideals of the Opoyaz, later attempted in his *The Composition of Lyric Verse* to also classify verse forms as he was wont to do using superficial features to categorize materials.

But the most insightful formalist work that picked up from Brik's lecture is Eichenbaum's *Verse Melody* which presents a detailed study of the phonetic structures of verse. Eichenbaum theorizes that stylistic differences in verse are largely lexical, stressing that the study of poetic language should focus on syntax since it is the necessary connection between phonetic structures and meaning (or semantics) in poetry; hence the need to study the relationship between rhythm and syntax. His work primarily interrogates the structural "significance of intonation in verse and speech" and points out that melody "as a system of intonation" should be isolated from "the general 'musicality' of verse" (Matejka and Pomorska 24). Based on this proposition, he identifies three styles of lyric poetry – "declamatory (oratorical), melodic, and conversational" (Kharbe 310; Lemon and Reis 94). Of these three, he devotes ample space to melodic style, focusing on its characteristics as manifested in the lyrics of Zhukovsky, Tyutchev, Lermontov, and Fet (Lemon and Reis 94). Ultimately, his work highlights the role of rhythm (or melody) in poetic speech and decouples poetry from the notion of verse as a mere outer expression of given content, thereby making form the centrality of verse instead. Ambreen S. Kharbe corroborates this in *English Language and Literary Criticism* thus: "…form itself was viewed as the 'genuine content of poetic speech'" (310).

Another important formalist worth mentioning as far as their metrical studies or theories on rhythm are concerned is Boris Tomashevsky. While his *Russian Versification* ushered in the theory of versification, his most instructive work on meter, *O stikhe* (On Verse), was instrumental in pointing out that verse is not defined by external embellishments such as meter, rhyme, or alliteration superimposed on ordinary speech but by its own "hierarchy of elements and internal laws," adding that poetic "speech [is] organized throughout in its phonic texture" (Tomashevsky 8; Erlich 631-2). At a superficial level, it will seem that Tomashevsky took issue with Brik's

simplistic identification and cataloging of rhythm in verse as though verse were merely defined by such phonic embellishments as rhythm. But far from this, Tomashevsky's work built on Brik's effort and clarified further the problem of the complex relationship between the phonic and semantic aspects of poetic speech – reverberating (as will equally be seen below in another of his works) the issue of the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the language of verse, which Jakubinsky and Jakobson had earlier discussed in their discourse on the difference between practical and poetic language, as pointed out in the earlier part of this section.

On rhythm, Tomashevsky elucidates in his "Problema stixotvornogo ritma" ("The Problem of Verse Rhythm") that rhythm in verse is made manifest in the various elements of speech that play a part in verse structure. In a review of this essay, Eichenbaum notes that the "rhythms of phrasal intonation and euphony (alliterations, etc.) are placed side by side with the rhythm of word accent" by Tomashevsky (Lemon and Reis 95). Fundamentally, in this work Tomashevsky promotes the formalist notion of rhythm as a structural element operating at all levels of poetic diction and versification in general – an observation Eichenbaum sums up in "The Theory of the Formal Method" thus: "… we came to see the line as *a special form of speech* which functions as a single unit in the creation of poetry" (Lemon and Reis 95). As already intimated in the preceding paragraph, in "The Problem of Verse Rhythm" Tomashevsky expands Osip Brik's rhythmic impulse trajectory, maintaining that various devices of rhythm operate at various degrees to create artistic rhythmic effects in verse, and asserting that "[t]he use of a given rhythmic device determines the character of the particular rhythm of the work" (Lemon and Reis 95), thereby reiterating the inextricable relationship between form and meaning. Based on this, he notes that "poetry may be classified as accented-metrical poetry (e.g., the description of the Battle of

Poltava), intoned-melodic poetry (the verses of Zhukovsky), or harmonic poetry …" (Lemon and Reis 95).

On the whole, Tomashevsky demonstrates in his essay that poetic language consists of various devices, including rhythmic devices, that work individually and collectively to make poetry a self-contained entity whose meaning is inextricably linked to its form – an argument similar to that echoed later by New Critic John Crowe Ransom who, according to the endnote numbered 43 in "The Theory of the Formal Method," argued that "the intended meaning of a poem is roughened, sometimes deliberately, as the poet attempts to give it a form; and that the form is likewise roughened as the poet attempts to put his meaning into it" (Lemon and Reis 103-4). This seeming convergence of ideas on the inextricability of form and meaning between Russian Formalism and its cousin New Criticism should not, however, be misconstrued as a yoking of the two strands of formalism into one yarn. As to the character of their ideological relationship, later discussions in this chapter will reveal. But for purposes of the present discussion, Boris Eichenbaum earlier commented on Tomashevsky's efforts on the form-content correlation in "The Theory of the Formal Method" as follows: "Poetic form, so understood, is not contrasted with anything outside itself … but is understood as the genuine content of poetic speech" (Lemon and Reis 95). Thus, following Tomashevsky's work, form and its role in poetic meaning was revisited and most importantly, "… the very idea of form, as it had been understood in earlier works, emerged with a new and more adequate meaning" (Lemon and Reis 95) – this time, roping in rhythmic devices and their connection with meaning.

His postulation on rhythmic devices and their effects on verse, which consequently further repudiated the traditional form-content dichotomy, courted a reaction from Jakobson who in his *On Czech Verse* reinforced the formalists' position that even though there is a relationship between

form and meaning, contrary to the traditional notion that form is shaped by content, form does not depend on content since "poetic form is the organized coercion of language" (Lemon and Reis 96); hence form rather shapes material or meaning – an argument clearly authenticated by Eichenbaum in the preceding assertion that "Poetic form … is not contrasted with anything outside itself … but is … the genuine content of poetic speech" (95).

The Russian formalists' formal method at a glance

From all the foregoing, what can be surmised is that Russian Formalism placed a premium on the literary work and its constituents and the "autonomy of literary scholarship," as Erlich has famously put it (627). Its practitioners, no doubt, distanced themselves from other psychological, socio-historical, and cultural practitioners of the verbal art – even from psychologically-oriented linguists, despite the affinities between the formal method and Linguistics[14] – and propounded theories that ultimately established literature, especially literary study, as a distinct, scientific field of study with its unique set of rules and approach. This approach, as evidenced by all the preceding discussions, gave priority to literariness (*literaturnost*) over extrinsic psychological, socio-historical, or cultural considerations and to form over meaning.

Formalists like Yuri Tynyanov in his *The Problem of Poetic Language,* for instance, even sought to distinguish between the study of psychological linguistics and the study of poetic language and style, insisting that there exists a relationship between the meaning of words and poetic structure and that unlike in psychological linguistics, there are various "shades of meaning peculiar to poetic speech" (Lemon and Reis 97). Pertinently, Tynyanov's efforts here further took the formalists' concept of form a notch higher, as this work pointed to the dynamism inherent in forms due to the fact that the elements of a work "are not static indications of equality and complexity, but always dynamic indications of correlation and integration" (qtd. in Lemon and

Reis 97). In his own words, the "form of literary works must be thought of as dynamic" (qtd. in Lemon and Reis 97). At the risk of sounding repetitive, it bears pointing out here that Tynyanov's concept of form dynamism resonates with Shklovsky's literary form evolution discussed earlier in this segment, thus pointing to the earlier observed ideological continuity within the formal school.

Having explored diachronically the theoretical and methodological evolution of the formal method thus far, it can further be surmised that apart from theorizing, the Russian formalists engaged in practical criticism (albeit not on the same scale as their Anglo-American cousins, the new critics, as discussions in 1.0.2b, section III will soon reveal), celebrating innovative and sophisticated form-conscious texts like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, "Shame" and "Kholstomer," Gogol's "Christmas Eve," and Hamsun's *Hunger* (mentioned earlier in the discussion on defamiliarization) among other works – including even heterodox ones like those of E. Zamyatin and V. Kaverin (Erlich 634). For further authentication of the above deduction, one simply needs to turn to Shklovsky's observation that Leo Jakubinsky's "On the Sounds of Poetic Language" was "one of the first examples of scientific criticism" (Richter 777).

Most importantly, this survey has revealed that the pioneer formalists focused on literariness and relegated all biographical, socio-historical, psychological, and cultural forces that shape texts to the background. They "did not take up questions of the biography and psychology of the artist," insisting instead that such questions "must take their places in other sciences" rather than in literary scholarship (Lemon and Reis 100). It is worthy of note, therefore, that this survey does not suggest that the Russian formalists rejected every aspect of the then Russian intellectual landscape, but rather only the then pervading approach to literary scholarship, which they sought to remedy with their scientific approach called the "Formal Method." Unfortunately this approach,

with its obsession with literariness, ultimately drew to the Russian formalists criticisms and attacks, commencing with those from Marxists and Leninists between 1924 and 1925.

As intimated earlier, such criticisms or attacks will force several of these formalists out of Russia; and those who dared to stay home had to recant or modify their theories. But the most significant and enduring consequence of these criticisms has been the impetus given to the rise of other strands of formalism, over the years, in Russia and other geocultural settings. A cursory look at these criticisms vis-à-vis the rise of other formal schools such as the Soviet formal-philosophical school, the Prague Linguistic Circle with its Czech Formalism (or Prague Structuralism), New Criticism, and New Formalism, among others, will therefore serve to map the evolutionary trajectory and character of formalism and its concepts of form in different geocultural settings from this period (that is, from circa 1924) to the present day. This will productively provide a solid foundation for later discussions on the applicability of formalist principles and notions of form in the situated oral Konkomba context being investigated in this dissertation in order to ascertain the nature and operations of forms in such oral contexts.

1.0.2 Criticisms against Russian formalism and the rise of other formalisms

(a) The Trotsky salvo

The earliest scathing attack on the Russian formalists and their formal method came from Leon Trotsky, a prominent government official of the then Soviet regime, who repudiated the Society for the Study of Poetic Language's (Opoyaz's) estheticism and radical reduction of literature to the study of literary devices. Trotsky, in his "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism," for political gains, I dare say, commenced his attack with the accusation that formalism was the sole opposition to Marxism in Soviet Russia. Political as this allegation sounds at first glance, especially coming from a politician, it is imperative to note that the Russian formalists' antagonism

toward Marxism was more ideological than practical, methodological rather than a right-wing, left-wing political rivalry. As already pointed out in the preceding segment of this dissertation, theirs was an attempt to establish an autonomous, scientific approach to literary study rather than to usurp political authority as Trotsky's allegation intimates at face value.

Regarding their formal method, albeit conceding the usefulness of aspects of their theorization efforts, Trotsky labeled the Russian formalists' method as superficial and reactionary in character (1) and accused the formal school of being "extremely arrogant and immature" (2). He further accused the formalists of reducing literary study to "…an analysis (essentially descriptive and semi-statistical) of the etymology and syntax of poems, to the counting of repetitive vowels and consonants, of syllables and epithets" (2). He then proceeded to sum up key Russian formalist arguments or theories on the centrality of form in literary analysis as follows:

> "Art was always free of life, and its color never reflected the color of the flag which
>
> waved over the fortress of the City" (Shklovsky). "Adjustment to the expression, the
>
> verbal mass, is the one essential element of poetry" (R. Jacobson, in his "Recent Russian
>
> Poetry"). "With a new form comes a new content. Form thus determines content"
>
> (Kruchenikh). "Poetry means the giving of form to the word, which is valuable in itself"
>
> (Jacobson), or, as Khlebnikov says, "The word which is something in itself," etc. (3)

These postulations, Trotsky was quick to dismiss as "partial, scrappy, subsidiary, and preparatory [in] character" (2) while conceding that the rigidity of the Russian formalists' method was significant in clarifying "the artistic and psychological peculiarities of form (its economy, its movement, its contrasts, its hyperbolism, etc.)" (2). He, however, warned that the formalists' insistence that "verbal art ends finally and fully with the word" (2) dangerously relegates to the background the social and psychological forms that equally give "meaning to the microscopic and

statistical work done in connection with verbal material" (2-3) – a criticism I concur with, as have other new formalists over the years, and which I seek to further amplify in this dissertation as I explore the applicability of the Russian formalists' radical, reductionist method and other proposed formalist approaches and their concepts of form in orally-based contexts such as Konkomba oral tales, in order to ascertain the nature and workings of forms in such situated oral contexts.

But in the interim, reverting to the present discussion on the limitations of Russian Formalism in order to set the tone for such later discussions, it bears noting that Trotsky, employing romantic lyric poetry, implicitly pointed to the presence of social and political forms in literary texts when he argued that "between the physiology of sex and a poem about love there lies a complex system of psychological transmitting mechanisms in which there are individual, racial, and social elements" (4) worth paying attention to since they also constitute forms that impact or "present new demands on poetry" (4). He asserted that literary works are influenced by social factors considering that poets employ their artistic consciousness to transform materials from their social surroundings or settings into artworks. Based on this, he surmised that "art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian" (5).

Pitting the formal approach against the Marxist approach to literature, he observed that the latter takes into account the social and psychological underpinnings of art as it, among other things, investigates the thoughts and feelings of poets, especially as regards the order of thought to which an "artistic work corresponds," the social conditions that gave rise to those thoughts and feelings, their place in a society's or a class's historical development, and the literary heritage to which the art or poetic form belongs as far as literary history is concerned (Trotsky 6). According to him, such a Marxist investigation's ultimate aim is to ascertain the social function of art, or what he termed "the subsidiary role which art plays in the social process" (6), accusing the formalists of

ignoring "the psychological unity of the social man, who creates [a work of art] and who consumes what has been created" (7). Through this juxtaposing of theoretical approaches, Trotsky consequently exposed the formal method's superficiality and restrictiveness, asserting that:

> Having counted the adjectives, and weighed the lines, and measured the rhythms, a Formalist either stops silent with the expression of a man who does not know what to do with himself, or throws out an unexpected generalization which contains five per cent of Formalism and ninety-five per cent of the most uncritical intuition.
>
> In fact, the Formalists do not carry their idea of art to its logical conclusion. If one is to regard the process of poetic creation only as a combination of sounds or words, and to seek along these lines the solution of all the problems of poetry, then the only perfect formula of "poetics" will be this: Arm yourself with a dictionary and create by means of algebraic combinations and permutations of words all the poetic works of the world which have been created and which have not yet been created. (8)

Proceeding from this rather sarcastic note, Trotsky noted that if one wanted to study a literary work based on this Russian formal method – that is, the algebraic combinations and permutations of words rather than subordinating diction to a preconceived artistic idea rooted in personal and/or social feelings – one would have to ignore mood, artistic inspiration, and other unscientific elements or "unsteady things" (8).

From all the foregoing, it can be surmised that Trotsky's main criticism against Russian Formalism was that the traditional formal method's focus on literariness at the expense of the social, historical, and cultural forces that shape literary works is rather narrow, discriminatory, and insufficient – a criticism which has since become the major criticism against this theoretical approach, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when anti-formalist and anti-literary forms critics

asserted that "There is simply no such thing as an aesthetic whole that can be separated from the social worlds of its creation and reception" (Levine, *Forms* 24). A good example of such criticism finds fertile home in Arthur Moore's "Formalist Criticism and Literary Form" where he wonders, despite his celebration of the formal method's "success in purging criticism of irrelevances," "whether the aesthetic object can be objectively determined for critical purposes" considering that a text is "an effect produced by cultural causes, including, of course, circumstances relating to the author" (21) – which was exactly Trotsky's argument some years earlier.

On the form-content correlation debate, however, Trotsky concurred with the Russian formalists that form shapes meaning. He asserted that a preconceived artistic idea, during its transition toward artistic materialization, encounters forms that shape it in ways that ultimately reveal profound truths hitherto unknown. Nevertheless, he observed that "such an active mutual relationship – in which form influences and at times entirely transforms content – is known to us in all fields of social and even biologic life" (9) – an observation echoed several years later by new formalist Caroline Levine who argues in her *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* that "… forms are everywhere structuring and patterning experience" (16), thereby authenticating Trotsky's argument regarding the existence of other forms (apart from literary forms). Thus, it is instructive to note that even though there is a marked ideological affinity between Trotsky and the Russian formalists that form and meaning are not mutually exclusive, there is a divergence between the two parties on what form encompasses: while the pioneer formalists limited themselves to literary forms based on poetic language, Trotsky sought to broaden the scope of form to include other forms such as social and political forms.

In pursuing this agenda essentially aimed at injecting contextual analysis into literary scholarship, he singled out Viktor Shklovsky for condemnation, alleging that the latter "assumes

a very uncompromising attitude towards the historico materialistic theory of art" (9). According to him, Shklovsky in his *The March of the Horse* argued against "the materialist conception of art" by insisting that if works of art are tied to the cultural settings or contexts that produce them, then their thematic concerns will be geographically limited even though "themes [should be] homeless" (9). Employing the analogy of the Darwinian theory of the impact of environmental factors on butterflies, Trotsky however argued rightly that despite their geographical peculiarities butterflies fly from place to place, noting that in a similar manner, the themes of literary works could transcend cultures and geographical boundaries even if those works were the products of their cultural settings or environments (12).

According to him, "To say that man's environment, including the artist's, that is, the conditions of his education and life, find expression in his art also, does not mean to say that such expression has a precise geographic, ethnographic, and statistical character" (10), stressing that usually such cultural or environmental influences or ethnographic traits are not even glaring in literary texts since artistic creation is nothing but a transformation of reality as experienced by the artist. In what could arguably be described as the thesis statement of this essay, Trotsky maintained that art is the product of the material given to it by its world, environment, or culture (11) though it may not be a verbatim re-presentation of this world or environment. He observed that "[art] is not a disembodied element feeding on itself, but a function of social man indissolubly tied to his life and environment" (13), adding that art depends spiritually, environmentally, and materially on social classes, subclasses, and groups (13).

Based on this latter postulation, Trotsky opined that though "art can and must be judged from the point of view of its achievements in form" (13), the attempt by the Russian formalists to use the formal method as a judiciary theory of sorts to sever art from its social conditions was

inappropriate. He argued that "Literature, whose methods and processes have their roots far back in the most distant past and represent the accumulated experience of verbal craftsmanship, expresses the thoughts, feelings, moods, points of view, and hopes of the new epoch and of its new class" (14) and should therefore be studied materialistically as well. Succinctly put, he advocated the devotion of equal attention to both text and context.

Indeed, if one wishes to ascertain the point of divergence between Trotsky and the Russian formalists, the fellow should look no further than the former's categorical declaration that "[t]he methods of formal analysis are necessary, but insufficient" (14). On this, he offers the practical observation that an esthetic or a literary form-based analysis of folk art such as a peasant wedding song will fall short of assessing the sociocultural elements that held that peasant society together and their value(s) to the peasants who lived through them, which will ultimately result in a partial elucidation on that folk song and folk art in general. On this, I concur with Trotsky in that such folk art, including the Konkomba folktales herein investigated, is always culture-bound and crafted in culturalized language. As a result, it depends on social and cultural forms as well, rather than only literary forms, to generate meaning, as my discussions on the formal aspects of the Konkomba folktales under study herein will reveal in chapter four.

In Trotsky's own words, "you will have only understood the outer shell of folk art, but the kernel will not have been reached" (14) when only literary forms are employed in analyzing such art. He added that the Russian formalists' "effort to set art free from life, to declare it a craft self-sufficient unto itself, devitalizes and kills art" (14), ending his onslaught on them by satirically labeling them as "followers of St. John" (16) – obviously because like John the evangelist, the Russian formalists believed that the 'word' is the beginning and the end of everything:[15] in other words, the alpha and the omega of literary scholarship.

Significantly, Trotsky's criticism of Russian Formalism and his consequent call for a broadening of its tenets, especially the concept of form and its relationship with meaning, widely influenced a lot of his contemporaries and has since swept through generations and cultures across the Global North and South over the years. As Francis Norbert aptly puts it, his arguments carried the day and have been widely accepted and "taken as part of a definitive critique of formalist theories" (16). Even though the formalists initially resisted Trotsky's onslaughts and maintained their position as regards the centrality of literary forms in literary study, pressure (especially political pressure) soon compelled some of them to seek a compromise between the formal method and philosophical as well as sociological approaches to literary scholarship, which eventually led to the collapse of the two major formalist groups that drove the formalist agenda and occasioned the rise and fall of several formal schools and criticisms thereafter, as discussions in the subsequent segments will reveal.

(b) The Soviet regime's formal-philosophical school, Prague structuralism, new criticism, and new formalism

i. The formal-philosophical school: a post-'pure formalism' era

The immediate school to rise after the 'demise' of the Russian formalist school and its reductive literariness obsession was the Soviet regime's formal-philosophical school. Writing in his "Russian Formalism," Steiner confirms this to the effect that the amalgamation of the two Russian formalist institutions – namely the Opoyaz and the Moscow Linguistic Circle – into Soviet institutions such as the State Institute for the History of the Arts in Petersburg and the State Academy for the Study of the Arts in Moscow, respectively, led to the adulteration of the original formal method with concepts of a rather heterogeneous "'formal-philosophical school' of the late

1920s which rehabilitated many concepts and methods programmatically spurned by the early Russian Formalists" (12).

But before one misconstrues Steiner's assertion as gesturing to the fact that heterogeneity found its way into the formal method only after the incorporation of these two formalist groups into the state institutions mentioned, I must point out that heterogeneity was never alien to the 'original' formal method. As I pointed out in my discussions in the Russian formalist school segment, right from its inception it proved, methodologically, to be adaptive and evolutionary in character. Eichenbaum gestured to this heterogeneity potential in his claim that their method was "a special scientific discipline concerned with literature as a specific system of facts" and that within this science "the most diverse methods can be developed …" (Matejka and Pomorska 4).

His projection has been validated by scholars as contemporary as Caroline Levine who, many years later, notes in her "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies" that the classical formal method drew on "discourses as various as rhetoric, prosody, genre theory, philology, linguistics … and later, folklore, narratology, and semiotics" (633). She reiterates this in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* where she asserts that "formalism has always [drawn] from rhetoric, prosody, genre theory, structural anthropology, … and semiotics" (2). But nothing better articulates my claim about the pluralistic nature of the classical formal method right from its inception – which posture Steiner concurs with anyway – than again Eichenbaum's categorical declaration that "We are pluralists" (qtd. in Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 14). Thus, methodological pluralism was not alien to the Russian formalists even before the twilight stage of their school's existence.

That said, it is fair to concede that the dawn of the Soviet Revolution and the political establishment's attacks on the Russian formalists – notably, the first Soviet Commissar of

Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky's attack featured in the journal *The Press and the Revolution*, where he picked up from "where Trotsky left off" by accusing the pioneer formalists of "encourag[ing] art for the sake of art and promot[ing] aesthetic sterility" (Lemon and Reis 80) – coupled with the regime's subsequent use of art as a political tool for suppression and propaganda, introduced into the formal method socio-philosophical approaches that were hitherto shunned by the Russian formalists. The resultant effect was the rise of this formal-philosophical school Steiner alludes to. Indeed, forced by the Trotskian onslaughts and, most importantly, the political establishment of Soviet Russia to abandon their radical reductionism which fundamentally reduced literature (especially literary scholarship) to an investigation of literary devices, the pioneer formalists began adopting more liberal and compromising postures.

Lemon and Reis authenticate this in their observation that "[t]he original Formalists themselves, in particular Shklovsky and Eichenbaum, … attempted a compromise. Shklovsky's compromise was a confused and partial recantation, Eichenbaum's a deliberate attempt to broaden a method which he had begun to find too constraining" (80). Steiner also asserts that many of the Russian formalists "modified their views in response to the intellectual trends around them" (Steiner, *Russian Formalism* 18) – intellectual trends, it bears pointing out, which were foisted on them through the amalgamation of the formalist groups and other intellectual movements by the Soviet political establishment (18).

I concur with Steiner that following this incorporation of members of the Russian formalist school into the two state institutions mentioned, there arose a cross-pollination of intellectual ideas which ultimately affected a so-called "'pure' Formalism" (*Russian Formalism* 18) as the philosophical ideas of the likes of Edmund Husserl and his student Gustav Špet made inroads into the formal school's ideologies, especially regarding form and its centrality in literary scholarship.

However, depending on where one stands on the debate on the place of form in works of art, one will agree or disagree with me that what Steiner regards as a dilution of the purity of formalism was in fact a welcome expansion of traditional formalism's regrettably narrow view on form through its insistence on literary scholarship being limited to an investigation of literary forms. If anything at all, the new formal-philosophical school redefined form by broadening the concept of artistic form. This is evident in its members' assertion in their 1927 anthology (titled *Artistic Form)* that "we pose the question [of artistic form] more broadly and seek its solution in the interrelations of various forms – logical, syntactic, melodic, poetic per se, rhetorical, etc." (qtd. in Steiner, *Russian Formalism* 18-19). Hence, rather than a dilution, the new school enriched the concept of form by acknowledging the existence and importance of other forms, apart from literary forms, in generating and shaping textual meaning – though I must admit that the penultimate three items in the list in the parenthesis of the quotation above equally fall squarely into the domain of literary forms.

But that aside, the new school's attempt to modify, or rather expand, the scope of form and for that matter literary study is commendable. Of notable mention in this regard is Tynyanov's observation that literature "belongs to the overall cultural system" of society and that "within this 'system of systems' it inevitably interacts with other human activities in part because of the linguistic aspect of social life" (Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 21). He observed that this linguistic aspect or communicative domain of social life provides literature with "new constructive principles" derived from "extra-literary modes of discourse" and "the speech genres proper to them" (21), adding that this rejuvenates literature and "[forges] new and unusual relations between the constructive factor [i.e., form] and material [i.e., content]" (Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 21). Tynyanov's submissions fundamentally bridged the gap between art and what he and his Russian

formalist companions had hitherto considered as non-art and consequently admitted into literary scholarship, the sociocultural forms that generate and shape meaning in texts. But most importantly, casting a quick glance back at the preceding segment's discussions on Trotsky's postulation in "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism" that form influences content and juxtaposing it with Tynyanov's submissions herein, one will notice an affinity of ideas between these two in the latter's tacit acknowledgment of the co-existential relationship between form and meaning. Essentially, then, at this stage of the development of formalism, the issue of form and its inextricable relationship with meaning as well as its expansive nature found roots in the formal debate, thus leading to the extinction of Russian Formalism – or "'pure' Formalism," as Steiner labels it.

ii. Czech formalism (aka Prague structuralism): toward a broader formal method

Fortunately, after its fall in Russia, the influence of the Russian formalist school spread to other parts of the world. One will agree that in those new cultural settings, the formal method was never bound to be the same in character as the original, obviously due to the geocultural shift. As Edward Said has famously observed, when theories travel they can get modified to accommodate local or cultural demands (219). This is what becomes apparent when one takes a critical look at the reception and application of the Russian formalists' formal method in spheres outside Russia.

I propose to commence this discussion on the trans-geographical influence of the Russian formalist school with the birth (in 1926 in Czechoslovakia) of the Prague Linguistic Circle – whose members were mostly "former members of the [Russian] Formalist groups" (Groden et al. 774) – and its strand of formalism (variously known as Czech Formalism, Prague Formalism, or Prague Structuralism). As already intimated, considering the evolutionary nature of the formal method, one should not expect that the Prague strand of formalism will be the exact copy of Russian

Formalism, contrary to Erlich's suggestion otherwise in his claim that the former's tenets were nothing but restatements of the latter's (Steiner, *Russian Formalism* 29). Steiner corroborates my point herein in his "Russian Formalism" where he observes that Russian Formalism transitioned into Prague Structuralism and that "the two critical schools remain historically connected yet, at the same time, their theoretical distance is emphasized" (15). But no one better authenticates my claim regarding the modification of the original formalist thoughts in Prague than Striedter who asserts that "the development of the Prague school's theory of literature and art, of its own poetics and aesthetics, progressed chiefly in the work of Jan Mukařovský, who elaborated suggestions from Formalism, combined them with other ideas, and modified and expanded them" (84).

Resisting the temptation to go into the nitty-gritty of Jan Mukařovský's works, I will only state, for purposes of my discussions here, as did Striedter before me, that the Prague Linguistic Circle and its structuralist approach to literature stood not in opposition to nor as a mere imitation of Russian Formalism, but as an expansion of the ideals of Russian Formalism as subsequent discussions will reveal. Not oblivious to the fact that my stance on the relationship between Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism stands in contrast to René Wellek's claim, like Erlich's above, that the latter was merely an extension of the former and that it was devoid of any native Czech influence (Striedter 84), I must state unequivocally that such a dismissive attitude suggests that Russian Formalism essentially remained unchanged in Prague. Nothing could be further from the truth, as history is replete with evidence that no theory remains the same on migrating to new cultures. This is exactly the reason my present research seeks to interrogate what aspects of the formal method (especially its concepts of form) are lost when transported to situated orally-based cultures like the Konkomba one that has birthed the folktales I am studying in this dissertation, and what aspects could be complemented and applied productively in such primary

orature. But in the interim, examining the character of the formal method and its concepts of form in earlier cultural settings in Europe and America will serve to lay a solid foundation for later discussions on its character, especially as regards the nature and operations of form(s), in a situated West African oral context like the Konkomba one.

Consequently, circling back to my discussion on the character of the formal method in Czechoslovakia (Prague), it bears stating clearly that though the Prague strand of formalism focused on literary scholarship from the linguistic perspective (that is, structural studies) just like its predecessor Russian Formalism, there is evidence to the effect that it went beyond the literary text "to investigate the aesthetic function in its interaction with other social functions" (Striedter 86). As Lubomír Doležel succinctly put it, the "Prague theory of structure [was] located within an interdisciplinary mereology" (775). This line of interdisciplinary inquiry, mostly centered around the interaction between the literary and the social and championed by formalists such as Mukařovský who "underlined the folly of excluding extra-literary factors from critical analysis" (Selden and Widdowson 42), fundamentally sought to interrogate the social function of literature and the social conditions that govern the production and reception of literature. This social aspect was clearly alien to Russian Formalism whose chief objective was to sever literature from such sociological investigations, but which found its way into the Prague strand of formalism due to its members' exposure to the influence of old Czech literary traditions such as Hegelianism and Czech Marxism (Striedter 85-86).

Herein lies my grounds for disagreeing with Erlich and Wellek on their claims that Prague Structuralism or Czech Formalism was Russian Formalism unchanged and that the Czech strand of formalism was devoid of any native Czech influence. From the foregoing, it is obvious that even though structural analysis was an integral component of the Czech strand of formalism, its

practitioners expanded its scope from the narrow confines of the intrinsic textual analysis of its predecessor by interrogating the extrinsic sociocultural and psychological forces that equally generate and shape literary meaning – an approach much akin to that of the Bakhtin school "which [also] combined formalist and Marxist traditions" to account for "the sociological dimensions" of literature (Selden and Widdowson 29) but which discourse, for purposes of this dissertation, I decline to venture into. But suffice it to say that the formalism advocated and practiced by Mikhail Bakhtin and his followers, and most importantly by the Prague formalists, provides an apt picture of the character of immediate post-Russian Formalism and supports my argument herein about the mutative nature of the original formal method outside the borders of Russia. Selden and Widdowson sum up my argument herein thus: "The theories of Bahktin, the Jakobson-Tynyanov theses and work of Mukařovský pass beyond the 'pure' Russian Formalism of Shklovsky, Tomashevsky and Eikhenbaum" (43).

Pertinently, it bears pointing out that this modified, more expansive formal approach adopted in Prague showcases Czech Formalism's ties with Russian Formalism on the one hand, but on the other hand, it reveals a marked improvement on the original tenets of Russian Formalism, thereby manifesting, as pointed out in earlier segments, the evolving character of formalism right from its classical times. Thus, I concur with Striedter that such an expansion "constitutes an especially conspicuous difference from the basic concept of Russian Formalism" (86) but only to the extent that this "difference" places the two not in opposition but in a continuum of sorts in which the mutant Prague strand, based on certain local influences, assumes a broader scope than the Russian prototype. This marked continuity, albeit with a slight variation, further gives impetus to my attempt in this research to explore the application of formalist approaches in the Konkomba oral context using the Konkomba folktales under study to ascertain what aspects of

the existing formalist methods, especially the contemporary strand of formalism (that is, New Formalism) and its concepts of form, are applicable or could be complemented to account for the orality and performance domains of these Konkomba oral tales. That said, it is imperative to point out that admitting to this continuity is not an admission of Wellek's intimation that Prague Structuralism was basically Russian Formalism reborn, though this key figure of the Prague Linguistic Circle does make a good point that there exists a visible relationship between the two strands of formalism.

iii. Championing a practical criticism: new criticism and its close reading approach

Before my association of René Wellek with the Prague Linguistic Circle raises eyebrows of American new critics who regard him as a key pillar in their tradition, I propose to quickly turn my attention briefly to that cultural setting (that is, the United States of America) to interrogate the character of another strand of formalism that developed there from the 1930s onward, especially having discussed its character in Czechoslovakia after its departure from Russia. Wellek's role in the growth of New Criticism – variously known as "modernism, Formalism, aesthetic criticism, textual criticism, or ontological criticism" (Bressler 54) – after his emigration to the United States is significant to my discussions here as he and another key member, Roman Jakobson, who also emigrated to the United States following Nazi persecutions in Czechoslovakia, are important links between American New Criticism, Russian Formalism, and its mutant strand in Prague.

As a result of their key roles as theoretical pillars of the Prague strand of formalism and Russian Formalism (especially Jakobson with regard to the latter), one should expect that the interactions of these two stalwarts of formalism with critics of the then prevailing young new critical tradition in America will produce a critical tradition with manifest elements from either Russian Formalism, or Czech Formalism, or even both. Charles Bressler concurs with and

corroborates my assumption in his assertion that the "interaction of these [two] Formalists with New Critics … evidence itself in some of Russian Formalism's ideas being mirrored in New Critical principles" (51) – an assertion some critics are wont to contest, though, due to the deep-rooted Anglo-origins of New Criticism.

However, steering clear of the historical details of how New Criticism emerged independently of any external influence in British scholarship and eventually found its way into the American academic landscape, I will only focus on its tenets in America in juxtaposition to Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism or Czech Formalism as such an approach will ultimately showcase the character of formalism in the American context. But that said, it is imperative to commence with the historical fact that this critical tradition owes its name to John Crowe Ransom's 1941 *The New Criticism*, in which he argued among other things that a literary work, just like Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Handel's *Messiah*, and mineral resources such as iron or gold, "can be analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author's intention or of the emotional state, values, or beliefs of either its author or its reader" (Bressler 53). This postulation essentially grounds New Criticism in a text-based literary scholarship approach. Miranda Hickman corroborates this in her assertion that New Criticism "concerned itself with the literary 'work itself' rather than with the author or historical conditions of its inception or reception; and with the aesthetic form of a literary work rather than just its thematic content" (7). Federico Annette also authenticates my assertion above in her observation that for new critics, "the center of our intellectual inquiry should be the poem alone – not the reader or history or the needs of society" (17).

Casting one's mind back to my previous discussions on Russian Formalism, one will notice a convergence of ideas between this pioneer strand of formalism and New Criticism on the

necessity for a text-centered approach to literary scholarship without recourse to any socio-psychological or historical considerations. Bressler authenticates this when he states categorically that for a new critic, a "poem's overall meaning or form depends almost solely on the text in front of the reader. No library research, no studying of the author's life and times, and no other extratextual information is needed" (52-53). Selden et al. equally observe that:

> [New Criticism] is not concerned with *context* – historical, biographical, intellectual and so on; it is not interested in the 'fallacies' of 'intention' or 'affect'; it is concerned solely with the 'text in itself', with its language and organization; it does not seek a text's 'meaning', but how it 'speaks itself' …; it is concerned to trace how the parts of the text relate, how it achieves its 'order' and 'harmony', how it contains and resolves 'irony', 'paradox', 'tension', 'ambivalence' and 'ambiguity'; and it is concerned essentially with articulating the very 'poem-ness' – the formal quintessence – of the poem itself …. (19)

Selden et al.'s submissions above are particularly significant in that they fundamentally yoke New Criticism and Russian Formalism together, as they re-echo such Russian formalist postulations as Roman Jakobson's assertion that "the subject of literary scholarship is not literature, but literariness" ("Modern Russian Poetry" 62) and Eichenbaum's claim that "… the specificity of art is expressed not in the elements that go to make up a work but in *the special way they are used"* (Matejka and Pomorska 12).

But what better yoke together these two strands of formalism are Bressler's assertion that New Criticism seeks to employ an "objective approach for discovering a text's meaning" (53) and Ransom's argument that "criticism should become 'more scientific, or precise and systematic …'" (Selden et al. 19). These two scholars' submissions are nothing short of restatements of Eichenbaum's declaration, regarding Russian Formalism, that "The so-called 'formal method'

grew out of a struggle for a science of literature that would be both independent and factual" (81) and that Russian Formalism is "characterized only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material" (82).

Should one require further proof as regards the Russian Formalism-New Criticism nexus, one ought to look no further than David Richter's presentation of New Criticism as Russian Formalism reborn in his assertion that prominent American new critic I.R. Richards' postulations on poetic language are much akin to those of the Russian formalists. In his own words, "Like the Russian formalists, Richards was mainly concerned with what differentiated poetry from common language. For him, … [s]tatements made in poetry cannot be verified; their function is affective rather than cognitive" (754). Richter's claim here could not be more apt as a quick glance at my earlier discussions on poetic and practical language in the Russian Formalism segment will reveal that Richards was merely re-echoing Leo Jakubinsky's, Roman Jakobson's, Viktor Shklovsky's, and others' various arguments that while practical language possesses communicative value, poetic language serves an esthetic function rather than a cognitive one (Yakubinsky 11-12; Lemon and Reis 85; Richter 783; Steiner, "Russian Formalism" 22).

Most significantly, what draws American New Criticism closer to Russian Formalism is its position on the correlation between form and content. Regarding this, it is important to turn to Mark Schorer who in his 1948 "Technique as Discovery" postulates that:

> "Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the *achieved* content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique." (qtd. in Selden et al. 21)

This postulation – which clearly underscores the necessity for literary scholarship to be form-centered and which consequently elevates form above meaning but does not in any way divorce the two – is nothing but a restatement of Viktor Shklovsky's earlier postulation in his 1914 *The Resurrection of the Word* that "'Artistic' perception is that perception in which we experience form – perhaps not form alone, but certainly form" (11; qtd. in Lemon and Reis 87; qtd. in Matejka and Pomorska 12). At the risk of sounding repetitive, Bressler corroborates my attempt herein to credit this theoretical posture to the Russian formalists in his assertion – which I stated earlier in the Russian Formalism segment – that for the Russian formalists, to "study literature is to study a text's form and only incidentally its content. For [them], form is superior to content" (50) even though the two, it bears reiterating, are "inextricably intertwined" (Hickman 7).

American new critic Cleanth Brooks also aptly re-echoes the above Russian formalist posture on the relationship between form and meaning thus: "A good poem is an object in which form and content can be distinguished but cannot really be separated" (Spurlin 367-68), arguing more practically that "a good metaphor is not really 'decorating' the sense of the poem, it is conveying the sense in a special way" (368). What is more, his argument in "The Heresy of Paraphrase" that "content should not be seen as an inner core wrapped about in an exterior form consisting of metrical language" (Richter 757) is essentially a repetition of the Russian formalists' postulation as contained in Eichenbaum's claim that "The [Russian] Formalists, when they abandoned Potebnya's point of view, also freed themselves from the traditional correlation of 'form and content' and from the traditional idea of form as an envelope, a vessel into which one pours a liquid (the content) …" (Lemon and Reis 86). From these juxtapositions, one requires no prophetic abilities to notice the visible Russian formalist ideological influence on Schorer and Brooks.

Pertinently, then, it can be surmised that American New Criticism's core tenets are rooted in the text-centered approach of Russian Formalism and that the character of formalism in the United States was fundamentally not too different from what pertained in Russia even though the two strands of formalism owe their origins to different historical developments and conditions in Britain and America (for the former) and Russia (for the latter). Perhaps, the only dividing line between them is the rigor and amount of energy devoted to theoretical and practical criticism: while Russian Formalism was more inclined to theoretical criticism, New Criticism thrived more in practical criticism as its adherents did not only emphasize but also engaged more rigorously in a close reading of texts aimed at ascertaining how the various parts of a text work together as an organic whole. As put by Caroline Levine, new critics were more interested in analyzing "the complex overlap of different kinds of ordering principles within a single text" ("Strategic Formalism" 634).

Thus, while Russian formalists largely theorized, American new critics largely put to use such theories through near-laser practical criticism – what is commonly termed their "close reading" techniques (Hickman 1; Federico 18). Richter validates my conclusion in his assertion that "New Criticism is associated less with a body of theoretical doctrine about the nature of language and poetry than with a method of critical exegesis and explication" (754) and that "its development from the late 1930s on was primarily as a critical practice rather than a set of theoretical doctrines" (755). Selden et al. also validate this conclusion in their claim that "New Criticism is, by definition, a praxis," and that "much of its 'theory' occurs along the way in more specifically practical essays … and not as theoretical writing" (20).

But the foregoing difference aside, the striking affinity between these two strands of formalism is mindboggling. What could possibly account for such striking similarity of tenets than

Bressler's claim that this is partly the result of new critics' contact with "Russian Formalists, Roman Jakobson and René Wellek" in the United States and that this contact "does evidence itself in some of Russian Formalism's ideas being mirrored in New Critical principles" (51). As to whether or not Wellek can be considered a Russian formalist *sensu stricto*, that is another matter for discussion elsewhere. But the most significant thing worth pointing out here is that New Criticism's visible return to a text-based literary scholarship yokes it together with Russian Formalism while divorcing it from Czech Formalism's attempt to inject into the formal method a more comprehensive approach that takes into account both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of texts, especially their socio-psychological aspects – or simply put, their social interactions and social functions.

It is also imperative to point out that New Criticism's return to a text-centered approach rather than continuing with Czech Formalism's intrinsic and extrinsic approach of "connecting texts to contexts" (Levine, "Strategic Formalism" 634), when juxtaposed with Russian Formalism's rejection of the Symbolists' sociological and philosophical approaches to literary scholarship, reveals an interesting pattern in Formalism's evolution over the decades: namely, that its methodological character keeps alternating between pure esthetics on the one hand, and a blend of the esthetic and the sociological on the other hand. As evidenced from this diachronic survey on its scope and character, its various strands developed as reactions to previous ones – reactions that either birthed a narrow "pure" formalism or a comprehensive, liberal formalism. In tandem with this trait, one should expect that the subsequent strand(s) of this critical method will seek to expand on New Criticism's text-centered approach by advocating a more comprehensive methodology. This was exactly what happened with the rise of Chicago Neo-Aristotelianism (also known as Chicago Criticism) which faulted New Criticism's "rejection of historical analysis, its

tendency to present subjective judgements as though they were objective …; and attempted therefore to develop a more inclusive and catholic criticism which would cover all genres and draw for its techniques, on a 'pluralistic and instrumentalist' basis, from whatever method seemed appropriate to [each] particular case" (Selden et al. 22).[16]

But rather than go into the nitty-gritty of this short-lived critical tradition or the subsequent one – namely, Frank R. Leavis' Moral Formalism which, in my opinion, based on "his concern with [using] the concrete specificity of the 'text itself,' the 'words on the page,'" (Selden et al. 24) "to prove its moral force" (25) in mirroring its society and culture, was essentially a British critical blend of new critical, new historical, and cultural currents – I propose to move on quickly to another strand of formalism called New Formalism. Its tenets, though not completely the same as Neo-Aristotelianism's or Moral Formalism's, are also largely geared toward a more comprehensive approach to literary scholarship and form than the narrow, reductionist approaches of traditional formalisms like Russian Formalism and New Criticism.

iv. New formalism: toward a sociocultural formalism

New Formalism is a critical tradition that has dominated formalist discussions since the turn of the third millennium. Attempting a definition of this contemporary, transdisciplinary strand of formalism carved out of Russian Formalism, New Criticism, New Historicism, and cultural theory among other disciplines (Theile 6, 13, 18; Levine, "Strategic Formalism" 630), Marjorie Levinson points out in her "What is New Formalism?" that New Formalism is a movement rather than a theory – an observation which was true at the time of the publication of this essay but which several years of theorizing and debates by scholars such as Herbert Tucker, George Levine, Ellen Rooney, Stephen Greenblatt, Caroline Levine, Richard Strier, Susan Wolfson, Terry Eagleton, and Marjorie Levinson herself, among others, have rendered obsolete today. That said, her essay still offers

profound insights into the character or nature of New Formalism, among them her observation that this contemporary strand of formalism consists of two strains: "activist new formalism," which approaches literary scholarship from a historically informed perspective and "normative new formalism" which advocates literariness and for that matter a literary form-based literary scholarship because "contextual reading sets its face against the pleasures of the text" (561). In her own words:

> The … two strains of new formalism translates into a practical division between (a) those who want to restore to today's reductive reinscription of historical reading its original focus on form (traced by these critics to sources foundational for materialist critique – e.g., Hegel, Marx, Freud, Adorno, Althusser, Jameson) and (b) those who campaign to bring back a sharp demarcation between history and art, discourse and literature, with form (regarded as the condition of aesthetic experience…) the prerogative of art. (559)

Corroborating Levinson's assertion above, Michal Dinkler states in "A New Formalist Approach to Narrative Christology: Returning to the Structure of the Synoptic Gospels" that "New Formalism cannot be reduced to one perspective" since normative new formalists seek to defend the literary whereas activist new formalists – and here she quotes Annette Federico – "seek a compromise between the New Critical bent toward non-historical and aesthetic reading and the important work of historicists, Marxists, and feminists …" (5; Federico 19). Indeed, Federico acknowledges the existence of these strains in the preface to her *Engagements with Close Reading*, where she asserts that some new formalists advocate "a return to aesthetic matters, a New Formalism that would more fully take into account the distinctive literary features of a text" while "others have wanted to reconnect reading and affect, or discuss reading in light of the reader's

response," as yet another group gestures to "the importance of literary reading to human situations and our lives as moral and ethical agents" (viii).

Although Federico identifies three groups here, a critical examination of their respective interests will reveal that the last two's interests in feelings and ethics essentially yoke them together under the umbrella of the activist strain of New Formalism with its focus on the reading of literature beyond the printed word. My observation is authenticated by Levinson's assertion that proponents of the activist strain criticize "their normative counterparts [of] derailing the project of cultivating 'an historically informed formalist criticism' … that would lead to 'an adequate materialist understanding of formal values'" (559) – a critique I fully buy into considering that such a materialist approach essentially takes into account other extrinsic forms (apart from the intrinsic literary ones pure formalism advocates) that influence textual production, meaning, and reception; and which approach provides a more comprehensive formalist tool for literary analysis, as will become evident in chapter four where I shall discuss the interactions between form and orality and form and performance in primary orature such as Konkomba folktales.

In the meantime, I propose to stay the course of my present discussion on the character of modern formalism with the observation that Levinson's submissions above, coupled with Dinkler's and Federico's, regarding New Formalism's dualism (or plurality, if one prefers the latter word) do not merely indicate that an aspect of New Formalism goes beyond the traditional intrinsic form-based literary scholarship to consider the extrinsic forms and extratextual materials that equally shape poetic meaning, but also, most significantly, point to the continued struggle between pure estheticism and socio-historical approaches to literary scholarship within the formal method. This brings to the fore the lack of consensus in modern formal critical scholarship on which trajectory the formal method should take – pure esthetics (with the sole focus on literary forms) or

formal and political, historical readings simultaneously; contextual or intertextual readings; cross-cultural or cross-textual readings? Fredric Bogel corroborates my observation herein when he notes that New Formalism does not manifest "a degree of methodological unity, or a theoretical consensus, or a doctrinaire rigidity" but a "diversity and heterogeneity of actual New Formalist critical practice" (183), thus further authenticating Levinson's and others' assertions regarding New Formalism's two strains.

But having already delved at length, especially in the context of Russian Formalism and New Criticism, into the pure formalism Normative New Formalism seeks to resurrect, I propose to now devote attention in the next paragraphs to the tenets of Activist New Formalism. This has become the dominant strain of the two strains of New Formalism due to its methodological duality reflected in its esthetic and contextual inclinations, for which reason it has gradually eclipsed its normative counterpart regarding even the use of the generic term "New Formalism" (as subsequent discussions will soon reveal). I should point out at the outset of the ensuing discussion that, of the two strains, I subscribe to Activist New Formalism for purposes of this dissertation's attempt to employ an oral performance-sensitive new formalist approach to explore the forms at work in Konkomba folktales and the KKB milieu from which they emerge.

That said, it also bears pointing out that as far as my endorsement of Activist New Formalism goes, it is only to the extent that it aligns with my position on the formalist debate – which is that literary scholarship should transcend the intrinsic literary form-based investigations of so-called pure formalism to assume a more holistic approach that takes into account other extrinsic forms that equally shape literary meaning, production, and reception. In this regard, I must state unequivocally that Activist New Formalism's proposal for a historically informed formal criticism is at once an intrinsically and extrinsically-based, politically and culturally

sensitive approach to literary scholarship, in that a historically informed esthetic scholarship essentially grounds itself in examining the literary, cultural, social, political, and other forms operating individually and collectively to give texts organic unity – an approach in which, I must add, tenets of Russian Formalism, Czech Formalism, New Criticism, and even Moral Formalism find common ground.

Regarding its culturally political character, it is worth pointing out that the term "New Formalism" was first used by Heather Dubrow in 1989 in the title of a special session of the Modern Language Association (Bruster 45; Theile 13; Dinkler 4) as a corrective to the then prevailing literary scholarship that tilted more "towards cultural studies at the expense of form and literary aesthetics" (Dinkler 4), in her attempt to reintroduce formal studies into such scholarship. The New Formalism she gestured to in the title of that session – "Toward the New Formalism: Formalist Approaches to Renaissance New Historicism and Feminism" (Bruster 45) – was thus one that sought to embrace both the pure estheticism of traditional formalism and the then prevailing interest in cultural, political, and historical contexts of literature; hence, practically applying the term to the sort of formalism Activist New Formalism proposes. Since then, several theorization efforts and debates, including her own submissions in her "The Politics of Aesthetics: Recuperating Formalism and the Country House Poem," where she is categorical that esthetics (and for that matter studies in form) "can dine at the same table" with historical and political criticism (74) and that "the study of literary form can indeed be reconciled with poststructuralist paradigms" (84), have inspired, redirected, and transformed the character of the modern formal method into one that is culturally and politically sensitive as well as more encompassing, roping in both interest in form and sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of literature.

For a clearer and more contemporary picture of Activist New Formalism's (and for that matter New Formalism's) culturally political and esthetic character, it is important to turn to Verena Theile (an activist new formalist just like Dubrow) who has argued that in new formalist criticism "culture and form have to meet" (16), asserting that the supposition among new formalists is that "a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective'" (17; qdt. in Dinkler 4). Writing in her "New Formalism(s): A Prologue," she intimates that New Formalism is situated "at the crossroads of aesthetic readings and historical, political criticism" (5), pointing out that as a near-laser critical tool it leads the critic or reader "toward discovery, conflict, and resolution via a text's diction, its formal features, and aesthetics" (5) as well as its "social and cultural contexts" (7).

Fundamentally then, New Formalism is a two-pronged critical method: it focuses on both text and context. Annette Federico, another activist new formalist, corroborates this duality in her claim that the perfect critique is the one that strikes a balance between both the esthetic and the contextual, between the objective and the subjective (3), insisting that "[h]istorical contexts and theoretical tools should not be abandoned in our reading and critical practice" (13). She suggests that New Formalism "combine[s] a wish to delve into the aesthetic complexity of a literary work with a concern for its life in politics and history" (19), thus underscoring New Formalism's text-context duality and subsequently calling for a "relational approach to literary reading" (19) as she concurs with Louise Rosenblatt that textual "meaning is not [entirely vested] 'in' the text, nor is it 'in' the reader, but rather involves a range of unique factors that contribute to create a full, responsible, sensitive encounter" (19), for which reason literary scholarship must transcend the text and its intrinsic formal features.

According to her, the new formalism she and other new formalists propose "asks for a direct encounter with a work of literature" but it "doesn't banish context from the literary experience, or insist that we ignore data that could enrich our understanding and our pleasure," noting that "facts and speculations about the author's life, the values of her society, and economic imperatives that may have affected the work we are reading are needed background that should still be brought to the table" (26), thus essentially re-echoing Dubrow's main argument in "The Politics of Aesthetics: Recuperating Formalism and the Country House Poem." All these submissions lend credence to my assertion regarding the dual and encompassing nature of the new formalist approach.

This duality is further authenticated by Stephen Greenblatt – whom I consider a new formalist in practice but a new historicist in theory – who in his prologue to *Hamlet in Purgatory* points to the nexus between text and context by arguing that "the historical and contextual work that critics do succeeds only if it … turn[s] back to the thing that was the original focus of interest [i.e., the text]" (4), adding that "… even when in the course of this book I seem to be venturing far away from *Hamlet,* the play shapes virtually everything I have to say" (5). Thus, Greenblatt accentuates (like Theile, Federico, and others) the need for textual analysis to be both text-based and contextual "in order to examine more thoroughly what had been treated [by Russian formalists and new critics] as mere background for the canonical work of art" (5).

In his introduction to *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, Stephen Cohen also tacitly gestures to the plurality of New Formalism even in its infancy as he alludes to it as "a body of [emerging] critical work … (re)turning to matters of form … but [which] capitalize[s] upon the theoretical and methodological gains of New Historicism" (2-3). This body of work, based on its attempt to unite New Historicism and formal, close reading approaches, he terms *historical*

formalism, asserting that it acknowledges the limitations imposed on form and history when either is neglected or absent in the other's criticism and that a union of form and history ultimately "illuminate[s] at once text, form, and history" (3) – an assertion Levine corroborates to the effect that in such a union "literary and social forms collide to produce surprising and unintentional political effects" ("Strategic Formalism" 627).

For Cohen, "any thoroughly historical criticism must account for form, even as any rigorous formalism must be historical" (2), the latter submission clearly resonating Activist New Formalism's posture. Again, he notes that literary texts have historical roots and functions," which functions they execute through their discourse-specific forms and conventions in conjunction with "their extratextual … ideological content" (14). In all the foregoing, Cohen essentially points to the duality of new formalist criticism right from its infant stage, even though he initially termed it *historical formalism*, thus making it (i.e., Historical Formalism) one of the precursors to what is known today as New Formalism: a claim Theile (18) and Dubrow ("Foreword" ix) corroborate.

For further clarity on the duality of new formalist criticism, one needs to look no further than Theile's argument that New Formalism is not "an extension of contextual readings or a 'mere' return to aesthetic readings" (6) but a consortium of both, intersecting "with other theoretical approaches, such as formalism, New Criticism, gender studies, queer theory, post-structuralism, New Historicism, cultural materialism, and Marxist criticism, to name but a few" (6), as well as Levine's intimation that the new formalism she and, of course, other activist new formalists propose "borrows as much from Michel Foucault as it does from the New Criticism" ("Strategic Formalism" 627) and thus stretches beyond "the works of Russian Formalists and the New Critics … to include writing by a whole range of theorists" (630). Even though Levine prefers to call this kind of new formalism *strategic formalism* instead of the generic term New Formalism, its interest

in both the esthetic and the contextual certainly places it under the umbrella of Activist New Formalism (and for that matter New Formalism).

That said, her submission and that of Theile's gesture not only to the text-context duality of the new formalist approach but, most importantly, to a vital common ground between the two strains of New Formalism Levinson identifies in "What is Formalism?" (that is, normative and activist new formalisms). Despite their disagreement on the best methodological approach to literary scholarship, both strains concur on the necessity to divorce literary scholarship from an approach that relegates structural studies to the background. My observation is validated by Bogel's assertion that "[o]ne significant spur to the recent growth of New Formalist criticism … is precisely distress that the formal and linguistic dimensions of texts have been glossed over in favor of content, reference, themes, ideas, and political or other 'positions'" (2). Levinson herself gives a more apt picture of this consensus between the two strains as follows: "Within activist new formalism, and often in the normative strain as well …, the common cry is that we no longer attend to the processes and structures of mediation through which particular discourses and whole classes of discourse … come to represent the real …" (561).

Inferentially, then, within Activist New Formalism is subsumed Normative New Formalism and its concern for a return to form and the esthetic. Consequently, I opine that the moniker *New Formalism* should apply strictly to Activist New Formalism, rather than both strains, since the normative strain proposes no new formal approach but a mere return to old text-obsessed formalisms like Russian Formalism, the French Explication de Texte approach, and New Criticism, among others. (Perhaps just "Normative Formalism" or better still, "Neoclassical Formalism" will be a better designation for it, especially considering its interest in reviving classical or traditional formalism.) In this dissertation, therefore, though New Formalism refers

vaguely to both strains, it most especially refers to Activist New Formalism, whose approach, it bears reiterating, I subscribe to due to its more inclusive text (or esthetic) and contextual inclinations. It is arguably for this same reason that other scholars like Dubrow, Bruster, and Theile among others use the label "New Formalism" for this pluralistic formal approach to literary scholarship, thus making New Formalism synonymous of sorts to Activist New Formalism and giving credence to my earlier observation that Activist New Formalism is increasingly eclipsing its normative counterpart in the use of the moniker New Formalism.

But this politics of labels aside, my assertion regarding New Formalism's dual approach to literary scholarship is further solidified by, again, Theile's categorical postulation that "New Formalism stems from a literary-cultural theory that harkens back to New Criticism, Russian formalism, and structuralism, but that embraces cultural theory and actively draws on New Historicist methodologies" (7). Levine also gives credence to this in her assertion in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* that "new formalists … join formalism to historical approaches by showing how literary forms emerge out of political situations" (5).

Broadly speaking, then, New Formalism amalgamates "formalist analysis" and sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of reading, teaching, and analyzing literature (Theile 7, 19). In it rests a mutual matrimony of structural analysis and what Theile aptly terms "politico-historical, contextual" analysis (12). In other words, New Formalism strikes a balance between "the reactionary conservatism or the ahistorical and apolitical nature of New Criticism" and Russian Formalism on the one hand, and contextual approaches on the other, ultimately seeking "to understand the role form plays" in textual production and reception "without compromising … history, cultural context, and the mandates of post-structuralist literary inquiries"

(Theile 12). As aptly put by Bogel, "[i]t is an effort … to avoid sacrificing the work to the world, or the reverse" (185).

It is imperative to point out that in order to be this "historically [or contextually] charged and aesthetically informed" (Theile 24) at the same time, new formalist criticism steers clear of "slid[ing] from textual analysis and respect for forms … to a text-dissolving fixation on content and reference" (Bogel 185) – what Bogel terms a hasty movement "from work to world, or from work to self (the reader or humanity in general), or from literary study to political praxis and activism" (184). At the same time, it endeavors not to wander off into a "'purely aesthetic,' history-denying" scholarship (185). According to Levine, this contemporary formalist criticism is neither that of "the New Critics or their successors," nor is it "that of their detractors" but "it is both" ("Strategic Formalism" 632), noting that it strives to link "literary forms to social forms as if they inhabited the same plane" (647) and that it brings together these "social and aesthetic forms to produce a new formalist method" (*Forms* 3).

Thus, in this contemporary strand of formalism, form is still regarded as central to "the milieu in which literature is composed as it does about the manner in which literature is consumed … by an audience" (Theile 7). As more aptly put by Levine, "it is less about what authors intend or what readers receive than about what forms *do*" ("Strategic Formalism" 647). For the new formalist, "poetic language and form" are a prerequisite to experiencing "any given literary text in its entirety and to its fullest" (Theile 17). But this reading for form is done with the understanding that form is fundamentally a historical and cultural property that is employed to shape language into (literary) discourse. From such a perspective, form assumes in New Formalism a more comprehensive character, encompassing not only esthetic or literary forms but also social, cultural, and political forms among several others. As defined by Theile, it assumes a new, expansive

identity as "a social construct: society imposes [it] on literature, but this passage of form is never passive, neither for the society nor the literature" (7).

Juxtaposing this power of form to shape textual meaning and society with Trotsky's earlier discussed assertion that "form influences and at times entirely transforms content" (9) and Robert Kaufman's Kantian-steeped assertion that the material "gets to count as material in the first place by virtue of its relationship to an act ... of framing, an act of form" and "the formal gets to be formal only by its momentary, experimental coincidence with the material" (135; qtd. in Levinson 561), coupled with Levine's assertion that "forms organize things" (*Forms* 10) and that "forms travel across time and space in and through situated material objects" (10), one will notice an ideological affinity among these scholars on the mutual relationship between form and meaning, between form and material, and between form and object. The only marked difference is that in Theile's and Levine's – and I dare say other new formalists such as Heather Dubrow's, Kelcey Parker's, Bartholomew Brinkman's, and Karin Kukkonen's, among others' – perception(s) of form, form equally shapes the society that births a literary work. This observation is further authenticated by Levine's categorical claim that in New Formalism "[f]orms … have a different relation to context: they can organize both social and literary objects" (*Forms* 13) and that "Forms are organizations or arrangements [operating within] materials and contexts (14).

Thus, in "New Formalism … form is reinvented and reshaped and reinterpreted, … against a historically and politically charged background, one that is, above all, meaningfully informed by both literary and literary-critical tradition" (Theile 8). Levine tacitly alludes to this new formalist interest in reinventing form against a historico-political background in her observation that "in recent years [critics like] Heather Dubrow, Dorothy Hale, Ellen Rooney, Herbert Tucker, and Susan Wolfson … have urged a new attention to form as part of a politically aware historicism"

("Strategic Formalism" 626) – a call she concedes adhering to in her "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies," where she is categorical that "social hierarchies and institutions can themselves be understood as *forms*" (626), citing gender, race, and class (as did American author, social activist, and feminist Gloria Jean Watkins, aka bell hooks, before her) as some of them (627, 629).

Form therefore assumes, in New Formalism, a broader character material to both text and context (or society) – that is, esthetically, socioculturally, historically, and politically. Re-echoing the major criticism against radical formalism, Theile defends this new formalist perspective and approach to form (and the formal method in general) thus: "A text does not live sealed off from the historical, cultural, political moments in which it participated; it does not exist in isolation" (7), thus underscoring not only new formalists' interest in texts and their sociocultural, political, and historical contexts, but most importantly the grounds for her and other new formalists' advocacy efforts for the reinvention, reinterpretation, and expansion of the concept of form from the narrow confines of esthetics to include social, cultural, political, and other forms.

Perhaps no other new formalist concurs with Theile on this than Levine who unequivocally argues that form must not be "confined to the literary text, to the canon, or to the aesthetic" ("Strategic Formalism" 632) but must be expanded "to include patterns of sociopolitical experience" (*Forms* 2) and that New Formalism – though she prefers to call it *strategic formalism*, as I pointed out earlier – "invit[es] us to attend to *more forms* ("Strategic Formalism" 635): that is, all the forms or "… organizing principles that encounter one another inside as well as outside of the literary text" (*Forms* 15). In her own words, the enterprise of studying form "is not confined to the literary text or to the aesthetic, but it does involve a kind of close reading, a careful attention to the forms that organize texts, bodies, and institutions" (*Forms* 23). In other words, for her – and

I share the same sentiments – the study of form must not be limited to an interrogation of only the literary forms operating within a text but to other non-literary forms as well, and their contextual interactions and reflections. In such a pluralistic approach to studying forms, "[t]he traditionally troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context [essentially] dissolves" (*Forms* 2).

Attempting a definition of form, Levine asserts that "[f]orm … refers to shaping patterns, to identifiable interlacings of repetitions and differences, to dense networks of structuring principles and categories" ("Strategic Formalism" 632) operating in texts and social experience. She reiterates that its reading pays keen "attention to the ways that … texts, bodies, and institutions are organized – what shapes they take, what models they follow and rework" (632) and most importantly, the "specific collisions among … [literary], political, cultural, and social forms" (632), among several others, and the resultant effects thereof.

From all the foregoing, it can be surmised that, like Theile, Levine gestures to the need for an expansive approach to studying form: one that interrogates texts' formal features in close conjunction with their historical and cultural contexts. Such an approach fundamentally operates on an expanded concept of form in which form shapes not only textual meaning but society as well through its bodies and institutions – for as she rightly argues, "forms [are] at work in social situations" (*Forms* 14) just as they are in texts. Perhaps for reasons of averting the misconstruing of such a socio-literary approach to literature as sociological, cultural, or political criticism, Levine opts to call this new approach to reading forms "strategic formalism" rather than "social close reading" ("Strategic Formalism" 632).

I concur with her on this only to the extent that the reading of form beyond the confines of esthetics requires careful navigation, a back-and-forth commute between the ahistorical and the

historically political binary: that is, an "in-between-ness," to borrow the words of Peter de Bolla (3; qdt. in Federico 3), such that in the end one's critique is at once both textual and contextual, objective and subjective, esthetic and historically as well as culturally political, thus neither being a half-backed reductive formalist critique nor a blotted socio-political treatise, commentary, or documentary devoid of form or literary merit. Such an expanded approach to form strategically interrogates the complex, uneasy relationship between literary and non-literary approaches to the study of literature with the ultimate aim of situating texts in their historical, cultural, and political contexts using formalist close reading strategies to offer profound insights into texts' organograms, the concept of forms and their fluidity and shaping power, and the intricate sociocultural and political structures operating within the societies that birth particular texts.

As Theile and other new formalists have rightly argued, a text can never be divorced from its society or context. As a result, any comprehensive illuminative experience of a text requires careful attention to all its formal and contextual aspects: an enterprise that can only be achieved through a broadened scope of form that interrogates texts closely employing, among others, literary, social, cultural, and political forms – and in the case of primary orature such as Konkomba folktales, oral and performance forms as well, the nitty-gritty of which I defer to later discussions in chapter four where I will explore the various forms at work in these tales and the oral performance context from which they emerge.

In the interim, it is imperative to point out that all the foregoing new formalist commitments aimed at shifting formal studies, especially the concept of form, from the narrow confines of esthetics to embrace the extratextual (or contextual considerations), albeit from predominantly Global North perspectives, are highly commendable. Most commendable is Levine's advocacy of a new formal method that "considers the ways that social, cultural, political, and literary ordering

principles rub against one another, operating simultaneously but not in concert" ("Strategic Formalism" 633). Here, Levine is almost spot on in that this kind of new formal method ultimately yokes together textual (or structural) and contextual analyses into a single literary exercise vested in the examination of diverse forms engaged in acrimonious interactions; but at the same time, it also involves examining how these diverse forms are engaged in complementary working relationships of sorts to shape meaning and society or culture.

It is instructive to note that though diverse in affordances, forms ultimately work complementarily toward the goal of showcasing the diverse structures or patterns inherent in texts and social formations; and diverse forms' encounters, analyzed together, offer profound insights about the complexities of texts and the social experiences or formations they reflect about their geocultural settings and by extension other cultures in the past and present. In such a new formal method bent on interrogating the array of forms at work in texts and social experiences or formations, there is unity and beauty in diversity as various forms "compete, overlap, and interconnect" ("Strategic Formalism" 635) at various levels to impose order, shape, reshape, and structure experience not just in texts but in cultural and "social affairs" (651). Mark you, the quoted words above regarding the overlapping nature and interconnectedness of forms are Levine's own words that clearly contradict her call for forms not to be considered as operating in concert.

In this new, broadened formal method, I should point out, cultures or societies and texts become "dense networks of different kinds of interacting forms" (636) that when considered together – whether in pairs or larger numbers of three, four, or more – either undermine or reinforce each other or one another to shape meaning and social experience. An author can, for example, employ contrast and gender structures jointly to develop plausible characters or reveal certain social tensions, gender power relations, inequalities, or hierarchical orders in a text's geocultural

setting. In much the same way, another author can engage conflict and gender (or race, in the context of an apartheid system) jointly to undermine hierarchical structures at a workplace. Thus, forms can certainly work in concert to reinforce each other or in concert to undermine another form or other forms. As a result, I posit that forms be studied holistically through close and intimate readings that unearth their tensions and, most importantly, their interdependence rather than independence or self-sufficiency. This is a discussion I shall pick up again in chapter four where I shall discuss the power of forms to construct and/or destabilize (or sometimes even demolish) verbal materials, whole institutions, traditions, and various human formations.

Interestingly, Levine herself implicitly corroborates my posture herein regarding adopting a holistic approach to studying the operations of forms thus: "… national, religious, economic, and literary forms deserve their own attentive analyses. But … none of these can be ultimately determining" ("Strategic Formalism" 651) – an argument she reiterates in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* to the effect that it is never "effective to focus all of our attention on any one form [or any single formal perspective], singling it out as the cause or basis of all the others" (XII) considering that "no form operates in isolation" (7). These submissions inadvertently offer credence to my argument that forms be studied not from a single perspective that concentrates on their conflicts but a pluralist posture that is cognizant of the complexities of the encounters between diverse forms – "both social and aesthetic" (*Forms* 17), literary and non-literary – and how they operate in concert and/or "not in concert" to shape meaning and various human formations and experiences.

But what is most important here is that Levine's assertions above indicate that she concurs – as do I – with other new formalists such as Theile and Cohen that a full literary experience requires close attention to both the literary (i.e., the text) and the sociocultural (i.e., the context),

gesturing then to literary scholarship's inadequacy when either of this binary is prioritized over the other. Levine even demonstrates this by employing Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "Cry of the Children," asserting that the "encounters between social and literary forms mobilized by this poem" generate profound "political conclusions" about Victorian England ("Strategic Formalism" 640) and subsequently concluding that "When [for instance] rhyming couplets meet nationalism, … their encounters produce a history of unplanned consequences" (651) – what she terms "unexpected politically significant possibilities" – that can even effect social change, especially in sociocultural forms' encounters ("Strategic Formalism" 633; *Forms* 18). This argument regarding the profound insights generated by interform encounters, especially between esthetic and non-esthetic forms, Federico implicitly concurs with when she observes that "immersive reading and appreciative criticism … have the potential to reveal meaningful knowledge of the world and of ourselves" (ix), thus lending support to calls for a broadened approach to studying form.

Pertinently, this expanded concept of form in which forms are diverse, interact, and possess shaping power in texts and social formations and other human experiences is further advanced in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* where based on such interform encounters as her example above, Levine opines that forms are not static and do not always reproduce the same outcomes across time and space (*Forms* 6-7) – an argument I again concur with, and for which reason my research seeks to interrogate how certain normative concepts and examples of form will operate in an orally-based milieu like the Konkomba oral context from which the folktales under study emerge. As a matter of fact, when forms travel through and across texts, objects, and cultures their affordances change as they "overlap and collide" – "sometimes getting in one another's way" (XI) – to produce an array of "unexpected consequences" (8). In this regard, forms are neither stable, material or context-bound, nor passive, but are active, transforming, and transformative,

often ordering, structuring, or shaping the texts, the objects, or the social formations within which they operate. As Levine aptly observes, they are everywhere, including in these Konkomba folktales and the Konkomba oral performance context under study here, "structuring and patterning experience" (*Forms* 16).

From such a broad perspective in which form is not the preserve of the literary but the sociocultural as well, nor is it the preserve of any specific material, object, or culture, form can be defined as any organizing, structuring, or ordering principle – be it in a text or social experience: whether "pattern[s] that organized … narrative suspense [or] the scientific method in the Victorian period," whether "structural [patterns in the works of] avant-garde artists [or] democratic states" (X-XI), whether structural patterns in written or oral literatures such as Konkomba folktales or organizing structures in cultures such as the Konkomba oral one – operating in constant and unavoidable interactions with other structures, patterns, or ordering principles to give texts, objects, cultures, and social formations existence, shape, and power. Consequently, any formalist seeking to undertake a serious reading of form needs to examine form beyond its intrinsic, literary engagements in a text by considering other social structures and patterns operating in the sociocultural environment reflected in the text vis-à-vis the real world that birthed that text. In other words, a form reader, critic, or analyst should pay attention to all the diverse forms – intrinsic and extrinsic – that give existence to or shape texts, their meanings, and the contexts from which they emerge.

On this, Levine agrees with me and validates my position when she observes that formalists or "close readers are always attentive to many different forms at different scales operating at once" (*Forms* XI) to bring out meaning in literary works, asserting that "[to] speak of the *form* of a work of art is to gesture to its unifying power, its capacity to hold together disparate parts" (*Forms* 24)

– which disparate parts, I must reiterate, include all the inherent literary and the contextual or social interactions of the work. She further authenticates my posture here with a very practical insight that gestures to this reinvented and expanded new formalist reading of form that seeks to amalgamate both the esthetic and the sociocultural by asserting that if confronted with the explication of a literary text, a "contemporary [formalist] critic, informed by several decades of historical approaches," would commence "with literary techniques both large and small …" and thereafter "would want … to [also] take stock of the social and political conditions that surrounded the work's production, and she would work to connect the novel's forms to its social world" (*Forms* 1). Such a critic, she observes, will be interested in how "literary techniques reinforced or undermined specific institutions and political relationships, such as imperial power, global capital, or racism" (1).

Levine's submissions above are particularly interesting in that they do not only concur with my advocacy of an intrinsic-extrinsic reading of form, but most importantly fundamentally resonate and corroborate Theile's earlier stated assertions that New Formalism takes into account "a text's diction, its formal features, and aesthetics" (5) in close conjunction with its "social and cultural contexts" (7) and that New Formalism approaches form from both a literary and "a historically and politically charged background" (8). But nothing better unites Theile and Levine in this regard than the latter's assertion that "paying attention to subtle and complex formal patterns allows us to rethink the historical workings of political power and the relations between politics and aesthetics" (*Forms* XIII). Such relations, I must add, become even more glaring not only in texts but in social formations as well during the encounters between esthetic, social, political, and other forms.

On the specific social and political forms operating in social experience – and which find reflections in texts – Levine identifies spatial arrangements or "containing wholes" (*Forms* XIII), "temporal arrangements" (XII) as in "rhythms of labor" (XIII), "hierarchies of value" (XII) and "economic, racial and sexual hierarchies," as well as "sprawling, connective networks of capital" (XII) as some contemporary examples. Fundamentally, for her, wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks are forms that actively pattern social experience and texts (*Forms* 21). Consequently, employing close reading strategies to analyze these forms in close conjunction with the literary forms employed to communicate social content offers a holistic literary experience and a better understanding of past and present cultures, as well as form itself and its various affordances.

1.1 Conclusion

From all the foregoing discussions about the new, reinvented, and expanded concept of form in contemporary literary scholarship, it can be surmised that the contemporary strand of formalism (that is, New Formalism) focuses on interrogating the encounters between esthetic forms and such sociocultural and political structures or ordering principles as "the structures of race, class, and gender" among several others (Levine, *Forms* 11) – "from enclosures … to narrative resolutions" (11), from constraining sonnet structures to character conflicts to narrative suspense to time segmentations and routines, and from capitalism to nationalism to geocultural boundaries to networks of activist groups or unions, to mention but a few – in order to unearth profound insights about literature and social experience. Ultimately, and most significantly – and as discussions in the preceding segment have indicated – New Formalism adopts a more comprehensive, pluralist approach to form (and literary scholarship in general) that amalgamates both interests in structural studies and the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of literature.

As the postulations of Levinson, Theile, Bogel, and Levine among others have shown, this contemporary strand of formalism seeks a balance between ahistorical and historical poetics, thus making it more inclusive and its use more advantageous than either the strict, reductive formal studies of Russian Formalism and New Criticism or the over-blotted context-based cultural, historical, or political criticisms of New Historicism, Marxism, and Cultural Materialism, among others. Consequently, it is only fitting to conclude this diachronic survey on the formal method by pointing out that my present research's objective to explore the operations of forms in Konkomba folktales, the oral performance context from which they emerge, and the KKB milieu in general, draws on this contemporary strand of formalism's pluralist and broadened concept of form to accomplish this.

Its commendable attempt at a more holistic approach to form and formal literary scholarship notwithstanding, New Formalism's duality encompassing esthetic and contextual readings still falls short of accounting fully for the oral and performance domains of oral literature such as Konkomba oral tales and others of similar properties across the globe. Among the several others discussed in this chapter, a new formalist postulation such as Theile's assertion that "a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective" (17) essentially gestures to the fact that New Formalism, like all the previous shades of formalism, continues to overconcentrate on textual contents – especially those of written literary texts more than those of unwritten literature such as KKB oral tales. It is therefore imperative to detextualize our formal engagements – in an effort to deepen our understanding of forms and further decolonize both literature and literary theory – by exploring in equal measure the interactions between form and orality and form and performance in unwritten and non-canonized verbal arts such as KKB

folktales and several others across the globe. These are discussions that I shall revisit in detail in chapter four where I will reiterate the foregoing argument and use that as a foundation for my call for the detextualization of our formal engagements and subsequently discuss the operations of various forms in KKB folktales and their oral performance context.

Formalist engagements from the African context

Ahead of such discussions, it is important to stay the course of my present discussion on the over-textualization of studies in form by commending the various scholars who have paid attention to various oral works and their poetics, especially from Global South contexts such as the African one, in an attempt to decolonize literature and/or canonize various unwritten verbal arts. As Stefan Helgesson rightly observes in his *Decolonisations of Literature,* African scholars such as Léopold Senghor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Okot p'Bitek, among others, have variously engaged in critical scholarship that has "incorporate[d] African modes of verbal art" (138), especially African "oral forms and traditions[,] … [into] … critical discourse" (2). Helgesson is spot on in his observation that Senghor's "négritude [writings and criticisms, for example,] offered an alienated and romanticising conception of African and black cultures" (107), promoted the "recognition of Africans (continental and diasporic) as producers of literature" (109), and made commendable "attempts at decolonising literature from within a francophone horizon" (109).

Admittedly, Senghor's – and of course Chinua Achebe's, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's, and several others' – efforts and works incorporated an African poetics into mainstream literature and "cultivat[ed] [an] African literary criticism" (113) of sorts. In Senghor's own words, "Negro-African writers and artists … created poetry, novels, painting and sculpture afresh" (qdt. in Helgesson 113). According to Helgesson, Senghor even went as far as proposing a "'new criticism' (*une nouvelle critique*)" which "advocate[d] … a subjectively engaged and engaging model of

reading" (113-14) – a formal approach much akin to Gayatri Spivak's intimate reading and what

Helgesson labels as "deep reading" (124). In his *Liberté 3*, page 428 – excerpts of which are quoted

by Helgesson – Senghor reportedly asserted that:

> To be an expression of truth, criticism must therefore be human in the sense that it
>
> involves one person's judgement of a work and, by extension, of another person. It is the
>
> meeting of one sensibility and imagination with another sensibility and imagination. It is
>
> a matter of a reciprocal *attachment* [*saisie*] of the one with the other: the flash of creative
>
> intuition and the clarity of style at one and the same time.
>
> An attachment to what? To the writer in his [*sic*] environment, as one says today,
>
> historically and geographically, sociologically, but essentially psychologically and,
>
> ultimately, morally. You will have understood, moreover, that beyond the artist and the
>
> criticism, there are the people who reread them …. (114)

The theorization above essentially yokes Senghor together with new formalists and their call for

intimate engagements with texts and their contexts.

Apart from such theorizing, Senghor's critical engagements also included "engage[ments]

with Goethe, Harlem Renaissance poets, Victor Hugo, Camara Laye, Peter Abrahams, Birago

Diop, René Maran, Latin literature" (Helgesson 116), and other written literature. He equally

engaged with African oral poetics – as pertains, for instance, in his preface to Diop's anthology

Les Nouveaux contes d'Amadou Koumba, which was "transcribed and translated from the oral

delivery of the griot Amadou Koumba" (Helgesson 118). As Helgesson rightly points out, in this

preface, "Senghor makes Diop's translation and transcription of the griot's oral performances

aesthetically comprehensible to his French readers, but defamiliarises … the received meaning of

… terms" such as "*conte*, *fable*, *drame* (tale, fable, drama)" by pointing out the peculiarities of

African orature in terms of genre categorizations (118-19). This is an issue I shall pick up in chapter two and advance a step further in chapter four to connect it directly to the contemporary debate on the nature and workings of forms.

In the meantime, it is imperative to point out that due to the powerful influence of written literature, when scholars such as Senghor do engage with orature (as he does in his preface to Diop's anthology), the textual contents of the oral pieces tend to receive more attention than their oral and performance domains. In that preface, for example, Senghor draws extensively on the textual contents of the tales in the anthology to explore characterization and discuss the peculiarity of rhythm in African orature (Helgesson 119). As Helgesson reports, "Senghor quotes extensively from the text[s] to demonstrate … the effect of rhythm" (119) in such oral texts. To further authenticate my argument regarding the over-textualization of our formal engagements, I should draw attention to Senghor's review of a collection of Wolof proverbs, wherein he again draws on their textual contents to assert that "the 'proverb is poetry in its very substance', and as such its imagery 'expresses the experience of a civilisation through its reference to climate, history, myths, morals, [and] institutions'" (Helgesson 132).

There is no denying that formal studies in written literature and the textual contents of orature abound, especially from the African context. Senghor's formal engagements discussed herein are, collectively, only one classic example of these. Another noteworthy example is Sunday Anozie's various structuralist engagements in "A Structural Approach to Okigbo's *Distances*," "Poetry and Empirical Logic: A Correspondence Theory of Truth in Okigbo's *Laments*," and *Structural Models and African Poetics,* among others. In the two articles mentioned above, Anozie explores structurally the rhetorical structures that are employed by Christopher Okigbo in exploring "the theme of the exile's return" (qtd. in *Structural Models* 13), while in the second

article he discusses the logical nature of Okigbo's sequencing of his series of poems titled *Laments* in a structure akin to the Yoruba traditional drum language's. In this second article, he particularly celebrates Okigbo's "acute sense of form in formlessness" (qtd. in *Structural Models* 13), noting that his style resonates with those of other African writers whose "intuitions of language and medium … are generally linked not so much with the separable properties of words, images or sounds, as with the ability to discern in these discordant elements a unifying dialectic" (qdt. in *Structural Models* 13).

Such formalist insights into Okigbo's poetry filter into Anozie's later work, *Structural Models and African Poetics*, wherein he offers further invaluable structural insights into some African literature, including Senghor's works, snippets of Okigbo's poetry (13-14), and the Igbo mask among others. With regard to Senghor, Anozie employs Roman Jakobson's structural models to analyze his "Le Totem," suggesting, among other things, that "the organization of details in the poem" resonates with "the African totemic configuration" (172) due to the "frequency … of images derived from the vegetable and animal kingdom [that is, the Senegalese culture]" (172) to "perform[…] a significant metonymic function" (173). Based on the foregoing, Anozie concludes that "the semantic component of "Le Totem" is both normatively circumscribed and exhaustive" (174), thereby gesturing to the centrality of "'totem' as a 'thought structure'" (174) in this poem. The structuralist that he is, Anozie advances beyond this totemic configuration "to relate the semantic components of the poem to its syntactic structure" (174), noting that punctuation marks play significant roles in the poem's thought structuring and observing that the poem "has no end rhymes" (174) and that its "rhythm is conveyed through the preponderance of consonantal sounds at the beginning of words …" (175).

Apart from (written) poetry such as "Le Totem," Anozie's *Structural Models and African Poetics* equally offers structural insights into unwritten forms such as the Igbo wooden mask. Drawing on examples from Simon Ottenberg's *Masked Rituals of Afikpo* and his observations (118), Anozie asserts, in the chapter he titles "The Poetics of the Mask," that the Acali mask, for instance, "has a great range of stylistic variations upon its relatively static features" (118), noting that eleven of these variations were noted from Ottenberg's analytic schema based on their stylistic features such as "crest shape, forehead line, eye shape, tears, nose length, mouth, and beard" (119). He particularly observes, from Ottenberg's table (on page 119) and his "independent observations" (118), "an usually strange combination of the same forms" or features in one Acali mask (that is, "mask no. 9"), on which "the eye shape alternates between a square and a rectangle; the tear line either single or multiple; nose length either short or long, medium or large; mouth either present or absent; and beard small or full" (119-20).

Such close attention to the features of this mask – and others such as "mask 8," whose "forehead line is either low or high or both low and high" (119) – gestures to Anozie's employment of structuralist principles to study the stylistic patterns on these Acali masks. According to him, such patterns offer "a partial projection into a sign system of an [Igbo] iconographical symbol, the mask" (118), while revealing "the range and autonomy of the execution which each carver has brought to each static feature" (118). But most importantly, he adds, the marked variations in the stylistic features of these masks appear to gesture to "a principle of African prosody, or the Igbo word rhythm as embodied in the mask" (120). Such conclusions based on his comparative analyses of these masks' static features ultimately lend credence to Anozie's assertion that "the mask is shrouded in the mystery of the esoteric language. The language of icons, it is also a metalanguage …" (117) that can be analyzed structurally when "viewed as an autonomous cultural code, a

constitutive system of symbols, icons and, possibly too, of allegories" (117). Even though his analyses of the Acali masks' diverse features do not go into their semiotic manifestations, at least his attention to their static features and his subsequent comparative analyses of these stylistic features as presented in Ottenberg's table and from his independent observations, is formalist enough to draw attention to the "aesthetic and stylistic" (120) aspects of the Igbo mask as an unwritten art form.

Most importantly, all the foregoing authenticate my assertion that there have been and continue to be formalist engagements with various written and unwritten African art forms – albeit more on the written verbal arts than unwritten forms such as orature, and most regrettably, more on the textual contents of orature than their oral performance domains. Admittedly, some (postcolonial) writers and scholars have and continue to incorporate and/or discuss the esthetics of African oral art forms in their works (Bandia, "Orality and Translation" 111). As aptly observed by Helgesson, scholars such as Okot p'Bitek worked tirelessly "to bring oral forms and traditions to bear on critical discourse" (2).

In her *African Women's Literature, Orature and Intertextuality,* Susan Arndt also asserts and demonstrates that some Nigerian women writers, especially those of Igbo extraction, employ Igbo oral narratives and their esthetics in their literary works to write back. According to her, for "many African women writers, oral narratives, their aesthetics and world view, grew to be inspiring objects of emulation as well as mentors deserving of criticism" (8-9). She particularly makes the observation – and I do agree with her – that the fictionalization of Igbo oral esthetics by these women writers has not only africanized their writings but also contributed to decolonizing the genres they write and the English language (9). On the specific oral esthetic elements that are borrowed by these women writers, Arndt asserts that:

… the authors gather narrative devices which make oral narratives an artistic experience. Among these are the integration of proverbs, songs and riddles, narration in direct speech, the use of repetitions, digressions, ideophones, irony, satire, symbolic praise names and first names as well as of similes, metaphors and allegories which refer to the described world of real life. … they [also] borrow century-old structural elements of narratives, such as motifs, subjects, standardized figures as well as conflict and figure constellations, from oral literature. (9)

Advancing into linguistic structures, Arndt notes the employment of *Igbo-lexification* and *relexification* in the language of most Igbo women writers' texts, asserting that "Igbo women writers introduce Igbo words (above all nouns), word groups, sentences and passages into their anglophone novels and short stories" (73) for example. They also introduce Igbo "idiom, formulas and oral texts such as *Ilu* and *Afa-Ozo*" (73-74) – as pertains, for instance, in "Nwapa's *Efuru* and Okoye's 'The Pay-Packet'" (Arndt 74, note 29). Such Igbo lexical intrusions as those above, according to Arndt, are usually translated by these women writers either via parentheses or glossaries – which both come with their advantages and disadvantages (83). Arndt then takes a step further to identify two levels of translation in these texts – those done by the authors and those done by characters operating at the intradiegetic level. She then analyzes the esthetic values of various acts of translation in texts such as Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *A Kind of Marriage* (85-86), among others, and ultimately concludes that the latter's translations "possess an aesthetic maturity which is unequaled by other Igbo woman authors" (86).

In addition, Arndt notes that Igbo women writers make use of metaphors, similes, and allegories, adding that they "derive their metaphors, allegories and similes - like the oral women narrators - from the concrete social and natural context of the Igbo" (107). In a tabular form, she

enumerates the number of times works such as Emecheta's *A Kind of Marriage*, Theodora Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Ubaaku," Ifeoma Okoye's "The Pay-Packet," Bridget Nwankwo's *Drums of Destiny,* and Nwapa's *Efuru*, among others, draw these linguistic devices from the Igbo cultural context to enrich their dictions (107-8). Arndt then proceeds to discuss the various texts in her table, labeled "Table 7," illustrating how these draw from the concrete Igbo world to enrich their dictions and contents (108ff).

From all the foregoing discussions, it can be argued, then, that Arndt does not merely point out the manifestations of Igbo oral formal elements in the various women writers' works she discusses, but she also engages with these texts formally in order to drum home her argument that their authors borrow from their oral tradition and oral esthetics to write their works of fiction. This further authenticates my assertion – and of course, Bandia's and Helgesson's mentioned earlier – that there have been and continue to be formal engagements with African oral poetics via the fictionalization of African oral poetics and the critical discourses on such works of fiction.

Apart from such formal engagements, there have been more direct formal engagements with African oral poetics via African oral forms rather than through written African literature such as the Igbo women writers' examples explored by Arndt. One such direct engagement can be found in Beatrice Mireku-Gyimah's "Performance and the Techniques of the Akan Folktale," where she discusses the various constituents of the Akan folktale, offering insights into its introductory part, the main body, and the conclusion, as well as its oral performance esthetics. In his "Theorising Pornogrammar in the Akan Folktale Tradition: The Trickster's Rhetorical Indirection and Sexual Indiscretion," J.B. Amissah-Arthur also engages more structurally with the Akan folktale by discussing the language of Kweku Ananse, "the archetypal trickster of the Akan folktale tradition" (54). Concentrating on the language often employed by this character, Amissah-Arthur explores

"the forms of rhetorical indirection and linguistic stratagem" (54) Ananse often employs to outwit others and achieve his goals, observing that he often "resorts to linguistic indirection – puns, ambiguities, tropes – and rhetorical gimmicks, including incantations, *nsabran* (appellations) and songs as strategic tools to execute his tricks" (56).

Akosua Anyidoho's "Technique of Akan Praise Poetry in Christian Worship: Madam Afua Kuma" equally offers formalist insights into the textual contents and esthetics of another African oral art form – namely, Akan praise poetry. In this article, Anyidoho explores the textual and oral performance esthetics of Akan praise poetry (indigenously known as *amoma*), pointing out the peculiarities of its grammar as manifested in a particular female poet's (that is, Madam Afua Kuma's) oral Christian poetry. She comparatively analyzes the textual contents of the Akan *amoma* and Kuma's poetry, pointing out, among other things, their similarities in terms of "content, structure, imagery, and lexical selection" (78). She asserts that:

> A look at the metaphors and imagery used in both traditional appellation and Madam Kuma's work shows certain similarities: they are often related to war, hunting, cunning animals, birds and plants found in the forest, and deities. …
>
> Turning now to the structure of the compositions, one of the apparent similarities is the structure of the clauses. To begin with[,] the phrase[s] *wo na\a* ……., "you, who ….."., *ɔ(no) na\a*…….., "he, who…………… ," or in some cases a proper noun, recur … in the text. … [S]ince *amoma* is intended to portray the individual as above everyone else, the use of the construction "you, who" allows the artist to fulfil this objective.
>
> Another typical syntactic feature of traditional praise appellation is the use of semantically complex, multisyllabic nominals at the beginning of lines, followed by a relative clause…. (78-80)

Such structural analyses as the foregoing are heavily drawn on by Anyidoho to situate Kuma's private creative art and performances in the larger corpus of Akan praise poetry. But her analyses, most importantly, gesture to her formal engagement with the poetics of Kuma's oral poetry and Akan praise poetry in general. Her article, Mireku-Gyimah's, and Amissah Arthur's are only a microcosm of the diverse formal engagements with African oral poetics, and serve to offer glimpses into the sorts of formal engagements that have and continue to characterize formalist engagements from the African context.

Commendable as these and all the other examples of formal engagements with African poetics – whether through written or unwritten art forms – are, they still fall short of relating these engagements or poetics directly and rigidly to the debate on forms and their affordances. Simply put, these diverse formalist engagements fail to rigidly engage in the debate on forms or directly offer illuminations on the nature and workings of forms and the implications thereof for our comprehension of forms and their operations in oral verbal materials and their oral contexts. It is, therefore, important that having examined the character of the formal method and its concepts of form in various Global North contexts and the manifestations of formalist perspectives and structural engagements in a Global South context such as African literature, especially African orature, I advance a step further to fill the above knowledge gap by exploring the interactions between form and orality and form and performance from an orally-based, situated West African context such as the Konkomba one.

It will certainly be interesting to ascertain how certain normative concepts of forms are reinforced, destabilized, or even demolished in new geocultural settings such as the oral one from which Konkomba folktales emerge. What aspects are lost and how could the new formalist method and its reinvented and expanded concept of form be complemented and productively applied in

studying these oral tales, the oral and performance contexts from which they emerge, and the Konkomba milieu at large – especially considering Theile's assertion that form does not only shape texts but the societies that produce them as well (7)? But before delving into the nitty-gritty of such discussions, it is imperative to first spend the next two chapters examining the Konkomba oral tale as a literary genre and its translatability or untranslatability using available translation methods, after which the tales can then be subjected to an oral performance-sensitive new formalist scrutiny aimed at detextualizing studies in form.

CHAPTER TWO

The Konkomba folktale as a literary genre

2.0 Introduction: insights into the Konkomba (KKB) oral context

The objectives of this chapter are to situate the oral tales of the Konkomba people in the literary canon, especially in the comity of the folktale genre, and gesture to their study worthiness. Drawing on genre theory and employing the historical-geographical, anthropological, psychological, structural, and contextual approaches to folktale studies, the chapter explores the art of storytelling among Konkombas (KKBs) and teases out the characteristics of the Konkomba folktale in close relation to dominant characteristics of the folktale as established by studies in genre theory and the folktale genre so as to accomplish these goals. But before engaging in such discussions, a quick insight into the oral KKB context we are dealing with will serve to offer some foundational knowledge necessary for comprehending these KKB folktales and their performance(s).

Numbering about 1,090,000 in Ghana and 112,000 in Togo as at September 2022,[17] the KKB people inhabit north-eastern Ghana and north-western Togo – specifically the "Oti Plain" or the former "French and British Trusteeship territories of Northern Togoland" (Tait, "Konkomba Sorcery" 66; "The Political System of Konkomba" 213). However, following years of migration due to pressure from colonial authorities, ethnic violence, and the search for arable lands, today a lot of KKBs are also settled in the three Bono regions, the Greater Accra, Ahafo, Oti, and Volta regions of Ghana. Largely farmers (Tait, "The Political System of Konkomba" 213; Müller 94), they speak a language called Likpakpaln. Although there has been a rising number of written literature such as a Likpakpaln dictionary, teaching primers, and a pamphlet of folktales since Mary Steele's pioneering Likpakpaln Bible translation published in 1977,[18] the bulk of Likpakpaln literature is still oral in nature.

This KKB oral heritage cuts across several genres indigenously known as itiin (folktales), ilatiin (male dirges/male folksongs), ichaa (female dirges), igbelahn (female folksongs), ŋitiinbɔk (riddles), and ŋiyataŋak (proverbs), among others. Over the years, these have been jealously policed and passed down orally from one KKB generation to another, and from one KKB community to another. Consequently, as pointed out in the general introduction, the Konkomba folktales to be discussed in this dissertation are originally oral in nature, coming alive only during re-enactments in their communities of origin. The sample tales in the Appendix – and all the data used in this research project – are therefore primary data that I documented via audio and visual recordings. I visited various Konkomba communities in Chamba and Saboba and their environs in Ghana between 2019 and 2022, observed, participated in, and captured on audio and video various performances of these oral stories. Afterward I sorted the stories, transcribed some of them in Likpakpaln with the aid of some Likpakpaln consultants, and translated others into English in Düsseldorf between 2021 and 2022 using an oral performance- and culturally sensitive, ethical translation method – details of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.1 The Konkomba (KKB) folktale as a genre of folklore

Genre studies have, since the seminal efforts of Vladimir Propp in his structural study of the Russian fairy tale in *Morphology of the Folktale*, taken a dramatic turn in folklorist investigations. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Propp's work, among other things, situated the Russian fairy tale in the comity of literary and folklore genres. Most importantly, it effectively challenged the skepticism of such scholars as Alan Dundes ("Folk Ideas" 93-94) and Robert Georges (Ben-Amos xiii), among others, regarding the effectiveness of the concept of genre in folklore research by pointing to the applicability of genre theory in folklore studies, especially in folktale studies, using the Russian fairy tale. This has since generated interest in the study of the genre specifics of

various folklore materials, especially folktales (with regard to their structural features and literary merits), in various cultures and contexts.

That said, I am not oblivious to the groundbreaking works of Francis Child, George Kittredge, William Hart, and G. P. Krapp, among others, aimed at introducing "genre-oriented courses in American universities" as early as between 1894 and 1904 (Ben-Amos x). However, I must state unequivocally, without any agenda to belittle their great contributions to the application of genre theory in folklore investigations, that their efforts were more centered on merely cataloging, rather than studying structurally, such folklore materials as ballads, epics, folk songs, and proverbs. Besides, their initial classification attempts excluded the folktale and several other folklore genres. Hence, their classification engagements were limited in scope and were not aimed at employing the classificatory principle of genre to tease out or define the specific properties of these folklore materials like Propp did in his work on the structural analysis of the Russian fairy tale, where he is categorical that tales "must be classified" based on structural properties (*Morphology of the Folktale* 5). That notwithstanding, as aptly noted by Ben-Amos, the efforts of Child, Kittredge, and the other pioneers inspired more genre-oriented studies in American universities in later years as more and more universities, academics, anthropologists, and journals drew on genre principles to study, collect, index, and publish various folklore types (x-xi).

To stretch this influence a step further, one could say that such interest in drawing on genre principles to classify folklore genres laid the foundation for the typological works of the Finnish school of folklore studies (Ben-Amos xvi), the works of Kaarle Krohn, the folklore research giant and proponent of the historic-geographic method of folklore research that I will partly employ in this dissertation, the works of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, including especially their *The Types of the Folktale*, and even Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, among others. What is more,

the spillover of this influence has, and continues to inspire the setting up of folklore archival sites such as the Dutch Folktale Database and, more recently, the online repository *Verba Africana*, the publishing of type-oriented works such as Hans-Jörg Uther's *The types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* and Heda Jason's *Motif, Type, and Genre: A Manual for Compilation of Indices and a Bibliography of Indices and Indexing,* as well as scholarly articles such as William Bascom's "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives," Dundes' "The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique," and Meder et al.'s "Automatic enrichment and classification of Folktales in the Dutch Folktale Database," to mention but just a few, and subsequently my present interest in drawing on genre principles, especially in folktales, to explore the performance and structural esthetics of the Konkomba folktale as a literary genre. This attempt of mine naturally brings to the fore the issue of genre theory and its effectiveness in my present enterprise.

Genre theory, or the concept of genre, engineers systematization, introducing principles of order into a body of things, systems, ideas, or information by pointing out specific, inherent characteristics, elements, forms, motifs, or ideas that then serve as benchmarks for organizing, categorizing, or cataloging. The ultimate aim of such an enterprise is to bring to the fore the intricate structures or patterns inherent in a particular mass or system, and most importantly, in the individual constituents of that mass, body, or system. It is the latter case that makes genre theory apt and effective for my attempt to tease out the inherent features of the oral tales of the Konkomba people so as to situate them in the folktale genre; for one could not agree more with Propp that "the basic unit for any study of folklore, including classification, is genre" (*Theory and History of Folklore* 40).

As rightly defined by him, "a genre is a group of monuments united by a common poetic system" (40). For Jacques Derrida, it is a concept that highlights the "trait[s] that mark membership" of a set; and in so doing, it demarcates "the boundary of the set … by invagination" (59), which ultimately creates a division between entities of the set and others in a system due to genre's "classificatory and genealogico-taxonomic" tendencies (61). Elaborating on this, he observes that in the field of literature, the concept of genre requires that "There should be a trait upon which one could rely in order to decide that a given textual event, a given 'work,' corresponds to a given class (genre, type, mode, form, etc.)" (63). In much the same way, he adds, "outside of literature or art, if one is bent on classifying, one should consult a set of identifiable and codifiable traits to determine whether this or that, such a thing or such an event belongs to this set or that class" (64). Such identifiable traits, Ronald Langacker terms "typical properties" (478), noting that a given genre is recognizable by "a set of schemas abstracted from … [the] recurring commonalit[ies]" of its members (478). Essentially then, among other things, genre is a concept that "goes about classifying" by "situating the classificatory principle or instrument within [given] set[s]" and/or systems (Derrida 61), the consequence of which is the highlighting of the defining properties of those sets or systems and, most specifically, their individual members' properties.

For a more simplified phrasing of Derrida's and Langacker's submissions, we turn to Trudier Harris who has opined that genre is "an umbrella concept that allows for many disparate, and often related, concepts to be conveniently divided and subdivided" (509) based on some defining characteristics. In other words, the concept of genre often yokes together a group of things, elements, ideas, or forms with affinitive properties. This leads John Swales to conclude, from a discourse analysis perspective, that "A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of ... purposes" (58).

Considered in the light of all the foregoing perspectives then, genre, on the one hand, unites various entities under one umbrella, but it simultaneously excludes them from others on the other hand – for as Derrida has famously observed, "As soon as the word genre is sounded, … as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn" (56). As soon as one groups, classifies, or encloses a set of things, concepts, events, and people, among others, based on any parameter(s), one is essentially shutting them in, cutting them off from others, and preventing outsider intrusion. Genre therefore serves both as an *ordering* and *othering* system so to speak. Consequently, a more apt and comprehensive definition of genre is that which regards it as a concept that orders a set of elements, forms, things, entities, or bodies based on certain properties that offer illumination on their very anatomies, peculiarities, and commonality, but which ultimately distinguish or set them apart from others.

I am aware that while such innate ordering and othering tendencies in genre will situate the KKB folktale in a particular genre, it will in equal measure, exclude it from several others – which is precisely my goal in this chapter, for I am of the candid opinion that the concept of othering can be used productively in matters of classification or cataloging. Indeed, the othering tendency of the concept of genre makes it an invaluable tool that will not only integrate this KKB art form into a particular genre of the literary canon, but as earlier intimated, it will most importantly engender a closer interrogation of the distinct properties of this oral art form itself – its *poetics* specifically: where by *poetics* I mean its forms and content, especially how its forms are productively engaged to express meaning, as I will do later in chapter four.

Over the decades several literary scholars and critics, following the groundbreaking efforts of Plato and Aristotle, have employed genre theory to classify literary materials (Hernadi 1) into such classical, generic categories as poetry, drama, and prose – what Dunde has famously termed

the "traditional genres" (94).[19] And charting a similar path as their literary counterparts, folklorists have also time and again tapped into genre theory (Swales 34), especially these traditional genre classifications, to classify or organize various folklore materials into, among others, such specific categories as oral epics, myths, folk songs, legends, proverbs, ritual drama, riddles, chants, and tales – to which the Konkomba oral tales under study belong, as will soon be established in the next section. Although Vladimir Propp (in his *Morphology of the Folktale,* pp. 3-18), Stith Thompson (in "Classifying Folk Narrative," pp. 413-27), and Carl von Sydow (in "Popular Prose Traditions," pp. 127-45) have variously argued that "any [effective] classification system in [folklore research] should correspond to [these] actual traditional forms" (Ben-Amos xv), I must point out that such actual or specific forms as oral epics, legends, myths, and riddles, among others, derive the genesis of their classification principles not from the vacuum but from the general traditional genres of literature, for it is based on these traditional genres and their principles that one can then proceed to interrogate and tease out the specific characteristics of such actual forms – as even Propp himself did with the Russian fairy tale in *Morphology of the Folktale.*

Indeed, over the years, most academics, researchers, and anthropologists have and continue to employ the widely known generic genre forms and their defining properties as metrics for categorizing various specific folklore forms. A case in point is Ruth Finnegan's insightful work in *Oral Literature in Africa* where she catalogs various African oral texts into three categories – poetry, prose, and "some special forms," including drama (ix-xi; 76-80) – based on certain traditional genre characteristics first and subsequently, and most importantly, based on the specific characteristics of each specific folklore form, as advocated by Thompson, Propp, and Sydow above. In his *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity,* Isidore Okpewho engages in a more elaborate categorization of African oral literature as he also goes beyond generic

classifications to identify such specific forms as proverbs, riddles, puns and tongue-twisters, poetry of tone instruments, ritual drama, and popular drama, among others. That said, it bears mentioning that he, like Finnegan, categorizes these specific forms under such generic categories as "songs and chants," "oral narratives," "witticisms," and "musical and dramatic forms" (Okpewho 127-272).

Even though, unlike Finnegan, Okpewho endeavors to steer clear of directly grouping the specific African oral art forms he identifies under the traditional genres, his yoking of various oral art forms together under "songs and chants" based on their poetic properties, his categorization of various tale-types under "oral narratives" due to their prosaic and narratorial style, and "ritual drama" and "popular drama" under one umbrella based on their dramatic properties, is nothing short of a cataloging derived indirectly from the known traditional genres and their properties. This tacitly authenticates Harris' assertion that in folklore studies, "genre [particularly the traditional literary genre classification] provides the realm of familiarity, the base of the pyramid whose additional layers might not be formed according to the original plan, but they nonetheless rest on recognizable grounds" (524) or metrics – even if those traditional genre codes or metrics are not adhered to *sensu stricto* due to certain cultural peculiarities, as in the cases of Finnegan and, especially, Okpewho.

From these foregoing genre-oriented African oral literature classifications and studies, it is clear that genre theory (especially with its traditional genre forms or categories) has and will continue to influence, even if in the minutest measure, the categorization and study of various folk literatures. Hence, as graphically represented in Figure 1 on the next page, at the apex of folklore genre classifications naturally lie the traditional literary genre categories; and subsumed in these generic categories are various African folklore genres, subgenres, and forms, including folktales:

Folklore Genres

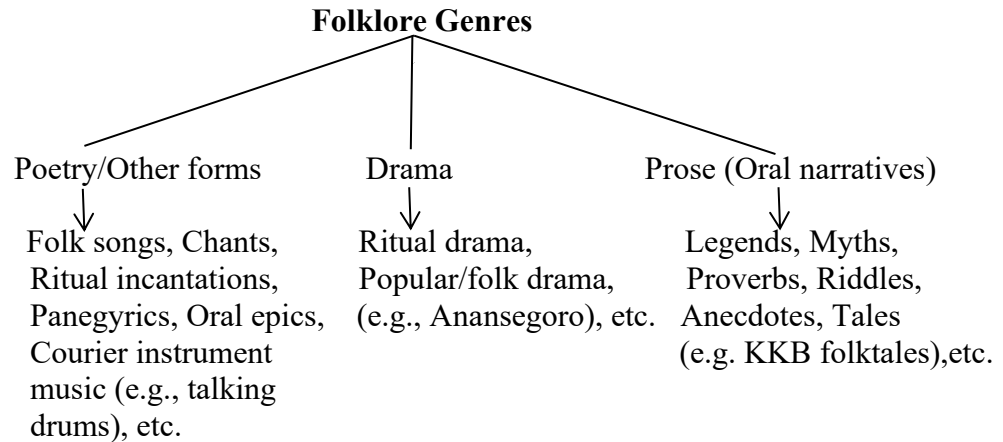| Poetry/Other forms	Drama	Prose (Oral narratives)
Folk songs, Chants, Ritual incantations, Panegyrics, Oral epics, Courier instrument music (e.g., talking drums), etc.	Ritual drama, Popular/folk drama, (e.g., Anansegoro), etc.	Legends, Myths, Proverbs, Riddles, Anecdotes, Tales (e.g. KKB folktales),etc.

Fig. 1. A graphic representation of African folklore genres as carved out of the classical genres

It is imperative to point out that like any system, genre classifications are bound to change or evolve from time to time, place to place, and discipline to discipline – for as Martin and Rose have rightly observed, genres are "staged, goal-oriented … processes" (6). As a result, once there is a change in goal or even the slightest alteration or transgression in a system's code, that classification system is susceptible to change or evolution. Such changes can give rise to whole new genres and subgenres. Consequently, under the traditional folklore genres and forms in the diagram above can be subsumed several other culturally, thematically, structurally, and stylistically specific genres and subgenres or sub-forms. For instance, under folk songs, there can be such culturally specific forms as *ichaa* or *ilatiin* (both of which are types of Konkomba folk songs) and *Nnwonkorɔ* or *Asaadua* (of the Akan people of Ghana), content-specific forms such as sacred folk songs (e.g., African American spirituals, hymns, etc.), and secular folk songs such as cowboy songs or blues – which themselves can further be divided into several subgenres based on content, place of origin, structure, or style of rendition.[20] Unfortunately, apprehensive of veering off the purpose of this chapter and my dissertation, I decline to venture deeper into these specific genres and subgenres. But the begging question from the diagram above is, "What qualify(/ies) the oral tales of the Konkomba people as folktales, for which reason I have used them here as an

example of the folktale genre?" Answers to this question certainly call for a critical interrogation of the defining properties of these Konkomba oral tales. But before delving into such an enterprise, a glimpse into the art of storytelling among Konkombas will serve to unearth certain Konkomba storytelling conventions that will in turn lay the foundation for discussions relating to the esthetic features of these Konkomba oral tales.

2.2 The art of storytelling among Konkombas
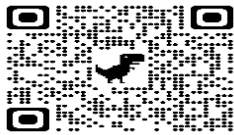
(You may scan the QR code above or visit https://blogs.phil.hhu.de/ctsdus/phd-project-data to watch sample storytelling sessions or access all the data used in this dissertation.)

Konkomba storytelling is an oral art: it is an art in which tales are transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation and from one cultural context to another. Ideally, every Konkomba (KKB) is expected to informally master the art of folk storytelling right from infancy when children practice the art among their peers. As one advances in age and keeps practicing, mastery over the art is eventually attained. Unfortunately, today not every KKB – in fact, not many a Ghanaian youth (de Bruijn 41) – can tell their folk stories. Various reasons, ranging from the lack of interest on the part of individuals to the lack of exposure to this art form due to migrations from rural settings (where such art forms are usually practiced and preserved) to the negative effects of urbanization and intercultural encounters, account for this. It is also the result of the negative effects of formal education and Christianity that regrettably make educated people, especially the elite, and Christian converts look down on or dismiss indigenous art forms as low culture. What has further contributed to the growing disconnect between many Konkombas and the art of (oral) storytelling has been the influx of technological devices into Konkomba territories since the early

1990s and the consequent exposure of many Konkombas, especially the younger generation, to foreign forms of entertainment.

Typically, among the Konkomba people, storytelling is an art for entertainment purposes – and was indeed, prior to the advent of electricity and technological devices in many Konkomba communities, the sole source of entertainment. As a result of this entertainment function, even when storytelling sessions take place during sedentary work or communal activities such as the shelling of groundnuts or maize among others – as pertains also among the Kasena people (Yitah 276) and other ethnicities in northern Ghana – they are never performed in a solemn atmosphere. On such occasions, they are often meant to uplift the spirits of participants and so are often performed in a lighthearted atmosphere of camaraderie.

Although in such situations the storytelling can get competitive, just as is the case among the Kasena people (Yitah 280), the competition is still done in an atmosphere of friendship; and there are usually no trophies or awards to be presented afterward – for there are neither winners nor losers. The only motivation for storytellers on such occasions is to outdo one another with the most interesting stories so as to receive the loudest applause from the audience – as, for instance, the narrators of tales #2, 6, 25, 33, and 54, among others, in the Appendix and the online repository succeed in doing at the end of their performances. The competition is often heightened and sustained by narrators appointing specific people from their audiences to narrate the next stories. To do this, a narrator may end his or her story as follows: "Maatiin mɔ e mua mɔ e m pir ki di leen ... [mentions the name of one of his/her audience]." This can be translated as, "Whether my story is interesting or not, I hand over the mantle/baton to … [mentions a name]." See Bisilki (349) for this type of ending and tales #16 and #18 in the Appendix or the online repository for examples of the foregoing KKB storytelling convention.

Whether assuming a competitive character or not, typical Konkomba storytelling sessions take place in the evenings (or at night) after supper as pastimes for relaxation after a day's toils on the fields – for Konkombas are predominantly an agrarian people although many equally engage in trade and commerce. This suitability of evenings or night-time for storytelling is common to other African communities and is well documented in de Bruijn (34, 41), Yitah (276, 280), Mireku-Gyimah ("Story-telling" 173), Rattray (vi, ix, x), Finnegan ("The Poetic and the Everyday" 6; *The Oral and Beyond* 44; *Oral Literature* 362), Harding (666), and Taylor (871), among others. In African diasporic communities in the Caribbean, storytelling is equally associated with wakes and "moonlight nights" (Warner-Lewis 94).

However, the uniqueness of the KKB situation stems from the spiritual and health undertones it assumes. In the KKB belief system, it is taboo to engage in storytelling in the daytime (Bisilki 351). It is believed that when one engages in storytelling during the day, he or she will suffer a consequence. For children, for example, it is believed that a child who engages in storytelling in the daytime will suffer stunted growth. This probably explains why most Konkomba storytellers will often end their tales with the statement, "Maatiin gur ki m muun ke n-yaaja aagbem na (translated as, "May my story diminish while I grow as tall as my grandfather's Kapok tree") or with any of its variants such as those found in tales #4, #8, #15, #17, #19, #23, and #96, among the several others I shall soon discuss in the next section. So entrenched is this belief among KKBs that over the years it has largely restricted the performance(s) of the KKB folktale to a temporal structure such as time (that is, evenings) – which tacitly gestures to the ephemeral nature of this art form and its occasion-sensitiveness.

That said, KKB storytelling sessions can sometimes take place in the daytime just as pertains in many other African societies (Finnegan, *Oral Literature* 362; de Bruijn 34; Mireku-

Gyimah, "Story-telling" 173; Rattray vi), in African diasporic communities in the Caribbean (Warner-Lewis 94), and, at the risk of overgeneralization, in many non-African societies across the globe. However, the peculiarity of the KKB context is that the initiator of a storytelling session during the daytime must first pluck out one of his/her eyelashes or "hair from the armpit or the head" (Bisilki 351) and throw it away. It is believed that this action wards off the spiritual ramifications or any ill fortune that would have befallen the one in breach of this taboo. Vainly superstitious and simplistic as this sounds, one should nonetheless not be too quick to dismiss it without recourse to the psychology behind this belief.

As a researcher seeking to understand the psychology behind this KKB belief, the various responses I received from my interviewees during my fieldwork in Saboba and its environs pointed to the fact that this taboo merely seeks to discourage the use of daytime for entertainment at the expense of work, especially on the farms. There is therefore no real spiritual or health consequence when one is in breach of this taboo; it is merely a deterrent to lazy people. As put by Liwallaa Ntakbi, one of my interviewees in Nasom, "Our forebears wanted to discourage people from idling during the day and rather spend their time on their farms. When they return from work, they can tell stories while relaxing or shelling their groundnuts in the evening. But children are allowed, during the day, to discuss – not narrate – the stories that were told the previous evening" (Ntakbi 2022). Ntakbi's last submission notwithstanding, today it is common practice for school children to sometimes engage in storytelling at school during the day. From all the foregoing, one can infer that the art of storytelling among Konkombas, though governed by rules, also enjoys some flexibility. This flexibility even made it possible for me to capture on video various storytelling sessions in the daytime, instead of the night, since most of the communities I visited had no access to electricity.

The storytelling sessions, like any performance with "live presence, embodiment and real time" in the "performing and visual arts" (Velten 250), feature narrators/storytellers/performers and their audiences who sit in circles or whatever formations work for them – as shown in Figures 2 and 3 below.

Fig. 2. A Konkomba storytelling session at Chakping

Fig. 3. A woman narrating stories to some children at Chagbaan

At any given KKB storytelling session, successful enactments are entirely the results of the cooperation between performers and their active audience(s). Unlike in some African communities where sometimes "'professional' story-tellers … travel from one village to another, and, presumably, live on their art" by performing to passive audiences, as is the case among the "Temne, Hausa, and Yoruba of West Africa, Yao of East Africa, and the Bulu [of] Rwanda …" (Finnegan, *Oral Literature* 363), the KKB storyteller-audience relationship is still a flexible one. At each point during a storytelling session, a participant is either a performer or an active audience – a phenomenon equally common to most performative arts (Velten 251), especially in some African storytelling cultures such as the Akan ethnic groups in Ghana (Opoku-Agyemang 116). In other words, presently, there are no trained professional KKB storytellers who narrate or perform stories for a living or for a passive audience to enjoy at a fee as pertains among the African ethnic groups Finnegan mentions above, or as is sometimes the case among some Ghanaian ethnic groups

such as the Fanti people whose Asassan Anansesemkuo and the Ananse Akuamoa storytelling groups, among others, equally practice this art as an economic venture.

A few years ago, David Kerr was spot on in his observation that in the Central Region of Ghana the Fanti storytelling or "performing group (*Anansesemkuo*) was … professional" and that the Fanti art of storytelling had developed into a complex one that included performances by professionals (72). In sharp contrast to this – and also unlike in the Akan context where occasionally "an individual may [even] choose to tell a story to himself/herself" (Mireku-Gyimah, "Story-telling" 175) – KKB storytelling is still solely a communal activity: everyone who wishes can narrate or perform a story for others to enjoy free of charge. During each KKB storytelling session, therefore, there is usually a storyteller/performer and an audience who listen, watch, sing along, and interject with questions, objections, validations, and additional details that might have been omitted by a particular performer. In instances where a performer is challenged by a member of his/her audience, the performer can either defend himself/herself or correct himself/herself and continue the performance. This is much akin to what Finnegan observes about the performance of Yoruba ijala chants in Nigeria (*Oral Literature* 13).

On one occasion during my fieldwork in the Chakping community in the Saboba district of Ghana, I observed that a storyteller who was rendering a tale about the friendship between fire and python was challenged by one of his female listeners about the place to which the python flees after his house is gutted by his friend, fire. The narrator, on realizing his error, quickly corrected himself by adding the right detail before proceeding with the rest of his rendition (see tale #5). On several other occasions, I also observed that one or more members of some performers' audience(s) either interjected with details that were omitted by those performers (as found in tale #1 for instance) or briefly took over the performances when the narrators/performers were laughing too

hard to continue their renditions (as pertains in tales #11 and #13 for example). Sometimes, some members of the audiences also interjected with explanations to clarify certain details that were just casually mentioned by some storytellers – as found in tales #9 and #84 for instance.

The foregoing observations essentially bring to the fore two important aspects of KKB storytelling: namely, that it still finds embodiment in the direct encounters between performers and their active audience(s), and that these sessions are not gendered – nor are they age-specific. Unlike in the Mende context where the performance of "The *domei* [that is, the folktale] is a subjective art form for women" and is "thus left to women, and to those males willing to take chances with their reputations" (Cosentino 745), in the KKB context all are allowed to actively participate in the performances. KKB storytelling is, thus, a platform where a highly gender- and age-stratified KKB society dissolves into a single unit of storytellers and audiences (as evident in Figures 2 and 3). In traditional KKB communities, women and children are not allowed to sit among men; nor are children allowed to sit among adults. However, during storytelling sessions these sociocultural barriers are dissolved and all are afforded the opportunity to entertain others, be entertained, compose, and co-compose tales (Fretz 163, 164). It bears reiterating, then, that the composing and/or performance of KKB folktales is still very much a communal thing and that community plays an essential role in the formulation, circulation, and policing of these tales. I shall delve into this discussion at length in chapter four when discussing the forms at work in KKB folktales, their oral performance context, and the KKB milieu at large.

In the interim, it is important to add here that KKB storytelling sessions are carefully structured, usually commencing with an extradiegetic introductory rhyme called *tiin kolb* or *tiin kulb* (translated as, "the summary of a story"), followed by a body of rounds of individual stories, and an open-ended conclusion. Each session commences with the tiin kolb introductory rhyme that

serves to educate all participants on what a KKB folktale entails and its ultimate purpose. This rhyme, normally intoned by the initiator/convenor of a storytelling session, varies from community to community. But three key elements – namely, the collective participation/involvement of all present (which is usually intimated in the statement, "Ti tiin itiin," translated as "Let us tell stories"), what a KKB folktale entails, and its purpose – run through all versions. For instance, in the Chagbaan community, the tiin kolb rhyme is often as follows:

	Likpakpaln	**English**
Initiator (I):	Ti tiin itiin.	Let us tell stories.
Audience (A):	Bi yin ba 'tiin?	What are stories?
I:	Tiin gbo.	Stories are steamed.
A:	Bi yin ba gbo?	What does "steamed" mean?
I:	Gbon nyɔŋ.	Steamed out of a shake.
A:	Bi yin ba nyɔŋ?	What is a shake?
I:	Nyɔŋ kuum.	A shake that is lighthearted.
A:	Bi yin ba kuum?	What does lighthearted mean?
I:	Kuum aa'taa ee nnaal ee nyɔl nyɔl.	The meaning of lighthearted, young sibling, is fun.

(**Note:** The last line can be repeated as many times as desired. Also, you may click the following link and listen to another variant of the KKB tiin kolb: <u>Tiin kolb rhyme: Sobii variant</u>. Alternatively, it can be accessed via the QR code below.)

Among other things, the contents of the tiin kolb state that a KKB tale is generated (that is, "steamed") out of a collection of ideas drawn from the collective knowledge tree of the Konkomba people (here, depicted in line 5 of the rhyme by the image of shaking a tree so that its fruits drop on the ground for consumption). In addition, the tiin kolb spells out that these ideas are lighthearted and are meant for entertainment or fun (as contained in lines 7 and 9 of the pseudo nonet), thereby once again underscoring the centrality of entertainment as a function of KKB storytelling, and for that matter the Konkomba folktale itself. But most importantly, the word "kuum" in line 7 of the rhyme literally means 'empty' and serves to inform the audience that the contents of the KKB folktale are not real – or that the KKB folktale dabbles in the world of fantasy and should therefore be taken lightheartedly.

This is much akin to what pertains in the Akan folktale's opening declaration, "Anansesem se seo …" (translated as, "Ananse's [i.e., the spider's] tale states as follows …") in which a storyteller invariably issues "a public disclaimer that what he is about to say is true" (Rattray x).[21] As Mireku-Gyimah aptly puts it, in this opening sentence of the Akan folktale, "the performer [reminds] his or her audience that the tale is not factual but fictive" ("Performance and the Techniques" 3). But I must quickly point out that this surreality is not peculiar to the Akan folktale and the KKB folktale. As put in another phraseology by Opoku-Agyemang, folktales are "Built largely on fantasy" (116) – the unreal. Thus, the fictitious is equally a characteristic element of the likes of the Limba folktale (from Sierra Leone), the German Märchen, the Finnish folktale, and several others. Finnegan has, for instance, observed that "in the complex continuum between 'fiction' and 'truth' [the Limba folktale, for example, leans] towards the former" (*The Oral and Beyond* 44), noting that the Limba tale is "basically what we would call fiction" ("The Poetic and the Everyday" 6). Similarly, Robert Cancel observes that Bemba tales (from Zambia) are also

"narrative-performances … of the fictional type" (75), while Helen Yitah gestures to the fictive contents of the Kasem folktale (from northern Ghana) in her assertion that the Kasena people's "*Folktale law* … is outside the ordinary or the natural world" and that it operates on "the lore of the fantasy world" (275).

All the foregoing immediately situate Konkomba oral tales in the comity of the folktale genre as they essentially draw these oral tales in close affinity with all the aforementioned folktales and several others across the globe which equally stage their narrative events in imaginary, often surreal settings and situations. But resisting the temptation to delve into the nitty-gritty of surrealism (or the unreal) as a characteristic element of the KKB tale at this point, I will stay the course of my present discussion on the art of storytelling among Konkombas and rather defer such a discussion to the next subsection. In this regard, it is important to further point out that the above affinity between the KKB folktale and others such as the Kasem folktale and especially the Akan folktale notwithstanding, their performance protocols differ. For instance, while the extradiegetic opening disclaimer that precedes an Akan folktale is repeated by each storyteller during an Akan storytelling session (Mireku-Gyimah, "Performance and the Techniques" 328), the KKB folktale's tiin kolb is normally performed only once at a given storytelling session.

After the tiin kolb, the intoner starts his or her tale by announcing it, receives a response (or not) from the audience, and commences his or her performance.[22] At the end of his or her story, the initiator of the session, who is usually only a *primus inter pares*, announces again that he or she has come to the end of his or her story, whereupon another person – not in any succession or order – announces his or her intent to tell a story and proceeds without repeating the tiin kolb. As I pointed out earlier, in a competitive storytelling session, the first narrator, after announcing the end of his or her story, will nominate a member of the audience to tell the next tale. But whether

it is this relay mode of storytelling or the normal random volunteering mode, this second segment of the KKB storytelling session serves as the main part of every session; and participants take turns to thrill one another with various tale-types.

The concluding segment of a session is usually open-ended as there is no formula or designated format for ending a session. A typical KKB storytelling session comes to an end when no one is interested in telling the next tale or when the eldest of the group – as is characteristic of any KKB gathering where "the senior person present [usually] exercises authority" (Tait, "The Political System of Konkomba" 214) – decides that the group should terminate the session. Also, on occasions when the storytelling is done over a communal activity or work, the session automatically ends with the termination of that activity without any formalities akin to the introductory part (that is, the tiin kolb). Thus, Konkomba storytelling sessions are often open-ended. But this open-endedness is only characteristic of storytelling sessions and not the KKB folktale itself – for a typical KKB tale is closed-ended and has various signing-out protocols, as discussions in the next segment will soon reveal.

2.3 The defining features of the Konkomba folktale

Over the decades, research into the folktale genre has established that among other things folktales are fictional narratives that are often lighthearted, didactic, without temporal and spatial definitions, and feature anthropomorphized animate and inanimate characters. As famously put by William Bascom, "*Folktales are prose narratives which are regarded as fiction*. They are … not to be taken seriously. … they are almost timeless and placeless (4). Tracie Pullum asserts that "Folktales are an art form … [typically] passed by word of mouth, often changing with each retelling," "usually short, full of suspense," and embedded with "morals, values, conflicts, and [other] issues" (96). She observes – and I do agree with her – that folktales are a literary genre

with "clear, understandable themes, morals, and characters" (96). However, I disagree with her that folktales involve "real people and situations" (96). As many years of folklore studies have established, and as I pointed out in the preceding section while discussing the irreal contents of the KKB tale as implied in the tiin kolb, and as further supported by the corpus of literature I cited in that regard, the narrative situations and settings staged in folktales are very far from real – perhaps close to reality but never real.

That said, Pullum makes a good observation, like Bascom (4), that a major characteristic of the folktale genre is that "it uses humor to resolve an issue, and it makes a point about life" (96). Expressing similar sentiments as Pullum's, Brian Sturm and Sarah Nelson also assert that folktales are "'literature' that has been passed down orally for generations" and that "These stories, most originating in oral societies, … are *good* stories that address important intellectual, social, and moral issues" (171). This essentially corroborates Bascom's and Pullum's positions that orality and didacticism are among the characteristic properties of the folktale genre. Most importantly, all the foregoing are some of the defining properties of the folktale genre that serve as very useful starting points for my attempt herein to define the KKB oral tales under study in this dissertation.

Genre blending

Like most folktales, KKB folk stories are, at face value, prose narratives existing orally and often transmitted orally in largely extradiegetic modes through the collaborative efforts of storytellers/performers and their participating audience(s) at the very time of performance. When considered at a superficial level, therefore, these tales fit into the normative classification of folktales as prose narratives by such scholars as Bascom (4), Stith Thompson (4), Damiana Eugenio (155), and Cosentino (744-5), among others. However, when subjected to a rigorous micro-analytical test, these tales pose a challenge to this classical criterion and expose the

vulnerabilities and deficiencies inherent in "genre as a discourse categorization" (Coulouma 176). Even though a KKB storyteller will quintessentially commence the rendition of a tale in everyday language, the fellow will, usually, accompany this with gestures and other dramatic aids such as voice modulation, voice characterization (aka mimicry), dramatic pauses, and facial expressions, among others. Then along the performance, the person might break into a song, accompanied by the audience – as pertains in tales #1, #4, #5, #12, #17, #30, #52, and #90, among others. This requires further elaboration.

In the course of my fieldworks, I observed that the various storytellers/performers often employed extradiegetic narrative modes to recount events, situations, activities, and actions of characters in prosaic language, interspersing these with dialogic renditions of various characters' interactions through mimicry, facial expressions, and dramatic gestures as shown below.

Fig. 4. A storyteller in Kutol employs (intense) facial expressions and gesticulations to enhance his performance.

For example, I observed that while rendering tale #13 which features the hyena and the rabbit (who happens to be the trickster character in KKB folklore), the storyteller in the pictures in Figure 4 often attempted to mimic the cunning speech habits of the wise rabbit and the hoarse, deep, impatient voice of the foolish hyena whenever he was rendering their dialogues. Intermittently he also broke into gestures, squatting and demonstrating how for instance the hyena and the rabbit squatted over the carcass of the crocodile and squeezed their testicles into her mouth in order to determine who would take the dead crocodile home and eat. In addition to such dramatizations, some performers also often broke into musical interludes, sometimes repeating the songs several times with slight variations while their audience(s) sang along. So within the space of perhaps three minutes or more, a performer and his/her audience were able to render a tale in prose, drama, and poetry.

Genre blending is, thus, a key characteristic of the KKB folktale and countless others such as the Akan folktale (Mireku-Gyimah, "Performance and the Techniques" 319-326), the Bemba folktale (Cancel 81-82), the Lunda folktale (Cancel 183-186), and the Limba folktale (Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond* 44; "The Poetic and the Everyday" 6), among others. As a result, the blanket characterization of folktales as "prose narratives" is somewhat problematic in contexts such as the KKB one although the bulk of a typical KKB tale is rendered in prose. This is a discussion I shall revisit in chapter four where I engage with form from an oral performance perspective. In the meantime, suffice it to say that on account of the foregoing, and consistent with the normative definition or classification of folktales as prose narratives (Bascom 4; Stith Thompson 4; Damiana Eugenio 155; Cosentino 744-5), the KKB folktale can be considered a prose narrative and for that matter a member of the folktale genre. But this classical definition (or classification) falls short of accounting for its dramatic and poetic aspects. At best, then, we can redefine folktales as fictional

narratives (oral or written) that are rendered largely in prose but sometimes interspersed with poetic and dramatic forms in certain cultural contexts. With this definition or classificatory criterion in mind, one can conveniently situate the KKB tale and others of similar properties in the folktale genre. But this politics of genre classification aside, the issue of folktales existing or being transmitted orally or in written form brings to the fore a very important feature of the KKB folktale – its orality.

The oral performance-dependence of KKB folktales

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the KKB folktale is predominantly still oral in nature. Apart from a cataloged pamphlet of folktales titled *Itiin Aabor: A Collection of Folktales from around Saboba* (which was missing from the only library that has a record of it, i.e., the library at the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation, Tamale), there is no collection of written KKB folktales. As a result (and as already pointed out), the stories used as data for this dissertation quintessentially exist orally and so had to be documented via audiovisual recordings and translated. During the fieldwork, my initial attempts to capture the performances at night on video proved futile as most communities had no access to electricity. I therefore resorted to recording the visuals during the daytime and the audios during the night.

In all the audio and video recordings, performers and their audiences compose and/or co-compose tales through words and dramatic acts that help bring alive these oral stories for all participants to enjoy. On watching or listening to these videos or audio recordings, one will observe that the various performers do not just render their tales verbally, but employ oral or rhetorical accessories such as voice modulation (as already pointed out using tale #13's narrator's performance), repetition (especially of musical interludes as pertains in tales #1, #5, #12, #17 and several others), ideophones (as found in tales #14 and #17 among others), and direct speech

accompanied by mimicry and gestures to shape their stories such that they capture and sustain their audiences' interest and participation.

Such prosodic, rhetorical, and dramatic accompaniments characterize the oral performance of the KKB folktale, and for that matter the KKB tale itself since the tale cannot be divorced from its performance. This fundamentally yokes the KKB tale together with others such as the Akan folktale (Asante and Edu 349; Mireku-Gyimah, "Performance and the Techniques" 312), the Limba folktale (Finnegan, "The Poetic and the Everyday" 6-8), and the Lunda folktale (Cancel 170, 173) among countless others that equally typically exist orally and draw on the aforementioned oral and dramatic elements for their shaping, framing, or fleshing out. As Cancel succinctly observes about the Bwile tale's performance – which is also true of the KKB tale and several other African ones – "words and gestures [are employed to] create a rhythm of sound[s] and movement[s] to both frame and flesh out these [tales]" (216). The orality of these tales makes it imperative for such oral accessories to be employed in shaping and rendering them to a listening audience so as to enable them to actively participate, memorize the oral tales, and further transmit them, albeit with their own additions and omissions. If one defining property of folktales is that they are typically transmitted orally (Pullum 96; Sturm and Nelson 170) or both orally and in written form (Thompson 4) from generation to generation with variations, then KKB folk stories are a good example of this. But most importantly, the oral and dramatic accessories that help give form to the KKB tale point to its literariness and the need to pay attention to such stylistic elements (as will be done in chapter four of this dissertation) so as to fully comprehend and appreciate the esthetics of the KKB folktale.

Fantasy

One other defining feature of the KKB folktale is that, like many folktales across the globe, it dabbles in the world of fantasy (Opoku-Agyemang 116; Bascom 4; Yitah 275; Mireku-Gyimah, "Performance and the Techniques" 3; Cancel 75; Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond* 44). As intimated in the preceding section, the worlds, characters, events, situations, and actions staged in KKB tales are most often not plausible. The tales are usually set in timeless and placeless worlds with anthropomorphized characters engaged in sometimes highly implausible actions – as pertains, for example, in tales #15 and #89 where the tortoise ostensibly flies with a group of birds to a festival and a wedding respectively; in tale #5 where fire sings on his way to visit his friend, the python; and in tale #9 where beans, an axe, and a log talk to their owners, among several other bizarre encounters. Such surrealism, as found in these tales among others, affirms the fictional nature of the contents of the KKB folktale as intimated in the tiin kolb that often precedes its performance.

But if there is anything that gestures to the fictitious contents of KKB folktales, it is the fact that the tales' contents are often staged in indefinite settings. This is usually clearly spelled out at the outset of a tale where a storyteller will state in the introduction that: "Ni bi le ki bi …" (translated as "Once upon a time, …" as pertains in tales #17 and #45 for instance); or "N-yoonn mu jer na, …" / "N-yoonn (n-yoonn, n-yoonn) na …" (translated respectively as "In times past, …" or "A long time ago, …" / "Long (long, long) ago, …" – as found in tales #18, #22, #71, and #97 among others); or better still, "A or B [mentions a character/s] le nan bi / nnan bi" (translated as "There (once) lived a/an … [mentions a character/s]" – as pertains in tales #5, #7, #26, #30, and #58, among others). It is important to note that in all the above introductory phrases, there is no place nor time definition to the events or situations the storytellers want to relate. And in fidelity

to such timeless and placeless openings, the storytellers will usually tell their stories without assigning proper nouns to the worlds their characters inhabit nor offer definite dates or years for characters' actions or encounters. Such openings tacitly inform audience(s) that the stories they are about to hear are not set in real worlds and timelines. This fictional element of the KKB tale, as already pointed out in the previous segment, certainly yokes it together with the Akan folktale, the Limba folktale, and others across the globe whose narratives are staged in similar unreal worlds, times, and situations.

The KKB tale's structure

The foregoing affinity notwithstanding, the KKB folktale's structure and style of rendition deserve to be appraised on their own terms, as they seem to display some unique features that may well distinguish them from folktales from other cultures across the world. With regard to form, the KKB tale has a well-defined, formulaic structure: namely, a beginning or an introduction, a middle that serves as the main story, and a well-defined end or conclusion, albeit existing in different forms with countless variants. A KKB folktale typically commences with an introduction in which a storyteller and his or her audience encounter each other (or one another) through a verbal exchange. A narrator often announces the intent to tell a tale variously as follows: "Maatiin le cha na(a) / Maatiin n-cha ya(a)," translated as "Here goes my story" / "My story is as follows" / "My story goes like this …," (as pertains in tales #4, #23, #71, #89, and #97, among others); or "Datiin man," translated as "Permission to tell a story" (as found in tales #6 and #19, among others).

Almost similar to how the Bisa folktale of Zambia commences (Cancel 130, 136), the openings above respectively serve as declarations of intent to tell stories and subsequently position storytellers as the centers of attention at storytelling sessions. Everyone present at the sessions then pays attention to the storytellers, who proceed to employ memory, improvisations – rather than the

"rehearsed artistic actions" (Bial 59) or predetermined word orders or choices (Schechner 35ff) associated with film and theater performances – and dramatic aids to entertain and educate them with the moral lessons at the ends of their stories. To these declarative openings, the audiences will typically respond with interjections such as "Ehen!" to wit "Go ahead" or "Proceed" (as found in tales #1, #5, and #73 for example), "M-hmm!" to wit "Go ahead" or "Proceed" (as pertains in tales #4, #11, #52, and #97 for instance), "n-yɔɔ n-yɔɔ," transliterated as "yes, yes" but contextually translated as "Let it be done as said," or "Proceed as said," or "So be it" (as is the case in tales #29, #66, #87, and #94, among others), and "Naba," meaning "So be it," or "Proceed as said" (as found in tales #3, #8, #31, and #89 for example), among other responses. It is important to note that all the above responses are associated with the first category of declaration of intent or opening (that is, "Maatiin le cha na(a) / Maatiin n-cha ya(a)") – hereafter referred to as opening type-1.

In the case of the opening type-2 (that is, "Datiin man"), the audience usually respond "Daya," translated as "Permission granted" (as pertains in tales #6, 13, and 19 among others). As can be deduced when compared to the numerous responses associated with opening type-1, the response to the second type of opening is only one, thereby pointing to opening type-2's rather restrictive nature. Perhaps its restrictiveness accounts for its rare usage among the KKB storytellers I encountered in the course of my fieldwork. Throughout the fieldwork, I encountered this type of opening and its well-defined response on only a few occasions. The majority of the storytellers and their audiences used opening type-1 and its various responses. At the risk of overgeneralization, one could interpret this as a reflection of KKB people's well-documented loathe for restrictions or constraining normative structures. This assertion finds authentication in the KKB people's now-defunct acephalous way of living – what John Middleton and David Tait

termed "hav[ing] no centralized political authority" (1) – prior to their contacts with their Muslim neighbors like the Mole-Dagbani and the colonial authorities (Talton 193-4; Ofori and Novicki 54, par. 21). Their loathe for restrictive structures certainly explains KKBs' initial resistance to the imposition of defined political structures on them by the colonial authorities (Talton 192-210; Müller 93-105). That said, that KKBs eventually embraced the chieftaincy system in the 20th century, underscores their receptiveness to change. This flexibility also manifests itself in their storytelling culture where strict adherence to the normative type-2 opening and its response is occasionally flouted – as pertains in tales #13 and #68, for example, where the storytellers use the type-1 opening but elicit type-2's response from their audiences.

In addition to this, there were occasions during my data collection when some storytellers plunged directly into their narratives without the usual formality of declaring an intent or seeking permission from their audiences to tell their stories using either opening types-1 or 2 respectively. On such occasions, the narrators launched directly into their performances by saying "Ni bi le ki bi, …" (translated as "Once upon a time, …") as is the case in tale #45 and others, or "N-yoonn mu jer na, …" (translated as "Long ago, …" or "A long time ago, …") as found in tale #18 and others. Other storytellers commenced with "A or B / A and B [one character or more are mentioned] le nan bi" (translated as "There (once) lived a/an …" or "There (once) lived … and …") as pertains in tales #5, #28, #30, and #58, among others. Such atypical direct commencements have been captured and explained in my translation notes in tales #2, #5, and #10 for instance. However, it is important to state that these direct commencements are not peculiar to the KKB context. From what Cancel records about Tabwa (45-50), Bemba (77ff), and Lunda (168, 171) folktales of Zambia, which commence without storytellers' declarations of intent to tell their stories, it can be inferred that such direct openings are commonplace in these Zambian contexts as

well. In the Konkomba context, to these direct openings (hereafter referred to as opening type-3), audiences will normally respond "Ehen," "M-hn," "M-hmm," or simply remain silent and listen as the narrators proceed – as pertains in tales #2, #5, #10, #14, #30, #88, and #95 among others.

Direct openings are a common practice (in the KKB storytelling culture) in situations where a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while or if a storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one. Within such contexts, the usual starting protocols can be skipped. This essentially gestures to the flexibility of the performance structures that regulate the performance of the KKB folktale, and by extension the contents of the KKB tale – an issue I shall revisit in chapter four during discussions on the workings of forms in KKB folktales.

During my fieldwork, I also observed that instead of conforming to opening types-1 and 2, on some occasions in order to arouse their audiences' interest and elicit their involvements right from the outsets of their performances, some storytellers began their tales with suspense-evoking questions such as "Aa nyi ni pi/bu/pu … naa?" / "Ni nyi ni pi/bu/pu … naa?" or "Aa nyi bunbu/budabu … naa?" / "Ni nyi bunbu/budabu … naa?" or "Aa nyi naah ŋa pi/bu/pu … naa?" / "Ni nyi naah ŋa pi/bu/pu … naa?" or "Aa nyi tiwan ni pi/bu/pu … naa?" or "Aa nyi nin cha ka … yaa?" / "Ni nyi nin cha ka … yaa?" (all translated as "Do you know why so is so?" – as found in tales #15, #17, #60, and #100, among others). This 'question-type' or 'interrogative' opening (hereafter referred to as opening type-4) is mostly associated with etiological tales – and storytellers will usually conclude such tales with the sentence, "That is why so is so," in order to neutralize the suspense created at the beginning via their opening questions. Thus, these storytellers deliberately employ questions such as those above to "raise an anxiety of expectation satisfied only by the final denouement" (Ngũgĩ 79).

To such storytellers' opening questions, audience(s) might respond variously as follows: "Tell us!" "We don't know!" "No!" (as pertains in tale #15 for instance), or "We don't know; tell us; why?" (as found in tale #17), or "Mm-hn!" (meaning, "No!") as pertains in tale #100 for example. Such responses serve to assure storytellers that they have the undivided attention of their audiences and can therefore proceed to render their tales. But most importantly, an audience's response(s) to a storyteller's question immediately fosters a bond between the two parties and creates an atmosphere conducive for collaborating to flesh out a tale (or tales). What is more, these responses point to the immediacy and statim inherent in the performance of the KKB folktale as performers and audiences encounter each other or one another within the same time and space. It is important to note that these same effects are produced when opening types-1 and 2 are used. Also worthy of note is that this performance esthetic feature is equally commonplace in the Kasem folktale (Yitah 280-81) and the Akan folktale (Mireku-Gyimah "Performance and the Techniques" 313-14) whose performances also commence with performer-audience encounters akin to those discussed above regarding opening types-1, 2, and 4.

After the KKB tale's introductory encounter – whether via opening types-1, 2, or 4 – performers and their audiences can then proceed to compose and co-compose tales in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Although when a storyteller commences with opening type-3 this initial dialogic exchange between the performer and the audience is lost, the storyteller can still skillfully connect with his or her audience in the course of his or her performance (in the main body of his or her tale) through various esthetic innovations – details of which will emerge in the succeeding paragraphs. Thus enter the KKB tale's main body.

Fleshing out the main contents

In this part of the KKB folktale, performers usually employ memory, tact, improvisation, voice modulation, gesticulation, and other performance aids to entertain and educate their audience(s). Largely rendered in an extradiegetic mode interlaced with intradiegetic exchanges akin to what pertains in the types-1, 2, and 4 introductions already discussed, the KKB tale's main body draws on events both from the present and the past to construct plots consisting of expositions, rising actions, climaxes, falling actions, and denouements.

The present-time events are encapsulated in the intermittent storyteller-audience interactions during performances. These interactions are usually occasioned by audiences' interjections or questions posed directly to them by storytellers – as pertains in tale #14, for example, where the storyteller poses a direct question to his audience thus: "Well, ubɔr has requested communal help; and a poor man has also done [the] same. Whose request will you honor?" The past events, on the other hand, constitute the distant events extradiegetically related by storytellers and occasionally by some members of their audiences who may intervene with specific fill-in details or corrections such as pertains in tales #1, #5, and #30, where some members of the audiences interject with omitted information (in tale #1) and the accurate locations of events (in tales #5 and #30).

Within the KKB tale, then, the diction sometimes alternates between the past tense and the present tense, thus offering a platform for the past and the present to meet. This convergence of the past and present serves to make the tales relevant to the present time in order to sustain audiences' interest and educate them so as to effect behavioral and societal change(s) in the present time. In tale #14, titled "The Communal Labor Requests of Ubɔr and the Poor Man," for instance, the past meets the present when the storyteller asks his audience to put himself in the narrative

situation presented to him and tell him what he would do should he be faced with the same challenge as the characters in the tale. In this respect, the performer and his audience are, as it were, situated in an in-between space where they serve as a bridge between the past and the present, as they move back and forth through indefinite time and space connecting their communal memory and ancestral oral heritage to their present cultural context and time.

Similarly, in tale #13 the storyteller asks his audience, "So when he was being traced, wasn't it natural that the search party would update one another whenever they spotted his footprints and blood?" This question indirectly requires that the narrator's audience put themselves in the narrative situation of the search party in the tale in order to fully comprehend and experience more closely the search team's actions during their search for the runaway hyena. In effect, here again the audience of the storyteller are united with the past narrative situation being staged as they are skillfully pulled into the story via the storyteller's question. This ultimately connects their present context and the past events in the tale.

The past-present nexus fostered through such encounters as found in tales #13 and #14 – which Kamau Brathwaite aptly termed an "[enjambement] of time/place/consciousness w/in continuums …" (qtd. in Ngũgĩ 75) – is a common feature of the KKB tale's main body. It often provides a connection not only between the past and the present but also between the introductory part of the KKB tale, where storytellers and their audiences encounter one another via various exchanges in their present time, and its largely extradiegetic main body that recounts characters' actions and worlds from the past. Essentially, both parts work together to give contemporary relevance and immediacy to the KKB tale and its performance. This is a salient fact that should not be glossed over in our analyses of the KKB tale's introduction and its relationship with the main body of the tale.

Consisting of the details, actions, events, and characters that give life to each tale, the main part of the KKB folktale features plots with anthropomorphized characters, human characters, as well as supernatural beings such as God, gods, and ancestors, among others. These characters and their locations are usually the first elements that feature in the plot. Storytellers will usually use the first sentences or two to three sentences of their narratives to provide details about when, where, and who the actors in their tales are. It bears stating that this is the level at which storytellers who choose to use opening type-3 operate when they decide to skip the introductory formalities and dive straight into their narratives. Consequently, stories with opening type-3 blur the lines between the introductory and the main parts of the KKB tale. For this reason, they can at best be described as headless or 'introduction-less' tales.

Be that as it may, such openings mark the actual commencement of the main part of a KKB tale where a storyteller outlines the time, place, and players of the narrative events to be staged. For example, when a storyteller like Binkpetaab Baabayii commences her story thus, "Famine once broke out in a certain land. In this land lived two good friends – sandee and naapilmoon" (tale #2), she immediately spells out the time (that is, a timeless past), the location (that is, a nameless village, town, city, country, continent, etc.), and the protagonists of her story (that is, sandee and naapilmoon). Similarly, when Waja Ngnalbu, after his opening type-1 introduction in tale #23, states that "Once upon a time, there lived an ubɔr who had three daughters," he immediately tells his audience about the place (though not stated directly but implied in the word "lived"), the time (that is, a timeless past), and the main characters of his story (that is, ubɔr and his three daughters).

These initial details, as pointed out earlier, immediately serve to conscientize audience(s) that the tales that are about to be performed are not staged in real, specific worlds since the places

and characters are not assigned proper nouns, and that the events belong to an unspecified time in the past. In rare instances where some characters are even assigned proper nouns, such as Nlanjerbɔr in tales #16 and #55, Tamambu in tale #52, or Timbu in tale #79, those proper nouns are usually aptronyms and so are normally summations of the events, situations, or outcomes of the stories in which those characters feature. Such characters are mostly the equivalents of eponymous characters in written literature, save their names offer insights into their personalities and/or summarize the contents of the tales in which they serve as the protagonists. For instance, in tales #16 and #55 the eponymous hero, Nlanjerbɔr (also spelled Nlanjirbor in tale #55), whose name is a truncation of the Likpakpaln phrase, "Kpa nlan jer/jir ubɔr" (translated into English as "Wiser than the chief?"), outwits his traditional ruler or leader in a duel of wits, ultimately resulting in the deskinment (aka, dethronement) of the traditional leader and the subsequent enskinment (aka, enthronement) of Nlanjerbɔr in tale #16. But as already stated, stories of this kind – that is, tales with aptronymic characters – are rare in KKB folklore. The majority of KKB tales remain silent on the specific names of characters and places – which will usually be spelled out at the outsets of the main body of a KKB tale by each storyteller.

After outlining the geospatial, temporal, and character details, storytellers will usually proceed to provide background information to situate the characters and events in a better light for their audiences to comprehend the events that will soon unfold. Such expository information might include details about the physical looks or the dominant traits of the main characters (as pertains in tales #7, #11, #19, #20, #30, #34, #37, #91, and #99, among others), the nature of the communities that host the characters and events to be staged (as found in tales #17, #29, #43, and #58 among others), or an underlying condition, context, environment, or atmosphere (as is the case in tales #15, #16, #52, #79, #88, #89, and #90 among others). On some occasions, the expository

information will be pseudo-historical in nature – such as pertains in tale #49 where the storyteller claims that "In the days of our ancestors, brooms used not to be tied. So whenever one wanted to sweep, he/she had to collect the broomsticks into a bundle and use it to sweep."

However, in the course of my fieldwork, occasionally I encountered storytellers who preferred to start with the pseudo-historical facts surrounding their stories before diving into the settings, characters, and other expository details. For example, in Chamba the narrator of tale #18 commenced his narrative thus: "A long time ago, ŋŋaan existed as individual broomsticks. Whenever it was time to use it to sweep, all its parts were then brought together. A rope was never tied around ŋŋaan's neck as is the case today." After this, he then introduced his tale and proceeded to relate the setting, characters, and other details of his tale. Similarly, in tale #71 the storyteller commences with the pseudo-historical fact (or claim) that "In the past, when a woman was newly married, she never played [a local mancala game called] inaan." She then follows this with the details of the characters, their location, and the rest of her narrative.

Clearly, these two examples deviate from the conventional KKB tale structure discussed earlier. They are usually typical of storytellers who prefer to employ unconventional plots to flesh out their tales – a discussion I will delve into in chapter four during my discussion on the operations of plot as a structuring force within the Konkomba folktale and its performance context. In the meantime, it is important to note that such pseudo-historical expositions as above gesture to the fact that the KKB tale is based on events of the past, is an ancestral oral heritage passed down from ancient times to the present generation, and that the Konkomba civilization is an evolving one – especially when we consider their claims that things used not to be as they are at present. What is more, whether coming before or after the geospatial, temporal, and character details, such quasi-

histories and other background information lay the foundations on which the rising actions and other parts of KKB tales' plots can then be constructed with ease and flexibility.

After the expository details, the arrangements of the rest of the details of the stories are often performer-dependent as each storyteller and his/her audience are at liberty to choose story details and how to stage them. Of course there will be communal policing to ensure that each tale conforms as much as possible to known details and standards, as pertains also in many other African cultures like the Akan one (Opoku-Agyemang 117; Mireku-Gyimah, "Story-telling" 176). But ultimately, the KKB storyteller and his/her audience have the liberty to be creative, humorous, and spontaneous during performances.

Tales across generations and cultural contexts

This liberty accounts for the existence of variants of the same tale across various KKB generations, communities, and geographical spaces. The existence of such variants serves as yet another defining property of the Konkomba folktale – and of course the countless folktales and other primary orature across the globe that have various variants. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has aptly intimated, variance is a characteristic element of orature, especially African orature (74).

Due to the fact that KKB tales are communal property handed down from one generation to another, there are bound to be a lot of similar stories and variants across various KKB communities and generations. In the course of my field visits to the KKB communities I sampled my data from, I sometimes noticed similarities and differences between various tales with the same subject matters or similar plot lines. Normally, the tales would be about the same subject matter – for example, a social function or a festive occasion attended by the characters involved, as is the case in tales #15 (recorded in Chamba) and #89 (recorded in Chagbaan). In both tales – which I have titled "Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell" – the tortoise and a group of birds attend a

social function. But the specific social function differs in each tale: while in tale #15 the characters attend a traditional KKB festival called Ndipɔndaan, in tale #89 they attend a marriage ceremony.

In addition, the sequences of events are slightly different. The plot of tale #15 commences with an exposition that introduces the audience to the good friendship between the tortoise and one of the birds, the partridge, pursuant to which the tortoise gets invited to attend the birds' annual festival as a guest. The exposition also details how the tortoise prepares for the event way ahead of the designated date. In tale #89, however, these background details are omitted as the storyteller plunges directly into the day of the event – at the very moment the birds gather and are about to fly to the top of the designated tree for the event. Also, while in tale #15 there exists no relationship between the tortoise and the other birds, in tale #89 he is a friend to all the birds.

Besides, there is a marked difference in the narratorial craftmanship: while the performer of tale #15 endeavors to draw his audience into his performance at the outset of his rendition by posing the suspense-evoking question, "Do you know why the tortoise has a badly cracked shell?" the performer of tale #89 simply announces his intent to tell his tale (via opening type-1) and proceeds after the audience's response. From the foregoing, one can surmise that individual performers' detail preferences and artistic choices can give rise to tale variance. But most importantly, from a historic-geographic perspective, human mobility and its attendant intercultural encounters also account for the prevalence of variance in primary orature like KKB folktales. In the two examples under discussion, the impact of intercultural encounters manifests in the name assigned to the tortoise in each tale. While in tale #15 the tortoise changes his name (midway through their journey to the event grounds) to Nimɔmɔk (which means "All of you" in Likpakpaln), in tale #89 he changes his name to Tizaabuni, which in Dagbani means "For all of us." Based on the latter name, one can infer that the narrator of tale #89 manifests some linguistic influence from

the Dagomba people – who are one of the neighbors of the KKB people, and some of whom happen to live in the very Konkomba community from which I recorded this tale. In this regard, a historic-geographic folklorist could speculate that this tale has been borrowed from the Dagomba folklore tradition – or vice versa. But regardless of the direction of influence, this example authenticates my assertion that human mobility and intercultural encounters contribute to the prevalence of variance in primary orature like KKB folktales.

From my collection, some other noticeable tale-variants include tales #58 and #48 which offer etiological insights into the anatomy of the wasp; tales #52 and #79 which both relate the story of a boy who kills a forbidden bird; tales #22 and #98 which relate how a woman chooses her baby girl over her baby boy after giving birth to twins along a pathway; tales #13, #34 and #100 in which the hyena eats crocodile hatchlings and gets punished for that; tales #8, #23 and #94, which are about marriage contests; tales #19 and #40 which feature wild animals with shapeshifting abilities; and tales #18 and #49 which offer explanation as regards why the neck of a broom is tied nowadays. As in the case of the two examples discussed earlier about the tortoise and his bird buddies, all the above tale variants, when subjected to near-laser analyses, will manifest similarities in subject matters but the sequences of events, the key details used to flesh out each tale, the narratorial styles of the various storytellers, and the main characters and their relationships will distinguish the tales from each other or one another. As already pointed out, individual storytellers' preferences and creative prowess, as well as migration and its attendant intercultural encounters have given rise to some of these tale variants enumerated above. That said, I must quickly add that the list of factors that account for tale variance is exhaustive as even age and gender can account for story variance. But rather than go into the nitty-gritty of these, I will

rather pick up that discussion in chapter four during my interrogation of the sociocultural forms at work in KKB oral tales, their performance context, and the KKB milieu from which they emerge.

In the interim, it is worth adding that sometimes the difference between two or more tales of the same subject matter is the presence or not of a musical interlude. For instance, even though tales #21 and #40 are about wild creatures with shapeshifting abilities, the latter has a musical interlude. Similarly, though tales #22 and #98 share the same subject matter, they differ in many ways – with the most visible difference being the absence of a musical interlude in the former. This same marked difference can be spotted among tales #8, #94, and #23 as the first two have musical interludes while the last one does not. Thus, musical interludes can be considered as yet another of the factors that give rise to tale variance – and even plot variance – in the KKB storytelling culture. Most importantly, these musical interludes are yet another defining feature of the Konkomba folktale – and of course many other African folktales (Ngũgĩ 73, 79) and others across the globe.

Musical interludes as performance enhancers and gap-fillers

Even though not all KKB tales have songs, music plays a pivotal role in the KKB folktale. Among other things, musical interludes serve to further sustain audiences' interest and enhance their participation, create suspense, illuminate tales' themes and/or enhance their plot developments. Akin to what Yitah observes regarding Kasem folktales (276), Mireku-Gyimah about the Akan folktale ("Performance and the Techniques" 321ff), and Cancel about the Bisa folktale (151), it is common for a KKB storyteller to break off into singing during a performance, joined by his/her audience who help sing the chorus while the storyteller serves as the cantor – as is the case in tales #1, #5, #11, #30, #52, #79, and #92 among others. However, in the course of the interlude, a storyteller might withdraw and allow a member of the audience to take over the role of cantor or

allow all the audience to sing the rest of the song unaccompanied by the storyteller (as is the case in tales #11 and #86, among others). I observed that this was mostly the case when a performer broke into laughter in the course of the musical interlude and so could not continue singing simultaneously.

Usually the audiences are familiar with the songs that are integrated into storytellers' narratives; so once a storyteller intones a song during a performance, his/her audience easily join in without the storyteller's express invitation. However, on some occasions when a storyteller knows or thinks that the audience might not be familiar with the song, he or she can briefly teach the musical interlude immediately after announcing his or her intent to tell the story (as pertains in tale #73 for instance) or wait till he or she is about to introduce the song into the narrative (as found, for example, in tales #7, #31, and #43 among others). This practice is similar to what Mireku-Gyimah found in the Akan context ("Performance and the Techniques" 319) where the teaching, learning, and singing of songs can temporarily interrupt performances. But such short interruptions are necessary in that they allow performers to interact with their audience(s) in the course of their performances in order to eschew monotonous presentations that might make them lose their audience(s). These interruptions also allow audiences to participate in performances and tale composition processes, as well as learn and memorize through repetition, some additional information that the musical interludes offer about the narrative situations being staged. For instance, in tale #29 which presents a group of animals who go fishing together, the musical interlude, at each repetition, reveals the various animals' reactions to the hyena's threat to turn on them and eat them in case they fail to catch any fish. Thus, musical interludes can serve as important gap-fillers that harmonize plot details that would have otherwise been difficult to reconcile.

On some other occasions, the musical interludes merely reinforce some already-known details. For example, in tale #17 the musical interlude plays a hyperbolic role by repeating the already stated fact that the wasp's kith and kin refuse to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. Reinforcements such as this are deliberately aimed at compelling audiences to pay close attention to the most important aspects of the narratives. In this example, for instance, audience are made (on several occasions) to come face-to-face with the repercussions of the wasp's self-isolation from his community as they sing the wasp's song. Indeed, it is for this purpose of internalizing the morals or most important details of stories that these musical interludes are mostly repeated intermittently throughout narratives – sometimes with slight variations as pertains in tales #29, #4, #11, #17, #52, and #79, among others.

From all the foregoing, one can see that musical interludes are integral parts of the main bodies of the KKB folktales in which they feature and should therefore be treated as such albeit coming in poetic form. The presence of such poetic forms in the main body of the KKB tale gives KKB tales and others across the globe with such genre-blending tendencies their unique form and beauty. It is no wonder that this oral esthetic feature and several others have even found their way into most Anglophone postcolonial written literatures (Bandia, "Orality and Translation" 111), especially those emanating from Africa as postcolonial writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Chinua Achebe, Efua Sutherland, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o among several others have often drawn on them to carve out a unique identity for their fiction in the literary canon. Hence, it is necessary to pay attention to such oral esthetic features as musical interludes and their contributions to the narrative and composition processes when exploring the defining properties of verbal materials such as KKB folktales.

The KKB tale's concluding segment

Another important aspect of the KKB tale that is worth exploring is its concluding part. Immediately following the main body of the tale, it typically comprises either the moral lesson of a story or an etiological assertion explaining a phenomenon or a situation, and a formulaic signing-off statement or phrase. The didactic significance or educational value of folktales has been well established in Onuora (xi), Pullum (96), Opoku-Agyemang (116, 117), Sturm and Nelson (173), Tekpetey (74, 81), Mireku-Gyimah ("Performance and the Techniques" 312, 326), and Harding (666) among countless others. Like many other folktales across the globe, KKB folktales often contain lessons or teachable facts that audiences can take away from each session – and the various storytellers are always keen on pointing these out at the concluding segments of their tales. For example, in tale #3, Wajabuu Maakpork concludes on the following didactic note: "So if it happens that you and another person find yourselves in a difficult situation, don't tell lies to get out of it. Takɔ told a lie to save his skin but ended up suffering the consequence." Similarly, in tale #15, the storyteller ends his tale with the moral lesson, "So you see, it's not good to be greedy; greed will only ruin your relationships and hurt you like it did the tortoise." Again, in tale #66, the storyteller ends her tale didactically as follows: "The snail's greed earned him a crooked mouth. Always appreciate what God gives you instead of complaining."

Such didactic conclusions as those above equally feature in tales #6, #14, #16, #19, #21, #34, #40, #45, #51, #79, #86, and #99 among others. These, and of course the numerous other didactic tales in KKB folklore, point to the use of the KKB tale not only as a source of entertainment and social cohesion but most importantly, also as a pedagogical tool to impart wisdom and values to participants. This instructive potential of the KKB folktale, together with its

other oral and performance esthetic features, makes it worth exploring across disciplines – be it in pedagogy, literary criticism, cultural studies, translation studies, or anthropology, among others.

Occasionally, the moral lessons offered via these tales will elicit responses from some members of one's audience – as is the case in tale #1, for example, where a member of the audience remarks, "Hear! Hear!" to indicate concurrence. The same pertains in tales #6 and #7 where some members of the audiences remark, "Mbo!" (to wit, "Yes," or "Well said," or "I agree"), as well as in tale #29 where one of the narrator's audience interjects, "Aa ŋa mbo" (to wit, "You've done well," or "You've rightly put it," or "I agree with you"). Such interjections, once again, serve as important avenues for performer-audience encounters and the attendant social cohesion they foster. But most significantly, from a performance-attentive new formalist perspective, they gesture, once more, to the roles of community and immediacy in shaping indigenous or primary oral materials such as these KKB folktales. This is a discussion I shall revisit in much detail in chapter four where I shall interrogate the performance forms at work in these folktales.

In the interim, and reverting to my present discussion on the concluding part of the KKB folktale, it is interesting to note that on some occasions storytellers conclude their tales with statements that proffer explanations as regards existing situations, phenomena, or conditions in our human experience or creation in general. As already pointed out on a couple of occasions, such endings are associated with etiological tales that offer insights into various aspects of the KKB belief system and worldview. For example, in tale #5 where the storyteller offers insights into why the python's skin has dark-brown blotches and why pythons inhabit the riverside or close to water bodies, the storyteller concludes as follows: "Since then, … the riverside, has been his home; and whenever the dry season is approaching, he quickly moves closer to the riverside. … That's why the python's skin has dark and brown blotches." Akin to tale #5, tale #84 also ends with the

statement, "That's why traditional rulers do not eat pigeons;" as does tale #11 which ends, "That is why to date, every upininkpil keeps jakuno as a pet." Other tales that end in a similar fashion include tales #2, #9, #12, #17, #18, #34, #58, and #100.

Like the moral lessons, these etiological conclusions sometimes attract reactions from audiences who will most often concur with storytellers by saying "Ti gbii," translated as "That's true" or "It's true" (as pertains in tale #5 for stance) or "A pɔan aabaa," translated as "You've done well" / "Well done" / "Well said" (as found in tales #87 and #90 for example). Others can concur by employing KKB interjections of agreement such as "M-ennn!" "M-hm!" "Ooooo!" "Mbo!" "Tɔɔ!" "Mmmmm!" etc. (as pertains in tales #2, #49, #52, #89, and #96 among others).

It is also commonplace for storytellers to terminate their narratives with a combination of a moral lesson and an etiological statement or vice versa. This is what can be observed in tale #15 where the narrator says, "That's why to date, the tortoise's shell has so many cracks. So you see, it's not good to be greedy; greed will only ruin your relationships …." The same concluding pattern features in tales #3, #31, #48, and #66 among others. Here again, the flexibility of the KKB tale's content and performance comes to light as one can infer that storytellers are not usually restricted in the way they choose to terminate their tales or performances: They can conclude with either a moral lesson, an etiological assertion, or both.

This flexibility notwithstanding, after stating the moral and/or etiological essence of a tale, it is usually crucial that a KKB storyteller indicates that his or her tale or performance has come to its end. Quintessentially, a storyteller is expected to sign off a tale or a performance via either of the following formulaic statements: "Tiin (tiin) kolb/kulb," translated into English as "This is the end of the story" or "The end of the story" (as found in tales #17, #31, and #45 among others) or "Maatiin gur ki m muun ke n-yaaja aagbem na," translated as "May my story diminish while I

grow as tall as my grandfather's kapok tree." Interestingly, throughout my fieldwork, I never encountered storytellers who still use the second formulaic signing-off statement (hereafter referred to as 'signing-off statement-2' while the first one shall be referred to as 'signing-off statement-1'). What I did encounter though were signing-off expressions such as "Maatiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun <u>ke n-yaajatiib aapɔagbem na</u> / … <u>ke bupɔagbem na</u> / … <u>ke n-yaajatiib aagbenja na</u>," etc. – translated respectively as "May my story diminish (and diminish and diminish) while I grow <u>as tall as my ancestors' wild kapok tree</u> (as pertains in tale #17 for instance) / … <u>as tall as a wild kapok tree</u> (in tale #60 for example) / … <u>as tall as my grandfathers' male kapok tree</u>" (in tale #23 for instance – also in Bisilki 349). All these are obviously variants of the original signing-off statement-2.

There are yet other variants of this signing-off statement – such as, "M tiin ntiin ka mu gur, ki gur, ka m muun, ki muun chaa ke n-yaaja agbinbel ya," translated as "May I tell my story such that it diminishes (and diminishes) while I grow (and grow) as tall as my grandfather's only kapok tree" (as found in tale #19 for example); "Nka m-mi m tiin ki muun ke chaa," translated as "May I tell my story and grow very tall" (as is the case in tale #8 for instance); "Maatiin gur ki m muun chaa," translated as "May my story diminish while I grow very tall" (as found in tales #4 and #96 among others); "Maatiin gur ki gur ki m muun ki muun," translated as "May my story diminish and diminish while I grow and grow" (as found in tale #97 for example); and "M muun ka maatiin gur," translated as "May I grow while my story diminishes" (as is the case in tale #13 for instance) among others. As can be inferred from all the foregoing, the normative signing-off statement-2 has numerous variants – and these are now preferred over the original phraseology. These variants herein are however merely a microcosm of the numerous existing ones – and the countless others

that will continue to be created as KKB folktales continue to crisscross generations and communities.

Pertinently, the prevalence of variants is not limited to signing-off statement-2. It is equally characteristic of signing-off statement-1. Since KKB storytellers are never restricted to using the exact phraseology of the original formulas, it is thus common to hear such signing-off statement-1 variants as "Maatitiin kolb," translated as "The end of my story" (as pertains in tales #29, #66, #87, and #94 among others) and "Maatiin kolb," translated as "The end of my story" (as is the case in tale #51 for example). Other variants include: "Maatiin kolb aanaa wɔŋ," translated as "The end of my story seeks/requires a continuation (as pertains in tales #88, #98, and #99 for instance), "Tiin tiin gbelb aalɔl," translated as "The end of my story has a knot" / "The story has ended" (as found in tales #28, #39, #54, and #62 among others), and "Tiin tiin kolb aataanyiln aa baa," translated as "The buck doesn't stop with me" or "I pass on the mantle/baton to the next storyteller" (as is the case in tales #30, #58, and #71 for example), among others.

One important thing worth mentioning here is that some of the variants above are peculiar to specific KKB communities and clans. For instance, in the course of my fieldwork in the Saboba district, I mostly encountered "Maatiin kolb aanaa wɔŋ" in a community called Kakpeeni while "Tiin tiin gbelb aalɔl" and "Tiin tiin kolb aataanyiln aa baa" were the preferred signing-off variants in the Sobii and the Buakon communities respectively. These community-based variants essentially gesture to the role community plays as a form in the fleshing out of the contents of KKB folktales. As earlier pointed out, this is a discussion I shall delve into at length in chapter four when exploring community as a performance form in the KKB oral context.

In the meantime, also worth pointing out is the fact that all the foregoing variants of the two normative signing-offs further cement my earlier assertion as regards the flexibility inherent

in the content and performance of the KKB folktale. What further supports this assertion is that KKB storytellers have the liberty of occasionally combining both signing-off statements-1 and 2 or their variants in their final remarks. This is what pertains in tale #17, for example, where the storyteller signs off as follows: Tiin tiin kolb. Maatiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaaja aapɔagbem na."

What is more, a KKB storyteller could simply employ any of the following more liberal endings to indicate the end of a story: "Maatiin nyɔk n-ya," translated as "This is the end of my story" (as found in tale #3 for instance), "Maatiin kɔkɔ n-ya," translated as "That's (all) my story," to wit "This is the end of my story" (as pertains in tales #12 and #37 for example), "Maatiin mu ka m kpa ya n-ya," translated as "This is the story I have" – to wit, "This is the end of my story" (as found in tale #7), "Maatiin kookoo le na," translated as "This is the end of my story" (as is the case in tales #18, #24, and #100 among others), and "Maatiin kookoo kolb" translated as "My story has ended" (as pertains in tale #98 for instance), among others. Though these liberal signing-offs clearly deviate from the two normative ones and their variants, it is interesting to note that many of the storytellers I encountered during my data collection tended to favor these liberal endings over the normative ones.

Occasionally, some would even combine them with variants of either normative signing-off statements-1 or 2 (as is the case in tale #98 for example where the storyteller signs off thus: "Maatiin kookoo kolb; maatiin kolb aanaa wɔŋ," translated as "My story has ended; the end of my story seeks/requires a continuation"). This once again points to the flexibility inherent in the content and performance structures that regulate the KKB tale's composition and performance. But most importantly, it gestures to many KKBs' (especially the younger generation's) increasing aversion to constraining normative structures within their storytelling culture. As some elders of

the Kakpeeni and Buakon communities pointed out, many of the liberal signing-offs and most of the variants of the normative signing-offs are mostly the products of the younger generation. The elders admitted that they had no idea where their younger generation got those variants from. But one might not be stretching it too far to speculate that the younger generation's exposure to education, other neighboring cultures, human mobility factors, and the ongoing rapid processes of urbanization in Ghana, among other factors, account for this development. Be that as it may, one will agree with me that such variant inventions are only made possible due to the flexible and accommodating nature of the KKB storytelling culture.

But despite this flexibility, there are still certain structures or protocols that are absolutely necessary in the performance process. That is why in the concluding part of the KKB tale, signing off one's tale or performance properly is a necessity – for it serves to pave the way for the commencement of the next tale or performance. As a result, failure to sign off might draw a reminder from some members of one's audience who are keen on upholding normative KKB storytelling structures. In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered one such incident in a community called Chagbaan where a member of the audience tacitly prompted a storyteller to conclude his tale by asking, "Is that the end of your story?" (see tale #8). The storyteller responded in the affirmative and proceeded to sign off appropriately using a variant of signing-off statement-2, after which the next performer voluntarily took the stage. On some other occasions (in the Sobii and Buakon communities for example), I noticed that when a performer forgot to sign off properly, one or more members of the audience would graciously sign off for the person (as is the case in tales #25, #39, and #71 for instance).

In a competitive storytelling setting, after signing off, a storyteller will nominate the next storyteller. This feature of the KKB folktale's conclusion, as pointed out in the previous segment,

is not peculiar to the KKB context. But it is important to highlight it again because, together with the other structural and performance esthetics discussed in this chapter, it gestures to the presence of structures of this kind that regulate the contents and renditions of these tales and thus calls for our attention as researchers, scholars, and critics interested in investigating the nature and workings of forms or structures operating in and around various verbal arts across the globe.

2.4 Conclusion

From all the foregoing discussions on the art of storytelling among KKBs and the defining properties of the KKB folktale, it is glaring that the KKB oral heritage indigenously called itiin (that is, folktales) possesses some unique features – as well as common features that draw it in close affinity to other known folktales across the globe – that are worth our literary, cultural, translation, and anthropological attention. Among other things, as discussions in this chapter have established, its performance draws on various oral and performance structures and innovations such as contextualized artistic language, dialogic exchanges between performers and their audiences, voice characterizations, gesticulations, facial expressions, and several other nonverbal cues, among other things, to give life or existence to this verbal art form.

To therefore fail to explore the KKB folktale and its performance will be discriminatory, marginalizing, and most importantly, deny us the opportunity to broaden our understanding of indigenous (oral) literatures across the globe and their contributions to anthropological studies, literary criticism, especially formal studies, and translation studies among others. It is for this reason that I shall spend my next two chapters exploring the translatability of the KKB folktale (in chapter three) and its formal aspects, especially the relationship between form and orality and form and performance (in chapter four). Thus enter, firstly, chapter three wherein I explore the translatability of the KKB folktale, especially its oral performance domains, using a translation

method that draws on aspects of the foreignization and domestication methods as well as modern

technology to render the textual, oral, and visual properties of such primary orature.

CHAPTER THREE

Translating primary orature: the case of the Konkomba folktale

3.0 Introduction: the challenge of translating primary oral texts

Translating primary orature continues to pose to the translator challenges ranging from the most suitable and ethical way of converting primary oral texts from their oral states to documented states, and from their source language (SL) cultures to target language (TL) cultures without violently and irretrievably severing them from their contexts. Admittedly, translating primary oral texts is twice as challenging as translating written or documented texts. It is little wonder that as far back as 1966 Vladimir Propp famously asserted that folk songs are untranslatable (Gatsak 182). One could not agree more with him on the challenging nature of translating an oral text like a folk song that is essentially steeped not only in words, but also in seemingly meaningless sounds and interjections, intonation or voice modulation, gestures of performers, the accompaniment of musical instruments and other musical embellishments, and which is temporal or occasion-bound, existing more authentically in an actual performance before an audience whose interjections, unsolicited additions, and reactions equally form an integral part of it.

Chronicling his translation experience from working on the oral literatures of indigenous societies in the United States of America, Sean O'Neill teases out the problematic nature of translating primary orature via a series of rhetorical questions he poses at the beginning of his article, "Translating Oral Literature in Indigenous Societies: Ethnic Aesthetic Performances in Multicultural and Multilingual Settings." He particularly questions the feasibility of transporting the contextual meanings of indigenous oral texts from their source cultures to their target cultures, wondering "how much is lost in the process of translation once [an] anthropologist departs from the original language and the context of shared life experiences" (218) and sets about his or her

write-ups and translations. Employing Chinese poetry and Plains Apache narratives, he interrogates how a translator will, for example, represent the tonal aspects of these oral art forms in languages – like English – that lack tone "without losing a sense of the original artistry" (219), bearing in mind their divorce from their actual enactments at the points of translation. Essentially, O'Neill's questions are no doubt aimed at bringing to the fore the herculean task the indigenous oral text translator is saddled with as far as the accurate translation of the content, formal, oral, and performance aspects of these oral texts is concerned.

Proffering thoughts along O'Neill's, Karl Reichl also observes that people who are familiar with certain great oral epics "have often expressed their doubts about the accuracy and fidelity of poetic translations" of such primary oral works into Russian (6). Citing V.M. Gatsak, he concurs with him – as do I – that "translations of oral poetry tend to move further and further away from the original" (6), and that "[t]he ideal translation of oral epics is easy to define in theory, but is difficult to carry out in practice" (6). Even though Reichl's discussions are limited to the translation of oral epics, the above observations and concessions regarding the problematic nature of translating accurately this oral art form hold true for all other indigenous or primary orature, especially those emerging from African contexts.

Translating indigenous African orature has admittedly been fraught with difficulties right from the very first translation attempt in 1562 by Portuguese priest Andre Fernandez, whose seminal *Inhambene* song translation to Portuguese (Nnamani and Amadi 78) resulted in the generation of interest in the translation and study of African oral texts and the challenges associated with these. Acknowledging the problematic nature of translating indigenous African orature, Nnamani and Amadi have observed that over the years Global North translators' lack of sociocultural connectedness and comprehension of African oral literatures, undeniably steeped in

African cultures and values, have often occasioned the production of inaccurate translations of African oral texts (80) – an observation I somewhat concur with as does Emmanuel Obiechina, who faults the early Christian missionaries' colonialist attitude toward African cultures for some of the dismissive and inaccurate translations of some African oral texts (10-11ff). Arguing along similar lines, Isidore Okpewho adds that most early translators of African orature often resorted to summaries of these oral texts due to "their interest in ideas and social content rather than the literary merits of the texts" (Okpewho 294; Nnamani and Amadi 80).

That said, it is only fair to these early Christian missionaries and the various Global North translators who have attempted to translate African primary orature to concede that many a primary orature translator across the globe has and continues to grapple with the challenge of accurately translating this type of literature. Even though scholars such as Reichl, Okpewho, Nnamani and Amadi have commendably ventured into the problem of translating primary oral texts, their proposed solutions have understandably fallen short of fully combating the challenges associated with translating indigenous oral literatures (particularly those of African origins). This fundamentally points to the colossal nature of the problem at hand and explains why it has persisted to date despite the numerous translation methods available to us (translators). All the foregoing raise the question as to what method could be deployed by the translator of primary orature to satisfactorily translate such literature as the Konkomba oral tales under study in this dissertation.

3.1 Western methods of translation and their applicability in the Konkomba oral context

3.1.1 Toward an oral context- and culture-grounded, ethical translation

As someone who has been translating the oral tales of the Konkomba people, I can attest to the fact that there is no single, well-defined translation method for translating KKB folktales and other forms of primary orature across the globe. Due to the performance-dependence and cultural

connectedness of indigenous oral texts, one naturally requires an oral performance and culturally sensitive translation method that will transport not only the oral outer contents but also the inherent sociocultural and literary aspects of these cultural materials from their source languages (SLs) to target languages (TLs). Thus, at the outset of my translation project, I had to ponder over questions such as:

(1) How do I translate accurately the content, formal, oral, and performance aspects of culturally grounded verbal arts such as these KKB folktales I am studying to an audience that has little or no knowledge about their sociocultural context and the socio-literary conventions of Konkomba storytelling?

(2) How do I stay invisible in the target text (TT) as a native translator so as to produce an objective, liberationist, culturally sensitive, ethical translation without imposing on it my biases, idiolects, and other preferences?

Answers to these questions, particularly the necessity for a liberationist and culturally grounded translation, initially pointed me in the direction of Friedrich Schleiermacher-formulated and Lawrence Venuti-popularized foreignization method. This is an ethnodeviant translation method that disrupts target language cultural values as much as possible "to register the linguistic and cultural difference of [a] foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 20; qtd. in Munday 145). In Venuti's own words, a foreignized "translation signifies the difference of the foreign text … by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 20). The ultimate result of this method is that it points the reader in the direction of the source text and its linguistic and cultural values, thereby "restrain[ing] the ethnocentric violence of translation" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 20) often perpetuated by hegemonic languages.

Pondering over questions such as (1) and (2) and the power of a hegemonic language such as English to silent minority languages and their cultures, I realized that I needed a translation method that produces "a translation that enters into the meaning, spirit and form of the original and endeavors to express all these in translation" (Reichl 5). Most importantly, I realized that I needed a translation method that would give visibility to the Konkomba language and culture in the target languages and cultures – namely, English and German.

Consequently, I decided to slightly foreignize my translations of the Konkomba folktales under study in this dissertation. Employing a moderate foreignization method afforded me the opportunity to maintain some Likpakpaln words, jargon, phrases, sentences, and slang that have eventually foreignized the TTs to their audiences and kept the translations close to their Konkomba origins. But most significantly, this foreignization method has offered me the latitude to provide, through paratextual materials in the form of brief introductions, notes, and glossaries (as shown in the translations in the Appendix), the sociocultural context of the tales and the socio-literary conventions of Konkomba storytelling. These paratextual materials are ultimately aimed at allowing the TT audiences to comprehend, enjoy, and better appreciate the texts and their culture.

It bears stating unequivocally at this point that the use of paratextual materials, when employing the foreignization method, is a more culturally sensitive and translation-friendly approach to translating indigenous or primary oral texts than weaving "into the narrative as unobtrusively as possible" defining statements explaining "culture-bound words or expressions" as proposed by D.U. Opata, F.U. Nnamani, and A.I. Amadi among others (Nnamani and Amadi 80). Nnamani and Amadi are spot on when they advocate the retention of culture-bound words and expressions of SLs in TTs. However, due to the culture-specificity of the dictions of such indigenous orature, especially African oral texts such as the KKB folktales I have been translating

and studying, their proposed in-text explanations of such culturally sensitive content is a flawed method. Such a method will regrettably compel translators to dismiss such culture-specific words, jargon, phrases, or even whole sentences with just simple statements or phrases translating those source language (SL) words or expressions without the space to give detailed elucidations of the sociocultural forces that govern or shape their usage and the connotative meanings of such words or expressions among other things. And therein lie my grounds for faulting Nnamani, Amadi, and others' proposed in-text explanations of key terminologies or culture-sensitive words and expressions of SLs in target texts (TTs). My grounds for disagreeing with them need further elucidation.

Citing an example from Opata's *Essays on Igbo World View* regarding the Igbo belief "in the philosophy of 'eziokwu bụ ndụ,'" which Opata translates as "truth is life," Nnamani and Amadi – and I dare say Opata as well – suggest the sufficiency of the rather basic explanation that the philosophy borders on "the necessity of always being honest and upright in one's dealings" (Opata 71; qtd. in Nnamani and Amadi 80). Laudable as this attempt to explain this pregnant Igbo philosophical thought is, it falls short of providing enough sociocultural context for its usage among the Igbo people – for example as regards the different situations or contexts for its usage, the categories of people who use it and what it reflects about Igbo class distinctions, why this philosophical thought equates "truth" to "life," the deeper meaning of this rich metaphor, and what it says about the linguistic richness of the Igbo language.

Interestingly, Nnamani and Amadi concur with me when they state later in their article that "… meaning in translation goes beyond direct, 'symbol reference structure' to include structures of feeling and association" (82). Certainly such socioculturally rich metadata as those I have outlined above cannot be condensed "unobtrusively" into an indigenous oral text that comes with

its own structure and rhythm. To therefore avoid wreaking havoc on indigenous or primary oral texts' structures and flows – or better still, to prevent "textual deformation" through the "[impairing of] the rhythmic flow of the work," as Antoine Berman puts it (286, 288-90) – it is imperative that an indigenous oral text translator seeking to use the foreignization method make use of paratextual materials such as prefaces, introductions, notes, and glossaries among others to produce culturally grounded translations that give the target audience the sociocultural contexts of the oral texts (especially those emerging from African contexts like the KKB one). This will also enable translators to steer clear of the risk of turning their translations into commentaries of sorts, facilitate easy comprehension of source texts (STs), and ultimately give esthetic satisfaction to TT audience(s).

These considerations informed my choice of this approach in my translations (as evidenced in the samples in the Appendix), where I employ introductions, notes, and glossaries to offer insights into the Konkomba language, culture, and storytelling conventions. For instance in tale #17 in the Appendix, the introduction is explicit that the tale borders on KKB funerals (especially the funeral dances indigenously known as njeen and kinachuŋ) and the KKB people's communal way of living. In the glossary, the gloss on "nkpaawiin" further offers insights into this communal way of living as manifested in how the concept of nkpaawiin works among KKBs, while in tale #5 (in the Appendix) the fourth note offers yet another insight into KKB hospitality. Also, in tale #2 (in the Appendix), the first note offers insights into a KKB storytelling convention bordering on the flexibility inherent in the introductory part of KKB folktales during storytelling sessions.

Occasionally, the notes and glossaries also highlight the linguistic character or structure of the Likpakpaln language. In tale #17, for example, the note proffers an explanation of my amalgamation of some English idioms in order to capture succinctly the Likpakpaln expression

"… le u fii ler nsan bo (ki cha). Similarly, in tale #2 the gloss "unoon" seeks to give TT audience an insight into the phonology of the Likpakpaln language as it gestures to the presence of heteronyms in this language.

All the foregoing point to my employment of paratextual materials in my translations to offer TT audiences foundational knowledge necessary for comprehending the indigenous oral tales I have translated (and their culture) without disrupting the flows of the translations with all the metadata these introductions, notes, and glossaries contain. One will agree with me that integrating into my translations all the metadata provided by these annotations would have turned the translations into long commentaries instead of the fluent and chronological texts I have produced. But before one misconstrues this for a campaign against intermittent translator commentaries where necessary in a TT, I should point out that I only disagree with the integration of explanations for culture-grounded and culture-specific words, phrases, or sentences into the main text of one's translation. As a matter of fact, as I will soon point out when discussing the translation of the oral and performance aspects of primary orature such as these KKB folktales, sometimes a source text's orality, performance-dependence, and indigeneity call for occasional translator commentaries aimed at giving TT audiences mental visualizations of performers' body languages as they employ gestures and other dramatic acts to give life to their verbal arts.

But in the meantime, and staying the course of my present discussion on foreignizing translations of indigenous orature through paratextual materials, I must add that settling on this culturally sensitive method of translation did not render my translation project problem-free. Naturally, such questions as how to translate accurately the contents and formal aspects of the oral Konkomba folktales I am dealing with still lingered. Although the foreignization method's paratextualization is efficient in transporting to TT audience(s) source texts' (STs') cultures,

linguistic organograms, and socio-literary conventions, how does one translate the actual oral texts so as to capture their original contents and formal aspects succinctly? Due to the foregoing concern, I had to decide whether I wanted to adhere strictly to a radical foreignization method by engaging in literal, word-for-word, syntactic translations that would ultimately register the STs' linguistic values and culture in the TTs or opt for a moderate foreignization method tilted toward producing sense-based or semantic translations that would ultimately capture the original contents and forms of the oral tales while still pointing TT audience(s) in the directions of the STs and their culture.

3.1.2 Translating the contents and formal aspects of Konkomba folktales

Since indigenous oral texts such as the KKB folktales I have translated are usually composed in culturalized or contextualized language, I propose to commence my discussion on my translation of their contents and formal aspects at the linguistic level. This is because one's approach to the language of such texts determines whether one eventually reproduces literally or contextually the original messages of these oral texts. At the risk of almost sounding repetitive, I must reiterate that in terms of language, I had to decide whether or not to do a literal, word-for-word, syntactic transportation of the language used by the various storytellers and their audiences to flesh out the contents of their tales. In other words, at the outset of the translation project I had to decide – as should every translator – whether I wanted to do literal, word-for-word, syntactic translations or sense-by-sense (semantic) translations in which I first decoded the actual messages of the SL texts before transporting their contextual meanings to the TTs.

I settled on the latter as literal, syntactic translations would have entailed wholesale transportation and imposition of the Likpakpaln linguistic system (especially syntax) on the English linguistic system. On the one hand, this would have produced highly foreignized or defamiliarized, estranged living texts. On the other hand, due to syntactic differences between the

SL and the TL, coupled with the cultural shifts TTs undergo, such translations would have violently disrupted the English language's syntactic system, dangerously led to the production of linguistically substandard texts, and in certain instances produced semantically nonsensical, ambiguous, and inaccurate content. For instance, when the narrator of tale #17 begins his story thus: "Ni bi le ki bi aa, ulangben ni waamaantɔl le nan bi," the verbatim syntactic translation would have been rendered as "There was and there was, a wasp and his kin lived" or "There was and there was, there lived a wasp and his kin." Also, when the storyteller is recounting the wasp's departure to his in-law's funeral, he says "… le u fii ler nsan bo ki cha" – which can be rendered, literally, as "… and he fell on the road going." One will agree that in the English translations, the dependent clause in the first example makes absolutely no sense while the second example equally has no communicative value as it is deficient in sense or meaning. Thus, in both instances sense would have been sacrificed on the altar of literal, verbatim, syntactic translations.

Similarly, in tale #19 (in the Appendix) the storyteller recounts the young suitor's response to the traditional requirements Lalaachi's family wants him to fulfill before he can marry their daughter as follows: "… nka unachipɔan ya mu kal ki tun ntun ŋin kama san ke u tun ki joo waaninpu ya …." A verbatim, syntactic translation would have rendered this ST as: "… and the young man sat down and did all the work he had to do in order to marry his wife ...." Semantically, this makes sense in the TL but regrettably falls short of capturing appropriately the ST and its culture – that is, the KKB traditional marriage procedure. The phrase "sat down," which is a literal translation of the Likpakpaln word "kal," creates the impression that the young man met all the traditional requirements he had to meet in order to marry Lalaachi in one day or immediately – which could not be farther from the truth as KKB traditional marriage procedure, especially the payment of dowry, can last from several months to years. Among other things, the young man in

this story will have to farm for his in-laws once or more times in what is indigenously called lichookuul in the KKB culture, his prospective wife will have to brew a local drink called pito and the young man will be required to galvanize support from his kith and kin to patronize and, if possible, finish the drink (indigenously called nchoodaan) at a fee, and the young man will receive a list of items he must purchase and present to the girl's family, among other requirements. These are certainly not things or "work" that can be done immediately or in a day, as the verbatim translation intimates. From the foregoing, one can infer that the literal rendition of the SL word "kal" as "sat down" is therefore misleading, fails to capture the actual meaning of the ST, and most importantly, loses the KKB marriage protocols to which it implicitly gestures.

To rectify the semantic paralysis in tale #17 and the mistranslation (as well as 'loss in translation') in tale #19 in the examples in question, one will have to engage in a contextual or cultural interpretation of the language employed by these two storytellers before translating their near equivalent meanings in the TTs. This obviously raises the age-long question of the correlation between translation and interpretation, and reader/audience and translator. Are they distinct activities and persons, or are they conjoined, inseparable activities and persons?

Steering clear of the temptation to go into the various arguments proffered by Roland Barthes, Susan Bassnett, and Julia Kristeva among others on this debate, I wish to state unequivocally that as the translator of these two tales – and the others used in this dissertation – I am first and foremost a recipient (that is, a hearer/listener/audience) of these Konkomba oral texts; and secondly, a translator of the same. As a recipient, I relied on my native speaker privileged position to analyze and interpret the narrators' words and expressions contextually so as to understand the texts. As a translator, I subsequently relied on my English linguistic tools to translate the tales into the TL. In this tripartite process of analyzing, interpreting, and translating,

I am certainly an active hearer, an interpreter, and a translator – for these translations are nothing but products of my contextual or cultural understanding of the narrators, my decoding of their narratives, and my subsequent translation of their contents into English. And therein lies the intricate process of translating indigenous oral texts, especially those emerging from African contexts or cultures like the KKB oral one. The translator has to first be at the same linguistic and cultural levels as the oral art performer, decode the often contextualized and culturalized language used, before setting about his or her translation. This essentially makes translation a formal engagement – a close reading, so to speak – in which a translator engages intimately with the ST in order to decode its culture-grounded language so as to arrive at an accurate interpretation and transport that interpretation to the TT.

Employing this intimate engagement (approach), one can semantically translate into English the Likpakpaln subordinate clause, "Ni bi le ki bi aa, …" in tale #17 as "Once upon a time, …" or "Long ago, …" or "A long time ago …," etc. – especially when it is analyzed in relation to its cultural and contextual usage in the Konkomba storytelling culture and juxtaposed with its equivalents in English. Similarly, "… le u fii ler nsan bo ki cha" translates loosely in English, based on its contextual usage in Likpakpaln, as "… and he set off" or "… and he departed." But I did not use either translation due to another reason I shall soon discuss. For now, what is worthy of note is that all the English translations above are far removed syntactically from their STs but are semantically accurate renderings of the STs than the literal, nonsensical, syntactically-based translations, "There was and there was …" or "… and he fell on the road going."

Again, based on the context and my familiarity with the KKB cultural element at the center of tale #19, "… nka unachipɔan ya mu kal ki tun ntun ŋin kama san ke u tun ki joo waaninpu ya …" was semantically translated as "One day the young man was invited to the man's house and

the girl was given to him in marriage after the traditional requirements were <u>painstakingly</u> met." Here again, the syntax of this translation is way different from that of the ST and the literal translation, "… and the young man sat down and did all the work he had to do in order to marry his wife …." But it captures the ST's content and cultural element more satisfactorily than the syntactically close, verbatim translation above. And in tandem with my earlier advocacy that annotations be employed to offer illuminating explanations in such culture-sensitive or culture-grounded situations as this example under discussion, I employed a note to explain that "The word "painstakingly" [was] used deliberately … to gesture to [the] lengthy [nature of the] KKB marriage process" (Note 2, tale #19). Thus, linguistic contextualization accounted for my ability to translate into readable English texts the examples under discussion, among several others, from tales #17 and #19.

The same is true of my translation of tale #26's narrator's conclusion, "Tiin tiin gbelb aalɔl," which can be translated literally as "The end of the story's knot" but when analyzed contextually vis-à-vis the KKB storytelling culture, can be better translated as "The end of my story has a knot" – to wit, "The story has ended." Similarly, in tales #88, #98, and #99 among others in the online repository, the storytellers end their tales as follows: "Maatiin kolb aanaa wɔŋ," translated verbatim as "The end of my story's cow/bull is missing." Here again, one will agree that this literal, syntactic translation is bereft of any semantic value. As a result, a translator will have to analyze this conclusion contextually in relation to the KKB storytelling culture and render it appropriately. Employing this method, I rendered this conclusion as "The end of my story seeks/requires a continuation" – as pertains in chapter 2 where I discussed the concluding segment of the KKB folktale. And herein lies, again, the necessity of analyzing and interpreting contextually before translating indigenous oral texts such as KKB folktales.

Should one require further convincing on this necessity, one only needs to turn again to tale #17 where the narrator concludes, "Tiin tiin kolb," which literally translates, "Story story short," or "Story story end," or "Story story brief." Here again, the primary oral text translator has to rely on contextual meaning to interpret and render the semantic meaning of this phrase in the TL since a literal, syntactic approach will produce inelegant, semantically deficient texts such as those above. Based on my familiarity with the language and culture of the ST, I would have rendered the above conclusion as "The end of my story," "My story ends here," or "This is the end of my story." But these translations, though semantically accurate, would have esthetically robbed the text of its originally intended rhythmic or musical ending produced by the repetition in the phrase, "tiin tiin kolb."

This fundamentally gestures to the fact that domesticating texts, especially indigenous, culture-specific oral texts like KKB oral tales, can sometimes result in losses not just in the meanings but the esthetics of those texts. To obviate this loss (in the instance above), I employed wholesale linguistic transportation, which allowed me to maintain the original SL text "tiin tiin kolb" in the TT (as shown in the Appendix) and rather provide paratextual explanations in the glossary. Hence my decision to maintain this SL text, as well as its accompanying concluding sentence, "Maatiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaaja aapɔagbem na" (in tale #17) stemmed from my unwillingness to wreak havoc on the literary beauty of these concluding sentences of the tale. This worked perfectly to my advantage, as far as my use of a culturally sensitive moderate foreignization method is concerned, since these texts ultimately foreignize the TT while the paratextual explanations in the glossary still give the target audience their contextual meanings and a glimpse of the socio-literary conventions of Konkomba storytelling as well as an aspect of the Konkomba culture.

Drawing on the foregoing, a vital caution to the indigenous oral text translator engaged in the transportation and application of Global North translation theories and methods in a predominantly orally-based culture like the Konkomba one and others in Africa is that, one should guard against the blanket transportation and application of such methods and rather engage in slight modifications of these methods, where necessary, to meet local needs and challenges such as accounting for the specificities of African oral literatures. Above all, the evidence from the examples advanced so far points to the fact that syntactic, literal translations of indigenous oral texts in strict adherence to the foreignization method's deliberate disruption of the linguistic systems of TLs with those of ST languages will produce texts bereft of semantic values. When this happens, it will not only lead to what Susan Bassnett terms a "distortion of the sense [and] communicative value … of the SL text" (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 93), but most importantly, it can result in the loss of STs' esthetic values as evidenced in tale #17's concluding expressions discussed herein.

Consequently, I propose – as Hilaire Belloc does in his advocacy of sense translation rather than "word by word or sentence by sentence" translation of written literature (Belloc 94; Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 125) – that when translating indigenous oral texts (especially those of African origins), semantic or sense-by-sense translation be favored over literal, word-for-word, syntactic translation. This is very applicable even in a linguistically rebellious approach like the foreignization method since translators can still foreignize their translations as much as possible by maintaining certain linguistic symbols and structures of STs in TTs – as I have done in my translations.

Translating source texts' literary forms semantically

The foregoing proposal raises the issue of semantically translating what Shklovsky terms "trans-sensible word[s]" ("On Poetry and Trans-Sense" 16) or "meaningless 'nonsense word[s]'" (Lemon and Reis 85). How does one translate what appear to be meaningless, nonsense words bereft of any semantic value in even the SL text itself and which consequently have no semantic equivalents in the TL? How does one translate, for instance, onomatopoeic words and phrases (aka ideophones) such as "kpa ti lab" in tale #11, "kpeeeeb" in tale #13, "den deen den deen" in tale #14, "Gum gum gum gum," "Tou tilouti," "Chakta chakta," or "Gang galaang ga" in tale #17, or "kpo kpo" in tale #19? These certainly possess no apparent semantic values in the SL texts themselves; hence it will be an effort in futility to attempt a semantic or sense-by-sense translation of these in the TL text. How does one translate meaninglessness meaningfully then?

As has been the practice of most verse translators when faced with such formal aspects as poetic meaninglessness, the indigenous oral text translator has to turn to another type of translation for a remedy. I propose the use of phonemic translations in such situations – as I have done in my translations of the KKB oral tales I am studying. The translator of such orature can transport, wholesale, the lexicon and syntax of the SL texts to the TTs but endeavor to provide explanations or the cultural and contextual meanings of such structures in the TTs in the form of notes or glossaries. On the one hand, such semiotic transportations will fundamentally foreignize the TTs; but on the other hand, the paratextual explanations will provide an equipoise, in terms of comprehension and esthetic satisfaction, for foreign audience(s) despite the likely loss of value due to the texts' geo-cultural shifts. One will agree that the ultimate import of such accessorial explanations in phonemic translations is to execute semantically accurate translations comprehensible and esthetically appealing to TT audiences – which brings us squarely back to my

endorsement of semantic translation over literal, syntactic translation as far as the translation of indigenous or primary orature, particularly those of African origins, is concerned.

This proposed sense-based translation further becomes necessary when one attempts to translate other literary forms of these oral tales. For instance, how does one transport to TTs such literary forms as the synecdoche "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa" (translated as "The world stands aloof; he stands aloof") and the hyperbole employed in rendering the sarcasm of the wasp's in-laws when some of them remark, as the wasp is approaching the funeral grounds, that "Din wee ma ulangben choo; kitiŋ ge nan yik" (translated as "Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode") in tale #17? How does one capture accurately the metonym, "Ute kan u nin dab dab kiyik ya bu ya, n kaa waar u nyɔk" (translated as "Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth"), the simile "Kichɔk kin gaar kpo kpo ke nte aachɔkbik …" (translated as "The axe that sounds like my father's little axe"), the hyperbole "… n-nyunyunn kpaln nnyunbun / Ki m lu ki nyu kaa nyi nkpin" (translated as "… my tears have become a well / From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water"), or the metaphor "… n-yikpir kpaln ukeenja" (translated as "… my hair have become elephant grass") in tale #19 without losing their esthetic values?

With regard to the synecdoche in tale #17, I should point out that the word "garwa" is a collective noun employed by the ST narrator to refer to the wasp's kinsmen who have refused to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. However, the narrator chooses to use "u" (the Likpakpaln gender-neutral third person singular pronoun) instead of "bi" (the third person plural pronoun) for the antecedent "garwa" – as though the wasp were addressing only one of his kinsmen. In so doing, the storyteller uses a singular entity (i.e., a kinsman) to represent a whole group (i.e., the wasp's kinsmen). This part-whole representation ultimately allows him (the storyteller) to successfully employ a synecdoche to suggest that the wasp's target audience are each and every member of his

kinsmen without having to say that explicitly. The ST narrator, thus, engages in a creative and literary use of the Likpakpaln language to emphasize the fact that not even one kinsman was prepared to accompany the wasp to the funeral.

The use of this Likpakpaln gender-fluid human referent pronoun "u" in the line under discussion, however, gives rise to a pertinent question: "How does one translate this ST narrator's creative use of language in a TL which has no human referent gender-fluid pronoun like the "u" in Likpakpaln?" Please note that "u" can be translated into English either as "he," "she," or "it." Since "it" is the neuter gender pronoun in English, one might be tempted to use that as the near-equivalent English translation for this Likpakpaln gender-neutral pronoun, thereby producing the almost verbatim translation, "The world stands; it stands." Unfortunately, this translation falls short of transporting the ST in two regards: firstly, though grammatically correct, it only captures partially the original content of the ST – as I will soon demonstrate; secondly, and most importantly, it has lost the synecdoche employed by the narrator in the ST.

I propose to commence with this latter defect (i.e., the lost literary form) in the English translation, "The world stands; it stands." In this translation, "it" refers to "the world" as a collective unit and so does not suggest individuality as "u" does in line 2 of the tale's musical interlude. Consequently, it does not suggest that in the second clause of this compound sentence, the wasp is referring to one (person) out of all his kinsmen in order to communicate the idea that each of them refused to accompany him. Added to this, "it" is a non-human referent pronoun and so cannot be used to refer to one of the wasp's kinsmen. To rectify the loss of this formal element of the tale (that is, the synecdoche in "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa"), the translator of this indigenous oral text has to first decode the literary device or form in the context of the Likpakpaln culture and then translate it to its closest TL equivalent, ensuring that as much as possible the

clause, and by extension the entire sentence, "conform[s] to traditionally accepted target [language] norms" (Shuttleworth and Cowie 8). Such an exercise will consequently, as Holmes rightly observes, relatively "naturalize" an essentially foreign text to its TL audience (97) but still capture, I must add, the formal element of this ST in the TT so as to enhance TT audience's comprehension and esthetic appreciation of it.

In order to restore the lost form in the English translation, "The world stands; it stands," I therefore decided to turn to the contextual referent of the Likpakpaln gender-fluid personal pronoun "u." In the context of this tale, it bears pointing out again, "garwa" refers to the wasp's kinsmen who have refused to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. As a result, contextually, the Likpakpaln gender-fluid pronoun "u" refers to one of the kinsmen of the wasp and should therefore, by default, be translated as "he" (in English), bearing in mind the fact that in the Konkomba culture it is usually males who attend their in-laws' funerals. Based on the above culturally-derived and contextual analysis and interpretation, I initially rendered the TL translation as "The world stands; he stands," thus capturing the synecdoche employed by the ST narrator in his text.

Even though the above translation captures the synecdoche in the ST, it still falls short of fully communicating the contextual meaning, and for that matter the original content of the ST sentence "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa" – which suggests nonchalance on the part of the wasp's kinsmen or their lack of empathy for him. To therefore capture this idea of the world around the wasp – in this context, his kinsmen – standing unconcerned or refusing to help him or accompany him to the funeral, I introduced the adverb "aloof," thereby allowing me to accurately translate the ST sentence as "The world stands aloof; he stands aloof." Content- and form-wise, this renders

accurately both the original content and formal element in this sentence and points the TT reader to the ST and its narrator's creative and literary use of language in his narrative.

Admittedly, with regard to transporting the synecdoche in the ST to the TT, one could have used the fast-becoming popular English language gender-fluid pronoun "they" to render the translation as "The world stands aloof; they stand aloof." Unfortunately that would have been grammatically incorrect. Most importantly, at first glance, it would have been bereft of the synecdoche employed in the ST considering that "they" suggests plurality and so does not communicate the idea that the ST narrator employed a part or a single person (i.e., a kinsman) to represent a whole (i.e., the wasp's kinsmen). Obviously, the use of this modern-day gender-fluid pronoun will entail employing a note to explain that the pronoun "they," as used in this context, is the gender-fluid personal pronoun modern-day gender activism has gradually introduced into English usage and not the regular third person plural pronoun. This would have definitely captured the literary form employed in the ST – thus, once again, offering credence to my proposal that annotations be employed in foreignizing translations of indigenous orature. That said, I must stress that in this latter translation the synecdoche is not as readily apparent as in the earlier translation; hence, my decision to go through the painstaking process of contextually and culturally analyzing and interpreting the ST so as to capture this formal element as precisely as possible in the TT.

This same painstaking process of contextually analyzing, interpreting, and translating literary forms was applied in the translation of the hyperbole, "Din wee ma ulangben choo; kitiŋ ge nan yik" into English as "Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode" (in the same tale #17). Engaging in a literal translation would have rendered the TT as follows: "Today the wasp is coming; the ground will uproot," which is deficient in terms of communicative value. However, consistent with my proposed culture- and context-informed semantic translation, I analyzed the

narrator's figurative use of language in the phrase, "… kitiŋ ge nan yik" – which evokes the image of the earth or ground bursting forth when a tree's stump is uprooted – and translated "… kitiŋ ge nan yik" as "… the earth will explode." One could have simply translated it as "… there will be an earthquake." However, that would have completely domesticated the translation and lessened the effect of the powerful image evoked by the explosion of the ground, as the ST narrator dramatically put it, thereby resulting in the loss of the weight of the originally intended exaggeration in the ST. Hence my choice of "… the earth will explode" over "… there will be an earthquake" was informed by this necessity to transport to the TT this powerful image evoked by the hyperbole the ST narrator employed during his performance.

From the foregoing, one cannot overemphasize the need for cultural, analytical, and interpretative consciousness as well as creativity on the part of the indigenous oral text translator when engaged in transporting the contents and formal aspects of oral texts such as KKB folktales from their cultures to other cultures. Indeed, one can surmise from discussions so far that indigenous oral text translation is a complex process whereby the translator contextually and culturally analyzes the message of the ST into its clearest form and "transfers it … in the RECEPTOR language which is [or rings] most appropriate for the audience which he intends to reach" (Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* 79-80, "Science of Translation" 484; qtd. in Shuttleworth and Cowie 9) – as I have done in my KKB folktales translations.

Much as translating the ST "in the RECEPTOR language which is [or rings] most appropriate for the audience" appears to lean dangerously toward the domestication method and appears to defeat the foreignization method I use in my translations, I must point out that I merely employ and propose a moderate, culturally sensitive foreignization method (rather than a radical one) that allows translators of culture-specific texts like primary orature to borrow tools from other

methods of translation such as the domestication method, as much as possible, to enable them to translate accurately and intelligibly the contents, cultures, and formal aspects of such oral texts. Consequently, with regard to my agreement with Nida that a translator should employ language that is appropriate or rings true to TT audience, it is only to the extent that a translator of indigenous orature needs to capture the contents of such orature in the receptor language that communicates aptly its (i.e., the ST's) original meaning and structural elements comprehensibly to the TT audience.

In doing this, however, in tandem with the foreignization method's tendency to register the linguistic and cultural values of the ST in the TT, the translator has to sometimes deviate from known TL structures by imposing foreign linguistic structures on TT audiences but endeavor to provide annotations to aid in content comprehension and esthetic appreciation. This is what I do in some of my translations when I need to capture some formal elements of some STs in the TTs but cannot do so due to syntactic differences between the SL and the TL and the cultural shift the STs undergo. In such situations, I have no option but to transport verbatim the ST expressions involved and provide notes explaining their meanings in the TTs. Often, I also provide the contextual usages of such STs and also state my reasons for engaging in such verbatim translations. This is what I do in tale #19, for instance, where I translate the metonym, "Ute kan u nin dab dab kiyik ya bu ya, n kaa waar u nyɔk" as "Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth." Even though the phrase "… never opened his mouth" sounds inelegant in standard English and leans toward what Bandia and others have termed "glocalization" ("Translation and Inequality" 61), I employed it nevertheless in my translation in order to capture succinctly the literary form contained in the Likpakpaln phrase, "… n kaa waar u nyɔk" since the fluent, elegant English translation, "… didn't utter a word" falls short of capturing the metonym in the ST.

By employing the phrase "… n kaa waar u nyɔk," the ST narrator skillfully draws on a part of the human body associated with speech to evoke a dramatic mental image of a speaking person in order to communicate its opposite to her audience. Instructively, such graphic mental image creation is characteristic of the textual aspect of the oral tales of the KKB people. Since these tales exist orally, such graphic language serves to help audiences capture images in their minds' eyes, internalize them, and use them as springboards for remembering details of these tales for onward transmission. Aware of the importance of such dramatic speech in the KKB folktale, I needed to capture that in my translation not just to showcase the linguistic difference between Likpakpaln and English, but most importantly, to draw readers' attention to this oral esthetic feature of the KKB folktale through my annotation. And therein lies, once again, the significance of annotations in (moderately) foreignized indigenous oral text translations. Thus, when a translator of indigenous oral texts like the KKB folktales I am studying is faced with the challenge of capturing accurately their formal aspects, it is sometimes imperative to deviate from known TL linguistic norms or structures not just to foreignize the texts but to avoid losing their esthetic elements.

What is more, sometimes a translator has to engage in linguistic restructuring (or 're-composition') of known TL structures in ways that, though showcase the linguistic differences between a SL and a TL, still capture the original message of the ST while simultaneously sounding close to the known linguistic norms and structures of the TL. This will allow the TT audience to relate to those foreign linguistic structures or structural compositums by transferring their local or native linguistic knowledge to the seemingly familiar linguistic structures or compositions being softly imposed on them by the foreign text. Ultimately, this will give TT audience an idea of the original message in the ST in a language they can relate to at the surface level, but which at a second or more critical glance will reveal inconsistencies with their own linguistic values. Such

inconsistencies can then be explained by the translator through paratextual materials such as notes or glossaries. Admittedly, such linguistic restructurings or compositions require a lot of linguistic creativity on the part of the translator, as I will soon demonstrate a few paragraphs ahead (in the translator's visibility or invisibility segment) using an example from tale #17.

The foregoing notwithstanding, it is worth belaboring the point that when translating indigenous oral texts, the translator's ability to contextually analyze, interpret, and transport the accurate content, formal aspects, and culture of a source text (ST) to a TT audience is still more important (and beneficial) than the word-for-word or syntactic rendition of a ST in the name of keeping a translation close to its ST syntactically only to end up distorting or losing the original meaning and/or formal elements. Sacrificing sense on the altar of lexical and syntactic closeness of translations to their STs is a disservice to STs, their cultures, and TT audiences in particular, as such translations will almost always produce, as exemplified in the examples advanced earlier, meaningless or at best ambiguity-ridden contents and result in the loss of key formal aspects due to the culture-specific nature of the language often used in indigenous oral performances.

From a literary perspective – and certainly from the perspective of an ardent Venuti disciple – the linguistic strangeness achieved in TTs through literal translations such as "There was and there was, ..." or "… the ground will uproot" examples mentioned earlier is commendable. But from the perspective of an indigenous oral text translator seeking to capture the accurate contents, cultures, and formal aspects of culturally grounded texts such as KKB folktales, such radical verbatim renderings defeat this objective. It is therefore important that when translating indigenous oral texts, one keeps in mind this fact that a strict adherence to a radical foreignization method without recourse to other methods such as the domestication method will produce literal translations that are, on most occasions, bereft of the semantic and esthetic values of STs. This is

why I employ a moderate foreignization method that draws on aspects of the domestication method to produce sense-based translations of the contents and formal elements of the Konkomba folktales I am studying.

The methodological path of the translator of indigenous orature is, therefore, a medial one that affords the translator the latitude to navigate cautiously the various translation methods available, borrowing and amalgamating them into a culturally sensitive tool that enables him or her to do justice to a source text (ST) by transporting (without wreaking havoc on it) its content, formal aspects, and culture. On this, I have the support of Anthony Pym who argues that translators should operate as *"Blendlige"* (i.e., people of mixed races or cultures) operating from "intermediate positions" (30). According to him, translators (just like *Blendlige*) should situate themselves in "intercultures, roaming along the borders, travelling between the territorial powers" (32).

Thus, a translator, especially one who wishes to do justice to an oral text and its oral context or culture, should operate with the golden mean, drawing on the diverse translation methods that address the translation challenges a situated (oral) context presents. Such an approach will enable the translator to, for instance, transport an indigenous oral ST to a foreign audience in a language that is comprehensible – or sometimes sounds similar to theirs but not necessarily exact as theirs – so as to help them understand the ST and its culture. And I must emphasize that in instances where there are readily available close TL equivalents of STs, the translator cannot but make use of them provided that they capture the meanings, forms, and contexts or cultures of the STs. But in situations where there are no readily available satisfactory TL equivalents, linguistic restructurings (aka compositums) and the migration of SL structures (as found in tale #19 for

example) are unavoidable – and both should come with accompanying annotations to aid TT audiences in comprehending the STs.

The loyalty of the indigenous oral text translator, then, is two-pronged: loyalty to the ST, its language, and its culture and loyalty to the TT audience as much as possible. After all, what is the point of translating an indigenous oral text if its TT audience cannot get a glimpse of its original message, its culture or context, and the socio-literary conventions (or esthetic aspects) of its performance? Anton Popovič authenticates my stance here regarding the communicative and esthetic ends of translation in his assertion that the "aim of a translation is to transfer certain intellectual and aesthetic values from one language to another" (78). This is the exact reason I propose the use of a moderate, culturally grounded foreignization method that allows the translator of indigenous orature to contextually analyze, interpret, and transport a source text's content, culture, and formal aspects in language that the target audience can comprehend. But this language should also include (where necessary, especially when dealing with culture-specific words and expressions) the reproduction of the linguistic symbols and structures of STs in TTs and the deployment of introductions, notes, and glossaries among other annotations. These paratexts will provide near TL equivalents or contextual explanations of SL words and expressions in order to enhance TT audiences' comprehension and esthetic enjoyment of translated indigenous oral texts without compromising those texts' cultures.

Such a culture-sensitive method of translation will definitely require borrowing occasionally from other approaches such as the domestication method. The sole aim of doing this is to give one's TT audience a better comprehension of a source text (ST) and its culture in a language that appears close to theirs (i.e., the TT audience's) or in a language that they can understand since the foreignization method is deficient in what Nida famously termed "naturalness

of expression" (*Toward a Science of Translating* 168). I concur with Venuti on the necessity for STs to be visible to TT audiences. However, this visibility should not be achieved solely through pointing TT audiences to STs' linguistic strangeness in apposition to their (i.e., the TT audiences') linguistic cultures or norms. The visibility can also be achieved through the coming alive of STs' culture-specific messages, socio-literary conventions, and cultural environments in TTs. This is something the translator (of indigenous orature) cannot do without somewhat relying on target language values – and for that matter the domestication method. That reliance notwithstanding, a translator (of indigenous orature) has the responsibility to creatively use such target language values in ways that ultimately point the TT audience in the direction of the foreign text's content, formal aspect(s), and culture – as already pointed out and will soon be demonstrated in subsection 3.1.3.

Structuring oral genre forms

The same creative demand is placed on translators of primary orature as regards the structuring or spatial arrangement of the oral texts they translate. Admittedly, one advantage of translating primary orature is a certain degree of liberty in text structuring. The ST, being oral in nature, comes with no definite spatial arrangement on paper. As a result, it behooves the translator to pay attention and interpret the narrator's prosody, especially the speech rate and pauses, in order to decide which materials logically belong together in a particular paragraph, stanza, act, or scene depending on which genre one is working on. This strategy proved useful in all my KKB folktale translations. One should however not take the spatial forms in my translations as absolute since the same tales will be structured differently by another translator due to differences in the purpose and method of translation as well as systems of interpretation. Most importantly, as Popovič rightly observes, "the

translator has the right to differ organically, to be independent [structurally]" (80; Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 94).

This independence in structuring places another creative responsibility on the translator. It fundamentally makes the indigenous oral text translator not just a reproducer of a source text (ST) but a creative writer of a TT. This privileged position offers the oral text translator another opportunity to creatively foreignize a TT through non-conformity to the spatial arrangements of existing genre forms in TL cultures. The translator can choose to experiment with various genre forms that remedy the challenges presented by the situated oral context at hand. Such a genre form experimentation ultimately provides a platform for the translator to engage in, consciously or unconsciously, the debate on forms and their affordances in different cultural contexts and materials through his or her practice. The foregoing certainly requires further elucidation.

As indigenous oral text translators migrate hegemonic genre forms from literate cultures to oral cultures such as the KKB one I am dealing with, their creative license (as writers of TTs) affords them the liberty to adjust these normative genre forms to accommodate the inherent structures in these indigenous oral texts. As it were, the inherent forms of the oral materials compel these TT writers to adapt these normative genre forms to accommodate their (i.e., the oral materials') contents. This bears a striking resemblance to what Pirker terms the "pull of form" (6, 32, 43) in her forthcoming book, *The Pull of Form and Poetic Practice,* where she argues that forms have the "potential to pull poets [and other writers in] a certain direction during the creative process" (31). She particularly observes that a poem, for instance, emerges from the "interplay between [a] poet" (i.e., the creating subject) and the formal force – namely, "language and form" (41). In much the same way, during the structuring of one's translation of a primary oral text, the

TT writer's creative license works collaboratively with the inherent form of the oral piece to give textual structure to the translation.

Thus, as a creative writer of a TT, a translator (especially an oral text translator) unconsciously participates in the debate on forms and their operations in situated contexts since the 'hybrid' genre forms that often emerge during the oral text structuring process have and continue to pose serious questions regarding normative genre form classifications and the nature and workings of forms in oral and performance-dependent contexts. These are discussions I shall delve deeper into in my next chapter where I shall discuss the operations of forms in indigenous orature such as KKB folktales. In the interim, it is important to add that the foregoing discussion about the position of the translator as a creative writer with structural independence also calls to the fore the issue of the translator's visibility or invisibility in the TT. To what extent can a translator be visible or invisible in a text that is a product of an original text that now relies on him or her for visibility and acceptance in a foreign culture?

3.1.3 On the translator's visibility or invisibility

As I pointed out earlier, my visibility or invisibility in the TT, as a translator, was one of the questions I had to address at the outset of my translation project. As an indigenous oral text translator, I was faced with the dilemma of toeing the line of Venuti in his advocacy of translator visibility in TTs (*The Translator's Invisibility* 17; Munday 145) or staying with the age-long practice of translator invisibility to produce fluent, transparent, readable TTs (*The Translator's Invisibility* 1-2, 4). I admit, like Norman Shapiro, that "my ego and personality are involved in translating, and yet I have to try to stay faithful to the basic text in such a way that my own personality doesn't show" (Kratz 27; qtd. in Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 8) and in such a way that the end of translation – that is, "to bring back a cultural other as the same, the

recognizable, even the familiar" (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 18) – is not compromised. But the disturbing question at the outset of the translation project was: how was I to do this?

Since the KKB folktales I am studying are part of the oral heritage of the KKB people and mirror aspects of the Konkomba culture (to which I belong), the tendency to impose my biases and preferences through selectivity as a native speaker translator was very high. This would have unfortunately resulted in the imposition of my voice on my translations (i.e., the TTs). So as to avoid this, I listened closely to the various storytellers' voices, paying close attention to tone, cadence, lexicon, and syntax as these are usually employed by many African oral performers (especially storytellers) to showcase their artistic skills and mastery of language and their oral crafts. This strategy, apart from assisting in the spatial or physical structuring of the various tales, profoundly helped in interpreting the storytellers' creative use of language, leading to accurate translations of the tales' contents and forms, especially their linguistic forms.

In tale #17, for example, when translating the storyteller's account of the wasp's departure, I focused on his choice of words and syntax, coupled with their contextual usage, to decode the idiomatic expression he employed in the clause, "… le u fii ler nsan bo ki cha" so as to accurately translate it into English. As pointed out in the previous segment, this clause literally translates as "… and he fell on the road going" – which is semantically deficient in English. In the Konkomba linguistic culture, the idiom, "u ler nsan bo ki cha" is often employed to communicate the idea of leaving or departing energetically or enthusiastically from one place to another. As a result, the oral translator seeking to translate such an idiom needs to understand it in this context of setting off enthusiastically so as to find an accurate or close equivalent in the TL. And herein lies the need for the indigenous oral text translator to be grounded in the language and culture of the ST in order to produce accurate translations. This (indigenous) knowledge I propose translators (and

anthropologists in particular) acquire through personal cultural immersion rather than desktop research so as to rely not just on the lexicon or superficial knowledge of SLs but also their contextual usage to satisfactorily translate the artistic use of language by oral artists such as the narrator of tale #17.

Based on my familiarity with both the SL and TL cultures, it was easy to assign the English near equivalent, "and hit the road running" to the Likpakpaln idiom "u ler nsan bo ki cha." In the TL culture, "and hit the road" would have succinctly captured the idea of the wasp leaving or embarking on his journey but the need to keep the translation close, semantically, to its ST placed on me the responsibility to find in the TL an equivalent expression that suggests enthusiasm or energetic start, as well as a verb of motion for the SL present progressive verb of motion, "ki cha." It is imperative to note that the English translation "and hit the road" would have reduced the SL text to, "u ler nsan bo," thereby partially capturing the original or ST message. To remedy the situation, I therefore introduced the English progressive verb "running" as the near equivalent for "ki cha," which ultimately rendered the ST "… le u fii ler nsan bo ki cha" as "… and (he) hit the road running." Thus, my choice of "… and (he) hit the road running" over "… and (he) hit the road" was not aimed at achieving lexical or syntactic closeness but the semantic closeness of the TT to its ST.

Fortunately, in the end, this translation foreignizes the language in the TT to its English audience who are used to using "hit the road" for embarking on a journey and "hit the ground running" for the enthusiastic and fast-paced start of an activity. Thus, "… and (he) hit the road running" is my creative linguistic amalgamation of the above English idiomatic expressions in order to successfully capture the idea of the wasp departing energetically for his in-law's funeral. Although this compositum foreignizes the text to its TT audience, it equally gives them an idea of

the enthusiasm with which the wasp set off for the funeral thanks to the note provided on this linguistic restructuring in the tale. Above all, the creative yoking of these two English idioms together successfully transports to the TT the beautiful formal aspect of this tale captured in the ST narrator's artistic use of language through this Likpakpaln idiom. The ultimate results are that this English translation – which stands in stark contrast to Suzanne Levine's postulation that "A translation should be a critical act … recontextualising the ideology of the original text" (3) – captures accurately the original meaning of the ST, points TT audience to the linguistic strangeness but richness of the Konkomba language, and at the same time showcases the liberty of the Konkomba storyteller to be creative in his or her use of Likpakpaln during oral performances.

Significantly, the foregoing further indicates that linguistic creativity is an indispensable requirement for the oral text translator seeking to translate accurately the contents and formal aspects of indigenous orature, especially those emanating from African contexts like the Konkomba one. It is interesting to note that a translator could have captured the wasp's departure as "… and (he) set off" but the original idiom in the ST would have been lost in translation, thereby wreaking havoc on this essential formal aspect of the tale and consequently failing to reproduce in the TT the voice of the ST narrator. Indeed, at the risk of sounding repetitive, the creative yoking together of the two English idiomatic expressions mentioned earlier enabled me to capture the voice of the ST narrator, consequently making me relatively invisible in the TT as I endeavored to reproduce the ST narrator's idiolects rather than imposing mine on the translation. Resorting to this strategy gave me the dual advantage of reproducing the semantic make-up and linguistic style of the ST without sacrificing my creativity as a translator familiar with the linguistic cultures of both texts.

I agree with John Felstiner that "the original must come through essentially, in language that itself rings true" (Felstiner 24) to a TT audience. But I should add that this must not necessarily be in language that is exact or in strict adherence to the linguistic structures of the TL but in language that is seemingly true or familiar to a target audience. In so doing, the translator foreignizes the TT but does so in language that sounds familiar to the target audience due to its seeming affinity to their language culture, thereby affording the TT receptors the opportunity to comprehend and savor the text – though, admittedly, never at the same esthetic level as its ST receptors due to the text's geo-cultural shift and, most importantly, the absence of the real oral embellishments of the actual oral performance in the translation.

Resisting the temptation to venture into the equally important discussion on how to capture satisfactorily the oral embellishments that usually accompany indigenous oral performances – a discussion I will rather defer to the next subsection – I propose to stay the course of my present discussion since the foregoing raises questions regarding my invisibility in the TT. Obviously, in my bid to reproduce accurately the message, language, and voice of tale #17's narrator, my manipulation of the English language through the amalgamation of the two English idioms mentioned a few paragraphs earlier makes me at once invisible in the TT while at the same time visible.

The specificity of indigenous orature and the culture-rootedness of the language often used by performers, I must admit, make it impossible for translators of such oral texts to be absolutely invisible. Indeed, if a translator truly wishes to produce a culturally grounded TT that does not only transport the outer contents of the ST but also its formal, oral, performance, and sociocultural aspects to the TL audience, then complete invisibility is an impossibility. This is because in order to capture the oral and performance aspects of indigenous orature for example, translators have to,

among the other things that will soon be discussed in the next segment, occasionally employ paratextual materials that will make them serve as the ears and eyes through which their TT audiences can hear and see the oral embellishments and performance acts of indigenous oral performers.

The position of the indigenous oral text translator, then, I must reiterate, is a medial one wherein the translator operates with the golden mean, allowing himself or herself to stay invisible in a TT as much as possible, but at the same time visible occasionally through the creative manipulation of the TL and the deployment of paratextual materials to give TT audience access to the oral and performance aspects of the oral ST. The latter certainly requires further elaboration, especially as regards how paratexts could be deployed in capturing the oral and visual domains of indigenous orature.

3.1.4 Translating the oral and performance aspects of Konkomba folktales

The difficulty with translating indigenous orature such as KKB folktales stems from their orality and performance dependence. As pointed out in the previous sections, one cannot divorce primary oral texts such as these Konkomba oral tales under discussion from their oral and performance contexts. Such an attempt will only produce a partial experience of the esthetics of these indigenous materials. Therefore, as a translator seeking to transport not only the textual but also the oral and performance aspects of these KKB folktales, it behooved me to employ a translation method that will give TT audience a near-native, even if not the exact, experience of these oral tales and their performance protocols.

To do this, I have and continue to employ paratextual materials such as short in-text commentaries to capture the oral habits and body language of the various performers and their audiences. And here resurfaces my advocacy of the use of paratextuals in one's translation of

indigenous orature. Most importantly, it reiterates my earlier point that I am not against the use of necessary in-text translator commentaries to offer TT audience insights into the oral and performance domains of indigenous oral texts. As pertains in my KKB folktale translations (for instance those in the Appendix), in-text commentaries have allowed me to draw readers' attention to the speech habits and performance acts or habits of various storytellers and their audiences. In tale #2 for example, in-text commentaries such as *"The storyteller repeats this three times while simultaneously demonstrating with raised hands and bending over her upper body ... On the third occasion, her audience join in, and all break into laughter at the end ..."* and *"On hearing this, the audience variously respond, "M-ennn! M-hm! Ooooo! Mbo mbo mbo mbo ...!" to indicate that they've enjoyed and learned something from Baabayii's tale. All laugh and clap for her"* are deliberately employed to this effect so that in the end, readers can have a closer experience and appreciation of the esthetics of this oral tale. Thus, in-text commentaries can be very useful to translators seeking to offer their audiences glimpses of the oral and performance domains of primary orature.

To particularly transport the oral aspects of such indigenous materials and give TT audiences a better experience, a translator can employ phonemic translations to render culture-specific interjections such as "M-ennn! M-hm! Ooooo! Mbo mbo mbo mbo!" (in tale #2), "Ehen!" "Enn!" (in tale #5), "M-heen!" (in tale #14), and "Bo!" (in tale #17) among the lot often employed in the KKB linguistic culture to communicate various ideas. Most importantly, the ideophones that are often employed by performers of these indigenous tales could also be translated phonemically. Culture-based interjections and ideophones are major oral characteristics of indigenous oral performances such as the renditions of KKB folktales. As a result, a translator has to endeavor to capture such oral speech habits in his/her translation as much as possible. And what better way to

do this than to transcribe these seemingly meaningless phonic structures employed by performers and their audiences to enhance their performances? After transcribing such interjections and ideophones, the translator should subsequently employ notes and glossaries to explain their meanings and sociocultural usage to TT audience – as I have been doing in my translations.

In tandem with this, in addition to the culture-specific interjections enumerated above and the accompanying annotations in the sample texts in the Appendix, employing phonemic translations and their accompanying paratextual explanations enabled me to capture such ideophones as "den deen den deen" (in tale #14), "gum gum gum gum," "chakta chakta," and "gang galaang ga" among others (in tale #17), and "kpo kpo" in tale #19. These interjections and ideophones and their accessorial explanations have worked perfectly to foreignize my translations and offer TT audience insights into the Likpakpaln linguistic culture, the KKB storytelling culture, and aspects of the oral and performance esthetics of KKB folktales. As can be surmised from all the foregoing, these have been made possible through my deployment of an oral and graphic-oriented translation method aimed at roping into written texts, the oral and performance aspects of these indigenous materials.

For those who might, however, still find all the preceding insufficient in capturing the oral and visual aspects of indigenous oral texts such as KKB folktales, there are yet two other tools translators could deploy to enhance their art. Firstly, translators could begin treating their translations of indigenous orature as though they were illustrated fiction such as graphic novels, comics, and other visual texts. This will enable them to easily draw on the compositional approaches of graphic artists to provide pictographic accessories – as pertains in tale #2 in the Appendix for instance – that offer readers visual images of the movements, facial expressions, and the other non-verbal cues oral performers often employ to enhance their craft. As I have pointed

out on several occasions, indigenous orature such as KKB folktales depend not only on the textual contents orally communicated by their performers but also on performance habits such as the dramatic movements or gestures of these performers for their existence and impact. As a result, so as to translate these materials satisfactorily to TT audiences who have little or no knowledge about their contexts or cultural backgrounds, it is only fair that translators also complement the words on their pages with pictures of the actions, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues of the narrators of these tales and their audiences. Such pictures will ultimately not only provide the contexts or atmospheres from which such indigenous texts emerge, but most significantly, offer readers visual representations of the performance esthetics of these oral materials.

Secondly, in this age of technology and the current drive toward digitization, what better way to offer TT audience(s) insights into foreign texts and their cultures than employing audiovisual accessories in one's translations? Fundamentally existing orally and transmitted orally in their communities of origin, indigenous oral texts such as the oral tales of the KKB people have to rely on modern technology for preservation and visibility. Most importantly, translators now have a reliable ally to help them transport indigenous orature such as these from their cultures to other cultures ethically, and also transport their TT audiences to foreign cultures easily in order to give them insights into the oral and performance domains of their orature.

To do this, translators could embed in their translations the audiovisuals or the links and/or QR codes to the audio sounds and videos of the actual oral performances of STs – as I have done in the sample tales in the Appendix. These embedded audiovisuals, links, or QR codes to these audiovisuals will serve to provide additional materials that TT audience(s) can easily rely on to access and appreciate the cultures and esthetics of indigenous orature while reading their translations. In my opinion, such an oral- and graphic-oriented translation method will work

perfectly in collaboration with the translator's in-text commentaries and phonemic translations I discussed earlier, to produce translations that render the textual, oral, and performance domains of indigenous oral texts such as the KKB folktales I have translated. Such a translation method – which for want of a better term, I shall hereafter refer to as 'oragraphic translation' – is no doubt a more culturally sensitive, ethical, orally-inclined and performance-sensitive way of translating KKB folktales and other indigenous orature across the globe.

3.2 Conclusion: toward an 'oragraphic' translation

In conclusion, working toward reproducing the original contents, formal, and sociocultural compositions of indigenous or primary orature is fundamentally working toward producing a culturally grounded, orally sensitive, and performance-rich translation. This is certainly no mean task for the translator, to say the least. As an indigenous oral text translator, especially the translator of oral texts emerging from African cultures such as the KKB one under study in this dissertation, one does not have the luxury of faithfully committing oneself to one specific approach since all the methods of translation currently available have unfortunately proven insufficient in capturing satisfactorily the original contents, formal, oral, performance, and cultural aspects of these oral texts.

But of all these available methods, discussions in this chapter regarding my translation project on some Konkomba folktales have pointed to the fact that a moderate foreignization method that allows the translator to contextually analyze oral STs such as these, interpret them contextually, and transport such culturally grounded interpretations to TTs can be a very useful tool. This modified, culturally sensitive foreignization method will, in my opinion, at least address the age-long challenge regarding the translation of the accurate contents, formal aspects, and cultural aspects of indigenous orature such as KKB folktales and others across the globe. As

evidenced from my translation project herein discussed, providing paratextual materials such as notes and glossaries can be very useful in this regard as these provide important explanations that ultimately give TT audiences glimpses not only into the contents and formal elements of these oral texts but also into their culture and socio-literary conventions without disrupting their flows or rhythms.

When employing this complemented foreignization method, semantic translations are more helpful and reader-friendly than word-for-word or literal translations. As evidenced from my earlier discussions in this chapter, the often culturalized nature of the language employed in the rendition of indigenous orature, especially those emerging from African contexts such as the KKB one, makes it imperative for one to contextually analyze an oral performer's language so as to arrive at an accurate interpretation of his or her oral rendition before translating it into a language that target audience can comprehend. But this language should also include the occasional reproduction of the linguistic symbols and structures of the SL, especially culture-specific words and expressions, which should subsequently be explained through notes and glossaries in order to help TT audience(s) comprehend and esthetically enjoy such indigenous oral texts.

Undeniably, such culturally and contextually derived interpretations will produce useful, culturally grounded, sense-based translations rather than sense-deficient literal, word-for-word translations. The practical examples advanced in this chapter have demonstrated that strict adherence to foreignizing indigenous oral texts such as KKB folktales through word-for-word, syntactic, literal translations in the name of keeping translations close to their STs will almost always produce semantically deficient or ambiguity-ridden TTs, which will in the end not serve the purpose(s) of transporting their contents, formal aspects, and cultures to foreign audiences. To effectively translate semantically, however, an indigenous oral text translator cannot but borrow

from other translation methods, especially the domestication method, from time to time. That said, in such situations the oral text translator is encouraged to creatively use the linguistic materials and norms of TLs in such a way that, overall, TTs still point their readers in the directions of the STs.

In advocating for the semantic translation of indigenous oral texts, I am not oblivious to the fact that sometimes these texts contain words, phrases, or expressions that appear to be bereft of any semantic values in their own linguistic cultures. In such situations, as already discussed and demonstrated, phonemic translations should be employed. When faced with "meaningless" or "nonsense" words such as some of the ideophones (aka onomatopoeic words or phrases) and culture-specific interjections discussed earlier, the primary oral text translator's available option is a wholesale transportation of these meaningless linguistic symbols of the ST to the TT while providing explanatory notes or glossaries – as I have and continue to do in my translations. As established in the preceding segments, this will essentially foreignize TTs and point their readers to the STs and their linguistic cultures, while the paratextual materials provided will help them (i.e., TT readers) to understand the contextual meanings and usage of such seemingly meaningless words, phrases, or expressions.

Having surmounted the difficulty of translating 'untranslatables' such as culture-specific interjections and ideophones, the translator of indigenous orature such as the KKB people's oral tales has to overcome yet another hurdle – translating their oral and performance aspects. Thankfully, deploying phonemic translation to capture the oral habits of indigenous performers and their audiences has proven useful in the KKB context I am dealing with, and can definitely be useful in other indigenous orature or oral contexts. As I have already stated, transcribing the oral habits of performers and their audiences and subsequently employing annotations such as notes

and glossaries to explain them to TT audiences can be very helpful in offering one's TT audience glimpses of the oral aspects of indigenous orature. Apart from notes and glossaries, translators can also occasionally employ short in-text commentaries to further offer TT audiences insights into the oral and performance domains of such oral texts. From the discussions in the preceding subsection, it is clear that such commentaries enable the translator to serve as the ears and eyes through which TT readers can access the oral and visual aspects of indigenous oral STs.

What is more, translators can even offer better visual access to their TT audiences by borrowing tools such as pictography from the field of illustrated fiction to embed in their translations pictures that showcase the performance habits of indigenous art performers and their audiences. This, as pointed out in the previous subsection, will enable translators to transport with their textual contents the performance aspects of indigenous orature. Also, as I mentioned earlier, such pictographic materials can give TT audience access to the atmospheres or contexts from which such indigenous oral materials have emerged.

In addition, in this era of technological advancement, translators of indigenous orature cannot but deploy audiovisual technology to transport their TT audiences to indigenous oral texts and their cultures. Technology has and continues to serve as a mediating force between orality and literacy. As a result, as my discussions in this chapter have indicated, in order to integrate the oral and performance domains of primary orature in written texts, translators need to tap into technology and embed in their translations audios and videos of indigenous oral performances, provide links to repositories where such audiovisual materials are stored, and/or provide scannable QR codes that TT audience can use to access such indigenous materials. These audiovisual materials, together with the various annotations, and oral as well as performance-sensitive translation approaches discussed in this chapter, will ultimately produce translations that lend

themselves to the textual, oral, and performance domains of indigenous oral texts. Such 'oragraphic' translations will better offer TT audiences near-native experiences of indigenous oral texts and also offer them (i.e., TT audiences) more intimate glimpses of the linguistic cultures, the socio-literary conventions, and other aspects of the cultures of such texts.

From all the foregoing, then, it is evident that the safe haven for the indigenous oral text translator, especially one tasked with translating primary oral texts emerging from African contexts like the KKB one, is a reliance on the use of various methods complementarily with the foreignization method to produce accurate, culturally grounded, orally-sensitive and performance-rich translations that offer insights into such oral STs and their cultures. This is, admittedly, a herculean task as the success or otherwise of a translator in this regard hinges on his or her creative prowess, analytical as well as interpretative consciousness, and familiarity with and receptivity to state-of-the-art technology and digitization methods.

Without any intent to suggest that the foregoing proposed approach to translating indigenous orature is foolproof or solves all the problems associated with translating such delicate literature, I must state that I merely put forth in this chapter the strategies I found useful when confronted with translating the textual, oral, and performance aspects of some KKB oral tales. That said, I am of the conviction that a moderate foreignization method, supported by and with other methods and tools, will always produce translations of indigenous oral texts that reflect the true contents, formal elements, oral and performance esthetics, and the cultures of such texts. Such a multi-pronged approach can produce 'oragraphic' translations that manifest ethical fidelity to STs and their cultures, fidelity to TT audiences as much as possible, and even be more useful to those of us who are interested in studying indigenous orature beyond the printed word – as I will

do in my next chapter, where I shall explore the nature and workings of forms in orality and performance using some Konkomba folktales.

CHAPTER FOUR

Engaging with form through primary orature

4.0 Introduction: the unity of form and content

"Unity of form results in unity of content, if by content we understand not only the plot but also the intellectual and emotional world reflected in the work."

(VLADIMIR PROPP, *Theory and History of Folklore* 41)

Propp's postulation above sums up the focus or purpose of this chapter – which is, to explore the forms operating in KKB oral tales and their sociocultural, oral, and performance contexts. Drawing on the traditional formalists' position on form and content (discussed in chapter one) and the various arguments put forward by new formalists such as Levinson, Cohen, Levine, Greenblatt, Theile, Dubrow, and Bogel, among others, that an analysis of a text should encompass a study of both text- and context-related forms (as discussed in chapter one), the chapter discusses some of the literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms that shape KKB folktales and the KKB culture in order to shed light on how forms work to shape verbal contents, knowledge, thought, and culture. These discussions will ultimately offer insights that will either reinforce or shed new illuminations on the nature and workings of forms, especially in different verbal arts and cultural contexts such as the KKB oral one.

As discussions in chapter one have established – and as aptly intimated by Propp above – form and content are inextricably linked. Be it in written, oral, or visual arts, the totality of a work's forms and how these are employed to flesh out the actual contents of the work determine the work's success at communicating authorial intent, "the plot, … the intellectual and emotional world reflected in [and around] the work" (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* 41). It is therefore imperative that in our engagements with forms and their affordances, we interrogate the unity of

form and meaning at various strata to ascertain how forms individually and/or collectively interact to give existence to creative works, especially verbal arts, and the contexts from which they emerge.

In this regard, at the outset of my engagement with the forms operating individually and/or collectively to shape thought and culture in the oral tales of the KKB people, I must reiterate that as far as the formalist debate on form and content is concerned, I stand with the new formalists in their campaign for engaging with form beyond textual esthetics. When dealing with indigenous or primary orature, the peculiarity and complexity of such verbal arts call for a more comprehensive formal approach that takes into account not only their textual aspects, but most importantly, their sociocultural, oral, and performance domains as well. The ultimate aim of such a formal engagement is not merely to tease out the forms at work at these levels, but to draw attention to the behavior of forms in orality and performance and gesture to the necessity of further broadening formal discussions, especially new formalist discussions, to rope in the oral and performance forms operating in orature, especially in indigenous orature such as Konkomba folktales and others of similar properties across the globe.

As can be surmised from my previous discussions in chapter one, formalism (in all its shades and forms) has excelled at making us pay closer attention to verbal arts and their contexts. From Russian Formalism, Czech Formalism, New Criticism to New Formalism, it has proven to be mutative and adaptive to various contexts, thus making it very interdisciplinary. This is especially true of the contemporary strand of formalism – that is, New Formalism, which approaches literary scholarship from a multidisciplinary posture where form and culture meet or where esthetics can "dine at the same table" with historical and political criticism (Dubrow, "The Politics of Aesthetics" 74) among others. As Theile has famously put it, the modern formalist

approaches form with the comprehension that "a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective" (17). It is in this theoretical framework that I ground my formal discussions and advance a step further to propose that New Formalism actively pay equal attention to the study of the relationships between form and orality and form and performance in primary orature such as KKB folktales. This proposition certainly requires further elaboration.

4.1 The esthetics of immediacy: form versus orality and performance

Due to its oral nature, the KKB folktale is wholly dependent on performance. As pointed out in chapter two, the storytelling sessions usually feature performers and their audiences who compose and co-compose tales through words, gestures, voice characterization (or mimicry), extradiegetic dialogues, facial expressions and other non-verbal cues, individual creativity, and communal participation among others. All these oral and performance elements are part of the forms that give existence to primary orature such as KKB folktales. They can therefore be very useful in reinforcing or offering new insights into certain concepts of form.

Unfortunately, as I pointed out in chapter one, despite all the progress we have made in formalism, especially New Formalism, our formal engagements continue to overconcentrate on textual forms at the expense of the forms operating and shaping the oral performances of such minor verbal arts as primary orature. This regrettably makes formalism, or our studies in form, come across as discriminatory, bourgeois, and "insufficient" to scholars such as Leon Trotsky (14) and Arthur Moore, who has observed that a text is "an effect produced by cultural causes" (21) – including, I should point out, cultural causes such as the oral and performance contexts from which primary orature such as Konkomba oral tales emerge.

Admittedly – and as evidenced by my discussions in the concluding segment of chapter one – several scholars have variously engaged in either ethnographic or literary studies of orature, drawn on the poetics of various oral art forms to produce works of fiction, study popular culture, or define regional literatures (such as African literature), and/or offered illuminations on various literary texts and theories. From Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* and *Theory and History of Folklore* to Léopold Senghor's theorizations and critical essays on African oral poetics (Helgesson 118-21), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's various works on the poetics of African literature (including his fictional practice and critical works such as *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* among others), Sunday Anozie's various structural articles and works such as *Structural Models and African Poetics* for example, Susan Arndt's *African Women's Literature, Orature and Intertextuality: Igbo Oral Narratives as Nigerian Women Writers' Models and Objects of Writing Back,* through to J.B. Amissah-Arthur's "Theorising Pornogrammar in the Akan Folktale Tradition: The Trickster's Rhetorical Indirection and Sexual Indiscretion" and Akosua Anyidoho's "Techniques of Akan Praise Poetry in Christian Worship: Madam Afua Kuma," there have certainly been various formalist discussions on various kinds of orature. There are yet other works such as Uhuru Portia Phalafala's "Decolonizing World Literature through Orality" and Liz Gunner's "Ecologies of Orality," among several others, which equally delve commendably into various "orature and performative arts" (Phalafala 202) and their poetics in an attempt to decolonize literature and literary theory.

Although all these foregoing engagements with orature and oral poetics are laudable, I must reiterate the argument I made in chapter one that they fail to directly and rigidly discuss these oral and "performative arts" and their poetics in relation to the workings of forms in orature – specifically, the interactions between form and orality and form and performance, and the

implications of these for our comprehension of forms and their operations in primary orature. That said, in fairness to these forerunners of mine, my current drive to push the boundaries of New Formalism to rope in the oral and performance forms operating in primary orature and their oral contexts is a buildup on their efforts, especially those of such scholars as Liz Gunner and Uhuru Phalafala whose study particularly makes a case for "orality and its potential to expand our theorisation of world literature" (206) – and of course critical theories such as formalism and its concepts of form.

It is fitting, then, to commence my push for detextualizing formal studies by reiterating and building upon my argument – as well as theirs and Helgesson's – that there exists an incontestable "hegemony of the Western academy, in particular the anglophone centres of knowledge production in the UK and North America" (Helgesson 6) that has remarkably explored form in relation to the written and canonized verbal arts, especially the novel. As Liz Gunner aptly observes, there prevails "a Western centre of literary influence and one dominated by the genre of the novel" (117) in particular. Pirker also rightly observes that "… the novel, is an achieving genre in European history and worldwide," asserting that it is a "highly successful literary genre [that] has been imposed, written back to, claimed and transformed in various ways …" ("God […] Expects Perfection" 112).

These two scholars' assertions regarding the dominance of the novel resonate with Sibylle Baumbach and Birgit Neumann's declaration at the outset of their book chapter that despite claims that the novel is a dying genre form, "… the novel continues to thrive" (1), adapting "to the rapid changes and challenges that continue to shape post-millennium culture and society" (2). Picking up from Virginia Woolf's observation that the novel "has devoured so many forms of art" (Woolf

224; qdt. in Baumbach and Neumann 2), they assert that this has been made possible due to the novel's "vampiric and protean qualities" (Baumbach and Neumann 2).

I cannot but concur with all these scholars that the novel, and the other normative genre forms, I should add, have and continue to dominate our literary scholarship and practice, sadly at the expense of minor forms such as primary orature. Baumbach and Neumann are spot on in their assertion that the novel, for instance, has over the decades tended to consume other forms. Their apt observation regarding the "vampiric" (2) nature of this genre form equally holds true for the other hegemonic genre forms when one considers particularly their continued towering dominance over minor forms such as primary orature in the literary canon and our overconcentration on textual contents in formal scholarship. Janine Rogers sums up the highly textualized nature of our formal engagements thus: "… the study of form is the science *of* literature, insofar as it is the study of the material nature of the <u>literary text</u>, the structures, substances, patterns, and forces that we experience <u>when we read</u>" (xiv).[23] "[T]he literary text" and "when we read" are the key phrases here, as they authenticate my argument (in this dissertation) regarding the excessive concentration of formal studies on textual contents and written verbal arts – a status quo that has sadly given rise to what, for want of better phraseology, I shall term a 'formalism of literacy.'

The commendable efforts of a lot of scholars to theorize and promote scholarship in orature over the years notwithstanding, the reality is that orality and performance continue to be relegated to the background in our formal discourse on the interactions between form and the verbal arts. Yet orality predates literacy (Ong 2ff)! Avoiding the temptation to venture into a discussion on the printing press, the Gutenberg project, and the influence of technology in fostering this status quo, I will only advocate that, in a *'sankofa'* (that is, "a return to the basics") move, so to speak, we begin interrogating more and more, the operations of forms in orature in order to further decolonize

literature, decolonize and detextualize the formal theory, and decentralize literary knowledge. As modern-day formalists, it is time we examined more and more the interactions between form and orality and form and performance in minor oral works such as KKB folktales so as to ascertain the conceptual dynamism that (can) emerge from such contexts, especially how certain normative concepts of form operate within such situated oral contexts. Incidentally, no formal studies exist yet on the forms at work in KKB folktales and the oral performance context from which they emerge. It will, thus, be productive to explore in this dissertation the various forms at work in these folktales and their oral performance context, and how these forms' operations reinforce certain normative concepts of form or prompt us to look at forms anew or from a different perspective. This automatically raises the question, "What is form?"

4.1.1 Form as constructor and/or destabilizer (or even demolisher)

One of the most divisive and contested monikers in academia, especially in literary scholarship and philosophy, is the word *form*. Since Plato's theory of "Forms" or "Ideas" in *Republic* (Books 5-7), the term has assumed several and, sometimes, very contradictory definitions in diverse disciplines. From its linguistic and esthetic inclinations to its manifestations in literary production and consumption, mathematical equations, social constellations, political structures, and religious structures through to built and abstract infrastructure, there seem to be endless possibilities as regards the nature and functions of forms. There seems to be no single discipline nor function that can lay claim to *form,* as "no single discipline or field-specific concept [can assume] absolute … priority over others" (Kramnick and Nersessian 652). In the words of Levine, "forms are everywhere" (*Forms* 16) – in literature, politics, education, sports, science, etc. But rather than dabble in the numerous arguments and definitions on form and/or form's interdisciplinarity, I shall

limit myself (here) to just a few postulations that speak directly to the purpose of this chapter and my posture on what form really is.

Writing on the subject in his *Reassembling the Social,* social theorist Bruno Latour asserts that form can best be defined as the material medium that connects things, people, and ideas (223). Singling out voting in a given election, he notes that materials such as pieces of paper, reports, check marks, accounts, and maps that connect things, people, and ideas in elections are forms. Thus, for him, form refers to various distinct but related things or entities that unify under an umbrella body – what he terms a sociology of associations.[24]

Henry Turner echoes similar sentiments in "Lessons from Literature for the Historian of Science (and Vice Versa): Reflections on 'Form,'" where he defines form as "an attribute of being, a category of ontology" (584). According to him, "'form' should be understood as a verb rather than as a noun, as an active relation among significant parts that are apprehended through a transaction between that artifact and its readers, viewers, listeners, or speakers" (582). Turner particularly observes that "'form' marks a point of convergence between three distinct moments: the act of recognizing the mere being of a thing, as defined by its form; the act of judging the significance of a thing, as again defined by its form; and the act of coming to some kind of knowledge about that same thing" (582-3). By these definitions or assertions, Turner underscores the point that form refers to the characteristic features or constituents of a thing that interact at various levels to give existence and meaning to it.

To further strengthen his position on form, he quotes Raymond Williams as having defined form in his *Keywords* as "an essential shaping principle, making indeterminate material into a determinate or specific being or thing" (584). It is significant to note that in this article, Turner draws largely on the ideas of Francis Bacon, literary works such as Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*,

Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species,* and Evelyn Fox Keller's *Refiguring Life* and *The Century of the Gene* to drum home his argument that "form shapes an object or an idea, providing structure and identity to it" (584). Thus, he establishes forms as structures and makes a connection between form and object, form and idea, and implicitly, form and meaning.

I like to think of forms in similar lines: that is, as ideas, principles, structures, or categories that compel us to pay closer and more conscious attention to the organograms, the very compositions, or characters of things – both tangible and intangible, verbal and nonverbal, oral and written. Forms serve as platforms that enable us to assemble, disassemble, and/or re-assemble things within and outside the domain of verbal art – in fact, within and outside every human experience (lived or imagined). In this regard, I concur with Caroline Levine, Anna Kornbluh, and Eva Ulrike Pirker that forms are "shaping patterns, … dense networks of structuring principles and categories" (Levine, "Strategic Formalism" 632), "organizations or arrangements [operating within] materials and contexts" (Levine, *Forms* 14) and that forms are essentially "composed relationalit[ies]" – that is, "constituenc[ies]" of "composed relations, institutions, [and] states" (Kornbluh 4) – "with the capacity to mediate [themselves]" (14) and "pull" writers (especially poets) in certain directions (Pirker, *The Pull of Form* 31).

Forms call our attention to the very idea of being, of existence, of reality and all that constitute a particular being, existence, reality, or abstraction. When I think of the form of an object, for instance, I think of its composite being, the totality of its make-up, while simultaneously paying attention to its configurations – every bit and piece of it and how each relates to the other(s) to give form or existence to that object or to produce an effect. To this extent, I am of the view that Levine, Kornbluh, and I find a point of convergence that form provides structure, order, constituency, and a platform for relational studies of every aspect of life, especially in the verbal

arts. That said, I should point out that Levine and Kornbluh depart from each other with regard to the operations or workings of forms. While the former advocates a formal study that interrogates multi-dimensional interactions, tensions, differences, "*dis*organization" and deviations from "hierarchies" and enclosures (Levine, *Forms* 16-17, 18, 150), the latter champions a formal enterprise that "embraces projects of building," of "constitution" and "structuration" (Kornbluh 4).

In this chapter, I prefer to consider forms and their operations from both angles: that is, forms as constructors of ideas, structures, institutions, traditions, and materials, among other things, and forms as destabilizers – or even demolishers – of (normative) structures, institutions, ideas, and materials among other things. Since forms naturally call us to relational studies, our formal investigations will always reveal patterns of tensions and/or cohesions between various forms, orders, ideas, parts, structures, and systems, among other things. Such tensions and cohesions are necessary for examining the interactions between diverse forms and for ultimately unearthing the nature and workings of forms in various materials and contexts. As Funk et al. helpfully observe, "Forms are not self-contained, nor are they meaningful in and by themselves" (7) alone – they rely on relations with others and the materials they shape. I want to therefore draw on relationality to discuss the various textual and contextual forms operating individually and collectively to shape the oral tales of the KKB people and the KKB milieu during oral performances for this very purpose – that is, to ascertain the nature and workings of form in situated primary oral contexts like the KKB one.

4.1.2 The operations of form in orality and performance

I have pointed out repeatedly in this dissertation that one cannot divorce primary orature such as KKB oral tales from their oral performance domains. A complete formalist analysis of these tales

therefore requires equal attention to their textual contents as well as their oral and performance aspects. To study the forms operating in any given literary work, it is imperative to engage with the forms within the work and the context from which that work emerges. On this, I have the support of several new formalists, including Levine who argues in her *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* that formal studies should not be "confined to the literary text or to the aesthetic, but [should] involve a kind of close reading, a careful attention to the forms that organize texts, bodies, and institutions" (23). Picking up from Levine's posture herein, I must reiterate that in the spirit of decolonizing and detextualizing the formal theory, our formal engagements – especially our discussions on the nature and workings of forms – should equally not continue to be "confined" to written verbal arts, especially the canonized genre forms, or to only the textual contents of oral art forms, but should include their oral and performance domains as well.

If forms are, among other things, structures, patterns, and/or ordering principles that impose order or give shapes to things, then there are certainly forms at work in the oral performances of such oral works as the oral tales of the KKB people of Ghana. The performances of these oral tales – as is the case in several other oral contexts the world over – are highly formulaic in nature. They are well structured, often patterned in such a way that each performance session commences with an interactive introductory rhyme called *tiin kolb* (translated as, "the summary of a story"), followed by a body of rounds of individual stories, and an open-ended, spoken or unspoken conclusion – as already discussed in chapter two. The oral tales that are often performed during such oral performances are equally formulaic in nature, possessing normative introductions, bodies of selected details that constitute their plots, and formulaic closed-ended conclusions – as evidenced by my discussions in chapter two. These performance and content protocols or structures are what give an identity and form to the KKB folktale and its performance

– so that whenever there is a deviation from the formula of the tale or its performance, one might be prompted by his/her/their audience to adhere to such formal structures (as pertains in tale #7, for example, where a member of the audience prompts a storyteller in the Chagbaan community to conclude his story properly in order to pave the way for the next tale).

It is instructive to note that the preceding performance and content structures are much akin to Finnegan's observation about the well-structured nature of the Limba tale and its performance. In her own words, "There were set ways to start and end stories, recognised ways of structuring them …" ("The Poetic" 6). From all the foregoing, one can infer that there are structures operating to shape traditional oral performances and tales right from their beginnings to their endings. If forms are therefore understood as structures and that these structures shape things or objects (Turner 584), then the oral performance and content structures that shape the performance of KKB oral tales and ultimately the tales themselves – as previous discussions in chapter two revealed – should earn their place at the table of forms; and most importantly, should engage our attention as new formalists.

If forms operate in oral performances, and if forms are also understood as categories, then to what category of literature – or genre form – does the KKB tale belong, especially when gleaned through its oral performance? From my previous discussions on the performance and textual esthetics of KKB oral tales in chapter two, one can surmise that KKB storytellers often employ extradiegetic narrative modes to flesh out tales in prosaic language during performances. These prosaic renditions are often complemented by oratorical and dramatic acts such as voice modulation, voice characterization, the dialogic renditions of various characters' interactions, facial expressions, and dramatic gestures (as shown, for instance, in Figure 4 on page 121 and Figure 5 on page 245).

In addition to these oral and performance acts, some storytellers often introduce musical interludes into their narratives, sometimes repeating the songs several times with slight variations (as found in tale #17 in the Appendix for example) while their audience(s) sing along. Consequently, within a short time, a KKB storyteller and his/her audience can render a tale in prose, drama, and (lyrical) poetry. And therein lies the challenge of normatively classifying such oral narratives or performances as prose forms. Thus, the very contents of these oral tales challenge our understanding of genre forms or categories and set us scampering for a more accommodating definition or classificatory principle that accounts for their oral and performance aspects. Which genre form are they – prose, drama, or poetry? Note that either normative genre form falls short of the constituents of these oral tales and their performances.

Thus, the KKB oral tale (like many other African folktales – and perhaps several others across the globe), when gleaned through its performance, deviates from normative genre form classifications – which gives it its unique form or structure, namely a multi-genre form. This gestures to the inadequacies of some forms, especially when they travel across contexts and materials, and the ability of such forms to co-exist and cooperate with other forms to give life to the verbal materials of their host cultures. This then makes our studies of the relationships between form and orality and form and performance all the more important, as such studies enable us to better comprehend the relationships between forms, the workings of forms in different verbal materials and cultural contexts – especially in minor contexts like the KKB oral one – and most importantly, the very organograms of the oral texts that emerge from such minor contexts.

A subjection of primary orature such as KKB folktales to textual micro-analyses without recourse to their oral and performance forms is always a disservice to these tales and the oral and

dramatic contexts from which they emerge. Most importantly, such analyses only scratch the surfaces of these oral tales, thus offering only partial illuminations of the forms at work in them and their oral performance context. Between the oral performance aspects and the verbal contents of Konkomba folktales such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband," "Why the Python's Skin Has Dark-Brown Blotches," "A Farmer's Strange Encounters," "Sandee Pays for Stealing Ubɔr's Ram," and "Naachiin Pays for Feasting on Unyii's Children," among the lot I am studying, there are a multiplicity of forms operating to shape and give meaning to these oral texts and their context.

From the fieldwork examples I recounted in chapter two, as well as the KKB oral performance audios, videos, and pictures I have embedded in this dissertation, one can infer that between the actual rendition and the verbal contents of these tales lie such forms as voice characterization, oratorical questions, oral repetitions, gesticulation, facial expressions, and community (that is, communal participation). There are others such as on-the-spot creativity (aka improvisation), culture-specific gender constructs, age differentials and their impacts on tale selectivity and details selectivity, as well as the time regimes or occasions for the performance of these oral tales, among others. Whether we like it or not, our actual experience and appreciation of the esthetics of these tales exist in the *Jetzt-Zeit*, in the now, at the very time of performance and not when they have been textualized. As a result, engaging with these oral materials beyond their textual contents – no matter the temporal and spatial challenges – will better serve our attempts to comprehend the nature and workings of forms in various contexts. This certainly requires further elaboration and illustration.

Breaking the hegemony of text-based literary scholarship

Admittedly, the text is usually our first port of call in any formal literary engagement. I will therefore commence my discussions herein at the textual level and delve deeper beyond structuralism as I progress. From the sample tales selected for this discussion, I shall commence with "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist." In this tale, the storyteller relates how the wasp's self-exile from his community eventually deformed him. At the literary level, our interrogation of the storyteller's contextual and skillful use of textual or literary forms such as the synecdoche "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa" (transliterated as "The world stands aloof; he stands aloof"), the onomatopoeic phrases "Gum gum gum gum," "Tou tilouti," "Chakta chakta," and "gang galanga," and his use of the hyperbole and sarcasm, "Bo! Din wee ma ulangben choo; kitiŋ ge nan yik" (translated as "Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode"), among other literary forms employed in this tale, will undoubtedly offer us insights into the subject matter, themes, and textual esthetics of this oral piece.

The hyperbole or sarcasm above, for instance, gestures to the theme of self-exile as it immediately points to the fact that the wasp's appearance at the funeral is an abnormality. The statement, "Bo! Din wee ma ulangben choo; kitiŋ ge nan yik" (translated as "Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode"), expresses the wasp's in-laws' shock that the wasp is attending the funeral – which implies that the wasp does not usually attend funerals. When analyzed against the communal nature of KKB funerals – for everyone in a Konkomba community is expected to participate in communal activities such as funerals – one can better appreciate the effect of this literary form in highlighting the fact that the wasp is not a team player; hence, his isolation from his community.

This isolation is further enforced more graphically by the imagery evoked through the synecdoche "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa" (transliterated as "The world stands aloof; he stands aloof") in the musical interlude of the tale. Through this synecdoche, one can easily visualize the physical distance or gap between the wasp and his community members, whom the storyteller deliberately uses the third person singular pronoun "he" to represent, in order to reinforce their oneness or unity and contrast it with the wasp's decision to exile himself from the group. Such linguistic finesse on the part of the storyteller deserves commendation, as it reveals his ability to manipulate language – something Eichenbaum and other traditional formalists highly celebrate (Lemon and Reis 86-87) – in order to highlight the consequence of the wasp's decision and also enhance the beauty of his tale's diction.

What further enhances his tale's linguistic estheticism is the storyteller's deployment of onomatopoeic lines such as "Gum gum gum gum," "Tou tilouti," and "Chakta chakta," among others, to give the diction a certain musical touch. But beyond this textual esthetic role, such onomatopoeic phrases highlight the tonal nature of the Likpakpaln language and most importantly, bring to the fore a very common characteristic of traditional oral performances – that is, the use of ideophones. As I pointed out in chapter three, ideophones are a major characteristic of the language deployed by traditional oral performers to enhance their crafts. Seemingly meaningless to the foreign ear, such phonic structures are rich in context- or culture-specific meanings and help give a distinct identity to the diction of primary orature such as Konkomba folktales. Consequently, one's structural analyses of onomatopoeic phrases and other literary forms such as the samples discussed above are very crucial to appreciating the esthetics of primary oral texts (such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist"), their subject matters, and themes.

Similarly, in "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" such literary forms as the metonym, "Ute kan u nin dab dab kiyik ya bu ya, n kaa waar u nyɔk" (translated as "Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth"), the simile "Kichɔk kin gaar kpo kpo ke nte aachɔkbik …" (translated as "The axe that sounds like my father's little axe …"), the hyperbole "… n-nyunyunn kpaln nnyunbun / Ki m lu ki nyu kaa nyi nkpin" (translated as "… my tears have become a well / From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water"), and the metaphor "… n-yikpir kpaln ukeenja" (translated as "… my hair have become elephant grass"), equally illuminate this oral tale's meaning and esthetic beauty. The tale relates how a beautiful lady (called Lalaachi) refuses to marry all the suitors her father selects for her and rather employs deceptive means to marry the man of her dreams. Unfortunately, the man she marries later turns out to be a python with shapeshifting abilities. Lalaachi becomes trapped in her marital home, suffers mental agony, and deteriorates physically. The storyteller skillfully employs various literary forms, especially those enumerated above, to communicate the subject matter and themes of this story, ultimately demonstrating her mastery over the Likpakpaln language and gesturing to the interconnectedness of form and meaning. The foregoing requires further elaboration.

The metonym, "Ute kan u nin dab dab kiyik ya bu ya, n kaa waar u nyɔk" (translated as "Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth"), for instance, provides a very powerful image of the young lady's father's reaction to his daughter's deceptive act – namely, his refusal to stand in her way even as she schemes to marry the man of her dreams in defiance of him and a patriarchal system that seeks to impose a husband on her. The phrase, "never opened his mouth" conveys powerfully the image of the father's refusal to reprimand his daughter, which then serves as the catalyst to the climax of the story where the daughter begins to suffer the consequences of disobeying him. Thus, the metonym is deliberately employed by the storyteller

to emphasize the important role parents, specifically fathers, play in selecting the right husbands for their daughters. That the father's silence – amply communicated by the metonym under discussion – ultimately results in Lalaachi marrying a husband with shapeshifting abilities and suffering the consequences thereof, gestures to the storyteller's skillful use of language to reinforce a rather patriarchal Konkomba marriage practice – namely, the tendency of fathers to impose husbands on their daughters in traditional Konkomba communities. The regrettable nature of this practice aside, the metonym the storyteller employs is a central literary form that effectively captures this theme of marriage (by betrothal) among KKBs, especially the vital role fathers play in selecting husbands for their daughters. When analyzed vis-à-vis Lalaachi's disobedience and the consequences she suffers, this metonym serves as the pivot around which these two parts of the tale operate to highlight the theme of marriage (by betrothal) – and intrinsically linked to it, the 'indispensable' role of the father in selecting a husband.

In her attempt to explore this theme further and drum home the importance of marriage (by betrothal) and the importance of obeying parents (in this case, fathers), the storyteller employs such other literary forms as the hyperbole "… n-nyunyunn kpaln nnyunbun / Ki m lu ki nyu kaa nyi nkpin" (translated as "… my tears have become a well / From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water") and the metaphor "… n-yikpir kpaln ukeenja" (translated as "… my hair have become elephant grass"). These two literary forms effectively create graphic images of the agony and physical deterioration Lalaachi suffers as a result of her rebellion against the marriage by betrothal system – and for that matter her father's choice(s) of husband for her. Through these literary forms, the storyteller's audience are brought face-to-face with the harsh realities of opposing tradition and one's elders – something the storyteller herself makes explicit at the end of her tale thus: "In life, do not be as stubborn as Lalaachi and get into trouble. If you fail to heed

advice from elders, you may end up like Lalaachi who married a complete stranger because of his good looks, against the counsel of her parents, and paid dearly for it" (tale #19 in the Appendix).

Clearly, these two literary forms, together with the metonym discussed earlier, are deliberately employed by the storyteller to create and develop the theme of marriage by betrothal and highlight the consequences of revolting against the Konkomba marriage practice of 'forced' betrothals. Literary forms such as these essentially construct verbal materials and for that matter the ideologies, perceptions, institutions, and/or systems contained or expressed through or in them. In this regard, it can be argued that form is a constructor of systems, institutions, traditions, ideologies, and perceptions – such as appropriate behavior in the context of this story. Since the literary forms discussed herein are employed in this story to construct materials aimed at deterring inappropriate behavior (as intimated by the storyteller at the end of the story), form can equally be said to be a corrective tool employed to demolish inappropriate social behavior. Hence, form acts both as a constructor of appropriate behavior and at the same time, a demolisher of inappropriate behavior – and therein lies the double-edged nature (or plurality) of forms: for every idea, tradition, institution, or system that is de-constructed or demolished, a new one is constructed. That is why I agree with Theile that forms are never passive in texts or cultures (7). They are always active, operating to either construct, destabilize, or even demolish completely, existing verbal materials, ideas, institutions, and systems among other things. This non-passivity of forms, or rather the constructing, destabilizing, or demolishing power of forms, will become even more apparent in later discussions on the operations of certain forms in the sociocultural, performance, and oral contexts from which KKB folktales emerge.

In the meantime, it is important to add that all the foregoing discussions point to the form-meaning nexus discussed in chapter one and the introductory part of this chapter. One cannot

separate form from meaning – for form serves as the channel or medium via which meaning filters through. Meaning finds embodiment through form; and form equally comes into existence through meaning. The two are inextricably linked, it bears reiterating. This is what becomes apparent from all the discussions about how literary forms are employed to convey meaning in KKB folktales such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist" and "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband." From a traditional formalist perspective, one might applaud, particularly, the narrator of "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" for her ability to deploy apt literary forms to flesh out the theme of marriage (by betrothal) among KKBs and highlight the consequences of opposing this marriage practice in such a graphic manner.

That notwithstanding, and in fairness to the present generation of KKB people, I should quickly point out that following years of sensitization and exposure to formal education, Christianity, and other cultures, forced betrothal or marriage by betrothal is now defunct among Konkombas. However, that stories of this kind – that is, stories that still celebrate this old practice – are still in circulation points to the fact that the KKB storytelling culture may not have fully evolved along with the other aspects of the KKB culture – at least not in terms of the tales' contents. I am writing this not without reservations though, for as my new formalist discussions on the operations of gender (as a performance-related sociocultural form) in KKB storytelling will soon reveal, nowadays some KKB female storytellers employ the contents of their stories and their styles of performance as forms of silent activism against patriarchy and other societal problems.

This is why it is important to consider these tales from multiple perspectives – especially from their oral and performance contexts. On this, I have the support of Hans Rudolf Velten who argues that performance (or rather performativity) "questions the formula that culture is made of texts and monuments, counterbalancing it with: culture is made of performances" (256). He

stresses that the performative questions "the idea that culture is made up of semiotic references and [is] 'represented' by its texts" alone (256). Erika Fischer-Lichte, drawing on Milton Singer's postulation, succinctly captures the foregoing thus: "... Kultur sich nicht nur in Texten und anderen Artefakten manifestiert, sondern auch in Auffuhrungen. Wer eine Kultur verstehen will, muss also ihre Auffuhrungen untersuchen" (31) – translated into English as ".... culture manifests itself not only in texts and other artifacts, but also in performances. Anyone who wants to understand a culture must therefore examine its performances." There is, thus, a need to engage with KKB folktales beyond the printed or spoken word and textual forms such as those explored in this segment, in order to gain a full illumination of the operations of forms within them and the milieu from which they originate.

However, before advancing beyond the text or textual forms, it is imperative, in the meantime, to stay the course of my present discussions on form from a traditional formalist perspective by exploring yet another important textual element of the KKB folktale – that is, its plot. A traditional formalist will be interested in a constructional element such as plot in much the same way as in the operations of linguistic literary forms such as those already discussed in this segment. Eichenbaum authenticates my assertion herein when he discloses that the Russian "Formalists … approach[ed] literary works (in particular, novels and short stories) more closely and … observe[d] the details of their structure …" (Lemon and Reis 91), adding that "… the dominance of structure, of plot over material, was emphasized" (Lemon and Reis 92) by formalists such as Shklovsky. For a relatively contemporary perspective on this, it is worth turning to Levine who offers the practical observation that a traditional formalist who wishes to study Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, for example, will be interested in "literary techniques both large and small, including the marriage plot …" (*Forms* 1). In this regard, to carry out a comprehensive literary

analysis of the KKB folktale, it is imperative to offer insights into its contents' structuring principle.

As far as the structuring of the narrative events in KKB folktales is concerned, there appears to be a dominant outline or pattern for presenting narratives. What has been observed are recurring structuring patterns that can best be described as conventional plot structures. As pointed out in chapter two and subsection 4.1.2, the KKB folktale has an introductory part, a main body, and a concluding part. As a result, it can be concluded that the KKB folktale typically has a conventional plot structure. However, how these three parts are usually constructed – not arranged – by storytellers is entirely their choice.

In "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," for example, the narrator weaves into his introduction, the moral lesson of his story – an element that is mostly reserved for the concluding part of the KKB tale (as pointed out in chapter two). After that, he proceeds to provide expository information about the wasp and his community, before advancing to the rising action where the wasp loses his in-law. The climax of the story then follows when the wasp comes into conflict with his community members who have decided not to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. The falling action commences as soon as the wasp departs for the funeral while carrying all the musical instruments needed to perform the traditional funeral dance called kinachuŋ. On arrival at the in-law's funeral, it is discovered that the wasp's waist has been compressed by the weight of the musical instruments he is carrying. This marks the denouement of the plot as the suspense evoked at the outset of the story via the question, "Do you know why the wasp has such a tiny waist?" is ultimately neutralized via the etiological declaration, "That is why to date, the wasp's waist is so tiny" (tale #17 in the Appendix). The story is eventually signed off, as part of the conclusion, without a restatement of the moral lesson.

The foregoing sequence of this tale's narrative events gestures to the fact that even though, occasionally, some storytellers might slightly deviate from the normative structuring principle of the KKB folktale, they still adhere largely to the normative arrangement of the three parts of the plot. Plot therefore places a degree of order on the formulation of the contents of the KKB folktale. The restricting and constructing power of this literary form becomes more evident, occasionally, when some KKB storytellers are prompted by their audiences to either sign off their tales or conclude their tales properly as pointed out in chapter two and earlier in this chapter. On other occasions, the order imposed by plot becomes apparent when some audience members briefly take over performances from some storytellers in order to help them conclude their tales properly – as pertains in tales #9 and #70, for instance, wherein some audience members briefly take over performances at the concluding parts of the videos in the online repository.

Thus, within the KKB oral context under discussion, plot functions as a constructional element that imposes order and restrictions on tale composition as individual storytellers are often expected to operate within its normative structuring principle (in the KKB folktale) – failure to do which will attract interventions such as those in tales #9 and #70. Such interventions ultimately point to the use of plot to reinforce normative textual structures within the KKB folktale. Hence, from a literary forms' perspective, form is not only a constructor of verbal materials but also a reinforcer of tradition or convention – in this case, the conventional plot structure of the KKB folktale.

Toward a sociocultural formal engagement

Instructively, while a traditional formalist study of the KKB folktale will constrain itself to such linguistic and constructional forms as those in the foregoing paragraphs, a more encompassing formal approach such as a new formalist one will advance a step further to interrogate sociocultural

forms such as teamwork and marriage and their operations in the KKB milieu, especially as reflected in tales such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist" and "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" respectively. As already discussed, in "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," the theme of self-exile is explored in detail as the wasp is presented as a loner who refuses to participate in communal activities, for which reason his community punishes him by refusing to support him to perform his in-law's funeral.

Even though the traditional formalist literary form-based discussions carried out in the preceding section illuminate this theme enough, a new formalist critic will however advance a step further to probe how the strained relationship between the wasp and his community gestures to the operations of teamwork within the KKB culture. When the contents of this story are analyzed against the concept of nkpaawiin (that is, communal labor) among the KKB people, it becomes evident that teamwork is presented, in this story, as a key social practice, form, or norm that does not only unite KKBs, but also serves to regulate individuals' behaviors within KKB communities. Among the KKB people, when someone is swamped with work, the person can appeal for assistance from the community. The community members will usually respond in their numbers to help the said person provided that the person has been participating in communal activities, especially communal labor. During communal labor, community members do not only work in teams to achieve particular goals but also socialize with one another. To this extent, teamwork is highly celebrated among the KKB people while extreme individualism is abhorred.

The concept of nkpaawiin (or communal labor or teamwork) can therefore be regarded as a social practice, or rather a social form, that helps in maintaining social cohesion in KKB communities while simultaneously serving as a deterrent to inappropriate social behaviors such as self-isolation (or self-exile), individualism, and refusal to be charitable to other people. This social

practice plays out in "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," where the wasp's refusal to connect with his community through teamwork eventually costs him his waist. As discussed earlier, the story employs such linguistic devices as the hyperbole "Bo! Din wee ma ulangben choo; kitiŋ ge nan yik" (translated as "Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode") and the synecdoche "Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa" (transliterated as "The world stands aloof; he stands aloof"), among others, to provide graphic representations of the strained relationship between the wasp and his community due to the former's decision to be a social deviant.

I have already discussed how these literary forms are employed to capture the physical and social gaps between the wasp and his community. As a result, I shall only add here that such visual representations ultimately provide insights into the social lifestyle of the KKB people, especially how community members often connect socially. In this regard, in "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," teamwork functions as a sociocultural form that holds communities together while simultaneously acting as a social force that constructs ideal social behavior – and in so doing, equally destroys social deviancy. That the wasp in this story is punished for violating this social norm authenticates this assertion. Here again, the constructing and demolishing powers of forms come to the fore as form is again presented as a force for promoting social cohesion and appropriate behavior, and deterring improper conduct at the same time. In "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," therefore, insights are not only offered into an aspect of the social life of the KKB people but also into the operations of a sociocultural form such as teamwork in this situated oral culture.

Similarly, in "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband," the operations of another sociocultural form – namely, the institution of marriage – take center stage as the story explores the theme of marriage by betrothal among the KKB people. From a new formalist perspective, the story interrogates this marriage practice and exposes its oppressiveness, especially when one

analyzes it against its cultural context. Even though a traditional formalist, as already stated in the previous segment, will celebrate the storyteller's deployment of the literary devices employed in this story to explore the theme of marriage by betrothal, a new formalist will however employ the same devices to explore how this theme, or rather this system of marriage in the KKB milieu, is presented as an oppressive regime.

The metonym, "Ute kan u nin dab dab kiyik ya bu ya, n kaa waar u nyɔk" (translated as "Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth") can be interpreted by a new formalist as a powerful visual representation (or image) of the silencing of dissenting voices by this KKB traditional marriage system. That Lalaachi's father "… never opened his mouth," upon discovering his daughter's attempt to deceive him in order to be permitted to marry the man of her dreams, speaks volumes about his love for his daughter and how much he understands her helplessness under the KKB marriage regime she seeks to outwit. In this regard, his daughter's plight becomes his plight; and his refusal to speak and draw the society's attention to the daughter's deceptiveness establishes him as a sympathizer and a collaborator in the daughter's attempt to outwit their oppressive marriage tradition. Indeed, if anyone were ever guilty by association, it would be Lalaachi's father – for his silence makes him a passive supporter of his daughter's rebellious attack on a patriarchal KKB marriage tradition.

To put things in a better perspective, his refusal to reprimand his daughter and notify his kin, as tradition expects of him, immediately raises questions as to why he acts in that manner, especially considering that he is expected to be a custodian of this tradition. When his act of silence is analyzed against the fact that the KKB society has imposed on him the responsibility of choosing a husband for his daughter, then one can begin to comprehend that his silence is actually an expression of his own helplessness in the face of the marriage tradition that he must enforce. In

effect, the oppressive nature of the KKB marriage by betrothal becomes even more glaring through this metonym as even the enforcer or custodian of this tradition is driven into muteness when faced with enforcing it on his own daughter. Thus, the oppressiveness of the KKB marriage tradition under discussion takes on a more devastating dimension when readers and audience are made to see that this system of marriage does not only affect young women like Lalaachi, on whom husbands are often imposed, but their parents as well – like her father.

What is more, the "Lalaachi" story under discussion further interrogates marriage as an institution and how much it is overrated, especially among the KKB people. As I pointed out in a short article titled "Concepts of Achievement among Konkombas: Representations in Their Folktales," in the KKB achievement culture, one of the major achievements of a KKB woman is marriage (Tidorchibe 34-35). However, the agony and physical deterioration Lalaachi suffers at the end of this story exposes the misconception that marriage is an achievement that the female should aspire to attain. Through such graphic depictions as "… my tears have become a well / From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water" and "… my hair have become elephant grass," readers and audience are given glimpses into the stark realities of Lalaachi's agony and deterioration in her marital home. Such graphic images of the devastating effects of Lalaachi's marriage certainly raise questions as to whether marriage is as glamorous as it has been painted to be in the KKB achievement culture – and, of course, in other cultures worldwide.

It might be noteworthy to point out that the concept of marriage as an achievement marker appears to be under scrutiny in many other KKB folktales where women are victims of unjust treatment and abuse in their marital homes. In tale #6, for instance, a wife's earnings from selling guinea corn are confiscated by her husband, who unjustly turns around and tasks her with the impossible task of buying new guinea corn to brew a local beverage (called pito) for his work

party. He then threatens the woman that failure to brew the pito will attract a beating – something that sets the woman crying and tacitly points readers and the audience to the fact that physical abuse of that nature is a frequent occurrence in that marriage. A similar unfair treatment is meted out to another wife in tale #44 where another husband treats his wife unfairly by giving her co-wife undue advantage over her during a competition to determine who is the better pito brewer. In this second story, a husband requests communal help and tasks his wives to brew pito for the work party. However, he gives the wife he loves guinea corn – which is the right raw material for brewing pito – but gives the one he does not love roselle seeds. Since no one uses roselle seeds to brew pito, the wife breaks down in tears knowing full well the humiliation that awaits her.

Pertinently, in both stories, the unjustly treated women find themselves in polygamous marriages wherein they are unloved by their husbands. Both stories employ contrast, or rather juxtaposition, as a narrative tool to compare and contrast how the husbands treat the wives they love and those they do not love. This eventually makes it possible for readers and the audience to see clearly the unfair and disadvantaged positions from which the unloved wives have to operate in both stories. Such contrasts also make it possible for readers and the audience to encounter the mental and physical agonies these unloved wives go through as they weep in helplessness and fear. Most importantly, such contrasts make it apparent that love is not a part of these unloved women's marriages. How anyone would consider as an achievement, a marriage in which Abraham Maslow's third theory of needs (that is, "love and belonging") is denied a wife, appears to be the silent question these stories raise about the KKB achievement culture.

Ultimately, these stories and others such as "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" (discussed in the preceding section) offer insights into the operations of marriage – be it marriage by betrothal or polygamous marriage – in the KKB culture, thereby helping us to comprehend the

operations of a universal social form such as marriage in a specific, situated context such as the KKB oral one. Readers and the audience are, as it were, prompted by such portrayals to rethink, or rather to engage more intimately with certain perceptions about marriage – for example, the notion that it is an achievement.

Toward a performance context sociocultural formal engagement

All the foregoing new formalist engagements with form serve to illuminate not only the textual contents of these KKB folktales but also the KKB sociocultural context from which they emerge. Such sociocultural formal engagements certainly offer better illuminations on these KKB folktales and their culture than a traditional formalist engagement that concentrates on the texts without recourse to their (cultural) context. That said, socioculturally illuminating as all these new formalist engagements with form are, they are still largely text-centered – for they draw on these tales' textual forms and textual contents to understand the KKB milieu. But a new formalist critic should delve deeper, beyond textual contents, into these forms and other sociocultural forms in relation to the oral performance context from which these two tales and the other KKB folktales emerge. A new formalist critic should, thus, be interested in exploring, among others, forms such as the gender of a storyteller and how that impacts the person's tale selectivity and style of rendition; the age of a storyteller and its impact on tale choice and style of rendition as confirmed by Yitah (276) from the Kasena context; and the genders and/or ages of the audience at a storytelling session and their impacts on storytellers' tales and details selectivity.

A more comprehensive, detextualized formal engagement should further explore performance forms such as the time (or occasion) for performing the KKB folktale, the extradiegetic dialogues between storytellers and their audiences during performances, the contribution of dramatic aids such as gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues to the

composition and performance processes, as well as the role of community (or communal participation) in the formulation, policing, and transmission of KKB folktales. Such a comprehensive formal engagement should also rope in such oral forms as voice characterization, oratorical questions, as well as the oral repetitions of story details (during individual performances) and whole stories at each retelling.

Gendered themes and styles

With regard to the operations of gender in the KKB oral performance context (especially during the performances of tales), in the course of my fieldwork I observed that most tales relating to marriage and family were the preferences of female storytellers who would often tell tales about unjust husbands or the horrors of polygamous marriages (as pertains in tales #4 and #6 for example), or the price of hasty marriages (as found in tale #19, titled "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" in the Appendix), or issues regarding feeding one's family (as is the case in tale #2, titled "Sandee Pays for Stealing Ubɔr's Ram," where the rabbit and the firefly go food-hunting during famine as breadwinners of their families). Other themes of interest to most of the female storytellers I encountered during the fieldwork were issues of childbirth and childlessness (as pertains in tale #98, where a mother gives birth to twins and abandons the male child, and tale #90, where a childless mother seeks the intervention of the gods for a child). There were also themes regarding housekeeping (as is the case in tale #7, titled "The Selfish Upininkpil and Her Granddaughter," where a girl pesters her grandmother into teaching her how to do household chores). In all these diverse issues that engaged the attention of female storytellers, the plight of the female seems to take center stage when the stories are analyzed content-wise.

The male storytellers, on the other hand, preferred stories of valor (as pertains, for instance, in tale #11, titled "A Cat Saves an Old Lady from a Troublesome Hyena" and tale #50, titled "Uwul

nearly Floors Naachiin in a Wrestling Match"), stories pertaining to leadership (as is the case in tale #16, titled "Nlanjirbor Defeats Ubɔr in a Battle of Wits"), and stories about achievement (as found in tales #8, #23, #30, #33, #36, #46, #63, #81, and #94 among others, where various characters win various contests). It was also observed that stories about male cultural activities such as attending in-laws' funerals (as found in tales #17 and #58, where the wasp attends his in-law's funeral alone), Konkomba culture-specific masculine escapes such as male friends visiting each other and eating together (as python and fire do in tale #5 in the Appendix), and hunting expeditions (as pertains in tale #21, titled "The Hunter and the Shapeshifting Beasts") equally engaged the attention of various male storytellers. Such stories had themes about cultural preservation, male freedom and adventures, and the bravery of hunters and were therefore regarded as masculine enough to engage the attention of male storytellers. From all the foregoing, it can be argued that gender plays an integral role in the types of tales that are told by KKB storytellers, and that gender mostly determines thematic preferences – and for that matter tale selection – during storytelling. This assertion is corroborated by Bisilki, who also noted "some differences in tale preferences between males and females" during some KKB storytelling sessions (355ff).

It might be of interest to note that these observations regarding gendered thematic preferences bear a striking resemblance to what Opoku-Agyemang observed in the Akan context where, like the Konkomba one, "While the male narrators appear to have told one erotic tale too many, the women told … tales that focused mainly on the plight of women" (118). That said, within the Konkomba context, I encountered storytellers like Abena in the Chakping community and Lanweyn in the Sobii community who, though women, related variants of tale #17 wherein the wasp attends his in-law's funeral. Among the Konkomba people, cultural activities such as attending in-laws' funerals are the preserve of males. This appears to be the reason most male

storytellers are often drawn to stories about such male activities – as pertains in the wasp story under discussion here. Be that as it may, occasionally, female storytellers such as Abena and Lanweyn breach the subtle, invisible sociocultural constraints of KKB gender constructs such as this to venture into the domain of what is considered the preserve of Konkomba male storytellers.

In addition to Abena and Lanweyn above, I encountered another female storyteller called Chamaaliin (in the Sobii community), who also told a story about leadership in a tale about a competition between two animals vying for the ultimate position of the traditional ruler of their community (in tale #41). There were equally female storytellers such as Abena (again) in Chakping who told a story about a KKB social achievement such as winning a marriage competition (in tale #61) and Yaawork (also in the Chakping community) who told a tale about a competition between a traditional ruler and one of his subjects in tale #55, titled "Nlanjirbor Defeats Ubɔr in a Battle of Wits." All these observations essentially gesture to the fact that the psychological gender constraints which often consciously or unconsciously play out in tale selection among KKB storytellers can be circumvented. As can be gleaned through the examples above, there are exceptions to the gender thematic preferences I observed between male and female KKB storytellers. These exceptions are very few though, considering that there are only five instances of them out of the one hundred folktales that were recorded during the fieldwork. As a result, they do not detract from the fact that the status quo discussed in the earlier paragraphs about the gendered nature of thematic preferences was the pervading situation. Gender certainly plays a key role in the sort of tales storytellers choose to perform in the KKB oral context – and in others such as the Akan one, as observed by Opoku-Agyemang.

From a new formalist perspective, it is imperative to comparatively analyze the conscious and unconscious motivations behind such thematic choices and how these reflect gender tensions

or cohesions between the sexes in the Konkomba culture. Pertinently, the male storytellers' thematic choices seem to be aimed at fostering their male dominance in society as they reaffirm certain male perceptions such as the strength and bravery of the male and the male as the custodian of tradition or culture. The female storytellers' thematic choices, on the other hand, appear to be aimed at exposing patriarchy and redefining the female in a society that condemns her to a weak, subordinating position. During my fieldwork, I observed that most female storytellers' stories – which, as pointed out earlier, often centered on the plight of women – usually ended in favor of female characters, especially the protagonists. In such stories, as I further observed later during data analysis, female heroines are often victims of domestic abuse or spousal injustice (as found in tales #4 and #6 for instance, where during two separate competitions, two husbands variously give the wives they love undue advantages over those they dislike). But in a poetic justice of sorts, the disadvantaged wives always emerge victorious through divine providence or human intervention (as pertains in tale #4 where the disadvantaged wife's child guides her to victory and in tale #6 where a mysterious man saves the day).

The triumphs of the female victims in such stories should be regarded as triumphs over their oppressive or unjust husbands who assume the roles of authoritative (or patriarchal) figures and deliberately set their wives up for failure. From such a perspective, a new formalist can then position the Konkomba female in a disadvantaged and less powerful position who must then work to survive or gain male approval in a patriarchal society. But beyond this, a new formalist can deduce the underlying gender tension between these female characters and their husbands in their marital homes, and by extension in a patriarchal KKB society, where they can only succeed (and/or survive) through their husbands' assistance. However, that these characters ultimately succeed without their husbands' assistance, points to the attempts by KKB female storytellers to

(sometimes) employ storytelling as a medium to expose the injustices of patriarchy and assert the independence and go-getting spirit of the female despite patriarchal oppositions. To this extent, KKB storytelling has and "continues to be [an] important site ... [for] resist[ing] ... various forms of social oppression" (Onuora xii), especially the oppression of the female, as female storytellers tell stories not only about the plights of the KKB female but her triumphs over patriarchy.

When analyzed from a psychological point of view, such stories and tale choices, it bears reiterating, reveal deep-seated gender tensions in the KKB milieu as the female fights to break free from the shackles of patriarchy. This probably explains why whenever even male storytellers tell stories that end in favor of female characters (usually the protagonists), their female audience(s) will sometimes respond excitedly, "Hear hear!" – as pertains in tale #1 titled, "A Man Should Love His Wives Equally" for instance. Such reactions point to the fact that in the spirit of sisterhood, these KKB female audience(s) identify with such female characters – that is, their challenges and victories. But most importantly, these reactions tacitly confirm my assertion regarding the unspoken gender tension in a largely patriarchal KKB society where women are not even allowed to sit among men. They also affirm the desire of these KKB female audience(s) to break free like the protagonists in their folktales. Thus, gender plays out in many subtle ways during the composing of the contents of KKB folktales during storytelling sessions, thereby once again authenticating Adwoa Onuora's assertion that storytelling is a platform for resisting social oppression (xii) – even in the most indirect way as the Konkomba example herein.

Instructively, it was also observed during fieldwork and my data analysis that Onuora's assertion also played out in female storytellers' styles of rendering their tales. Some of the female storytellers I encountered during the fieldwork sometimes deliberately ungendered some characters, especially when the roles those characters played were culturally gendered or reserved

for specific genders. By refusing to assign specific genders to such characters, these female storytellers appeared to be resisting certain KKB gender constructs. For instance, in tale #4 where the disadvantaged wife triumphs, the storyteller 'un-genders' the character that intervenes to save the protagonist from failure by referring to that character as "ubu" (translated as "a child") throughout the story. In Likpakpaln (that is, the Konkomba language), ubu (also spelled ubo) is a gender-fluid noun. To assign specific genders, one will have to add gender markers such as "-jabu" or "-jabo" (for male) and "upii-" (for female). Thus, a male child is called ubujabu (aka ubojabo) while a female child is called upiibu (or upiibo). In the story, the nameless "ubu" (or child) character employs music that is played on a flute to guide the disadvantaged wife to victory. In the traditional KKB culture, playing traditional musical instruments such as the flute is unfortunately the preserve of males. As a result, every KKB who hears this story will know straightaway that the "ubu" in question is a male child. However, the female storyteller deliberately refuses to foster this patriarchal gender construct by refusing to assign any gender to the character in her story. This could be explained as a tacit rebellion against the gendering of certain activities – such as the playing of musical instruments, in the case of this tale – among the KKB people.

Another female storyteller in the Kutol community adopted the same performance style while rendering tale #6, where an unjust husband confiscates one of his wife's money and tasks her to still buy guinea corn and compete with her two co-wives in a pito (i.e., a local beverage) brewing competition. In that story, the female storyteller also refuses to identify the gender of the "ubupul" (aka ubopol), translated as the eldest child, whose action results in the mysterious intervention of a stranger to save the disadvantaged wife from failure. Even though her audience might have been able to deduce the gender of the child from the KKB cultural context, the storyteller's refusal to assign a specific gender identity to her character – who is said to have left

the house carrying a water basin or container on the head in order to get help for the penniless, disadvantaged mother – is noteworthy since it effectively decouples the carrying of water basins or containers from the female gender.

Among Konkombas, the fetching of water from the river or dam or stream, etc. – or even the mere act of carrying a water basin or container on one's head – is traditionally considered feminine. Thus, when the storyteller's ungendered character leaves home while carrying a water basin or container on the head, it indirectly gestures to an attempt to decouple the fetching and/or carrying of water basins or pots on one's head from the female gender in order to perhaps reflect contemporary realities – for the fetching and/or carrying of water basins is no longer a female activity among modern-day Konkombas. Boys equally fetch water and carry water basins on their heads nowadays. That said, that this female storyteller will highlight this culture-specific element and refuse to associate it with any gender, especially the female, could also be explained as another tacit act of rebellion against the gendering of certain activities among the KKB people. Most importantly, it gestures to the fact that gender sometimes shapes the contents and styles of rendering KKB folktales, especially as female narrators such as the two discussed herein sometimes employ their stories as acts of activism against certain male prejudices and patriarchal ideologies.

Apart from all the foregoing, the deployment of storytelling as acts of activism through the non-gendering of the contents of the KKB folktale (by some female storytellers) also manifests in the departure of these female storytellers from certain normative narrative conventions. It might be of interest to note that all the female storytellers I encountered during fieldwork shunned, for instance, one particular patriarchal normative conclusion to a KKB folktale – namely, "Maatiin gur ki m muun ke n-yaaja aagbem na" (translated as "May my story diminish while I grow as tall

as my grandfather's kapok tree"). As pointed out earlier in chapter two, this is one of the normative conclusions of a KKB folktale. Its contents regrettably reinforce a certain patriarchal ideology among KKBs. This requires elaboration.

As discussed in that chapter, the normative conclusion under discussion gestures to the Konkomba belief that storytelling has health benefits, especially healthy physical growth – not only for the human body but also for families and whole Konkomba communities. As a result, the employment of the simile, "as tall as my grandfather's kapok tree" to evoke the image of healthy growth is significant in two dimensions: firstly, it immediately genders the source of this healthy growth – which is the "grandfather" who plants and nurtures the "kapok tree;" and secondly, it consequently reinforces the patriarchal belief that males are the sources of life, growth, and lineage continuity. Among KKBs, just as in several other African cultures, the male is not only regarded as the head of the family but also as the source of life and growth of the family. The male ensures the continuity of the family or the lineage – which explains why a Konkomba man is not considered a 'real man' until he has given birth to a male child. The torment that women who are unable to give birth to male children undergo is therefore unimaginable; and male childlessness has often given rise to polygamous marriages in many African cultures.

These are issues that a lot of African female writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Amma Darko, Flora Nwapa and others have explored at length in their works. Rather than rehashing their contributions, I will only add that the foregoing phenomenon – which the normative conclusion under discussion subtly reinforces – hierarchizes the genders and deifies the male gender (symbolized by the "grandfather" in this conclusion) as the source of life and growth. The simile employed in this KKB normative conclusion therefore gestures to the misconception

about the male being the source of growth or continuity among KKBs and therefore regrettably assumes a patriarchal tone when analyzed against this cultural belief.

Perhaps, the underlying patriarchal undertones of this conclusion explain why all the female storytellers I encountered during fieldwork preferred to sign off their tales either via its variants that are always silent on the element of the "grandfather's kapok tree" or via the other normative conclusion of a KKB folktale (that is, "Tiin tiin kolb") or its variants. For instance, in the Chakping community, a female storyteller named Inimoan, instead of "performing according to the [script] imposed by" (Pirker, "God […] Expects Perfection" 110) the normative conclusion, always preferred to sign off thus: "Maatiin gur ki m muun chaa," translated as "May my story diminish while I grow very tall" (as pertains in tales #4 and #22 for example). Other female storytellers (in Chakping) such as Yaawork and Abena equally signed off with this variant (as found in tales #55 and 61 respectively).

In other communities such as Nalongni, the female storytellers also concluded their tales with genderless variants such as "Maatitiin kolb," translated as "The end of my story" (as pertains in tales #66 and #87 for instance) while the female storytellers in Kakpeekni alternated between the variants of the first and second normative conclusions – such as "Maatiin gur ki m muun chaa," translated as "May my story diminish while I grow very tall" (as found in tale #96 for example), "Maatiin kolb," translated as "The end of my story" (as is the case in tale #51 for instance), and "Maatiin kolb aanaa wɔŋ," translated as "The end of my story seeks/requires a continuation (as pertains in tale #98), among others.

While all these genderless conclusions might point to the flexibility inherent in the KKB storytelling culture, they most significantly gesture to the KKB female storyteller's growing consciousness about the subtle manifestations of patriarchy in KKB folktales. I should add that

this consciousness is part of a growing trend among KKBs, especially the younger generation that seems to be moving further and further away from the limitations of certain normative KKB structures – as I earlier pointed out in chapter two. Through this new drive, KKB female storytellers seem to be quietly and gradually exposing and ridiculing certain patriarchal ideologies and structures through their tale selections, details selection, and styles of rendition.

From all the foregoing, it can be argued then that gender as a sociocultural form manifests in various ways to shape the contents and styles of performing KKB folktales and the KKB milieu in general. When gleaned through such new formalist lenses, the Konkomba folktale and its performance can be viewed as products not only of collective memory but of gender manifestations as well. The tales and their performance esthetics are not usually transmitted wholesale across cultural contexts and generations; they go through various configurations and modifications occasioned by forces such as gender. This therefore points to the fact that gender plays an integral role in the composing and co-composing of KKB folktales during performances. Succinctly put, gender in the KKB oral context serves as a form that shapes the contents of KKB folktales and destabilizes narrative conventions and patriarchal constructs. Form is therefore a destabilizer – or even a demolisher – of normative structures or conventions, especially when gleaned through the above operations of gender in the oral performance of the KKB folktale.

That form can be a destabilizer becomes even more glaring when one considers the operations of gender in the KKB milieu from another oral performance dimension. As pointed out in chapter two, KKB storytelling sessions – or rather the performances of KKB folktales – are non-gendered. Unlike in the Mende context where the performance of "The *domei* [that is, the folktale] is a subjective art form for women" and is "thus left to women, and to those males willing to take chances with their reputations" (Cosentino 745), the performance of the KKB folktale is not the

preserve of a specific gender. Everyone is granted equal opportunity to participate either as a performer, a member of the audience, or both. This is significant for understanding the destabilizing or demolishing power of form within the KKB oral context.

As discussed in chapter two, the KKB society is a highly stratified one in terms of gender and age. In typical KKB communities, women and children are prohibited from sitting among men; and children are not allowed to sit among adults. However, during the performance of the KKB folktale, all these sociocultural barriers are demolished as women are often very good storytellers and are therefore needed to contribute to communal performances. Thus, during KKB storytelling sessions, patriarchal gender constraints on women's right to freedom of association are lifted – albeit momentarily. This temporariness notwithstanding, the power of a social form such as gender to dismantle patriarchal sociocultural barriers such as the foregoing (within the KKB oral context) is highly commendable as it gestures to the ability of forms to act as destabilizers – and sometimes demolishers – of whole systems, structures, and traditions among others. Considering its operations within the KKB storytelling culture, especially against the backdrop of the patriarchal nature of typical KKB communities, it can be argued that gender functions within the KKB milieu as a destabilizer of patriarchal constructs and structures. In this regard, forms (such as this) serve activist purposes, so to speak, as they tacitly push for change and occasionally nullify entrenched traditional constructs such as the gender binary that still exists in the KKB society. Consequently, gender (as a sociocultural form) does not only shape the contents and performances of KKB folktales but also the KKB culture that produces these oral materials, as it often temporarily disrupts this culture's social stratification during oral performances.

Tales for all generations

Age is another sociocultural form worth exploring as far as the shaping of the contents and performance of the KKB folktale, as well as the KKB culture, is concerned. How do the ages of storytellers and their audiences impact tale selectivity, details selectivity, and styles of rendition? Yitah reports from the Kasena context that the ages of storytellers and their audience(s) impact storytelling (276). In much the same way, in the KKB context, the choice of tales and the styles of rendering those details are sometimes influenced by the ages of storytellers and/or the ages of their audience(s). Throughout fieldwork, it was observed that tales about taboo or weightier subjects such as death and sex were avoided because of the presence of children in the audience(s). As a result, there is only one disguised tale about sexual intercourse and none about death in the 100 folktales being used as data in this dissertation. This is because all the stories were recorded in the daytime and children were present at these storytelling sessions.

KKB storytelling sessions, as pointed out in chapter two, are not age-biased. Even though in the Konkomba society children are not allowed to sit among adults, during storytelling sessions this sociocultural barrier dissolves. However, in such mixed gatherings, stories about taboo subjects such as death and sexual intercourse do not typically feature in the performances. Tales about taboo subjects only feature in storytelling sessions where children are absent – usually very late in the night when children are asleep and adults can speak freely and employ more complex plots and techniques to flesh out their narratives. This is much akin to what Yitah reports from the Kasena context where in the absence of children at storytelling sessions, adults can "feel at ease to recreate narratives using more complex plots that might be difficult for children to grasp" (276). Thus, age certainly has an impact on the tale-types that are performed and how these are performed, especially when children are part of the audience(s).

Occasionally though, there are maverick storytellers who will venture into taboo subjects in the presence of children. However, they employ complex techniques such as defamiliarization to couch the contents of those stories in language that can only be deciphered by adults. They often employ a lot of hyperboles and metonyms to disguise whatever they describe or narrate – which is much akin to what Viktor Shklovsky observed about a Russian epic titled "The Legend of Stavyor," in which "sexual organs are referred to in terms of lock and key or quilting tools or bow and arrow, or rings and marlinspikes" (Richter 782). Apart from the language, such storytellers also employ a lot of humorous descriptions and gestures to throw children off the real subjects of their stories.

I encountered one such situation in the Chagbaan community where a storyteller (that is, the narrator of tale #65), whose audience included children, told a story about an old lady and her granddaughter who discovered the male genitalia and the pleasure of sex. Throughout the story, the storyteller never mentioned the male and female genitalia; neither did he mention the word "sex." Rather, he defamiliarized these by replacing the male genitalia the old lady discovered at the farm with phrases such as "a short thing" and "something called Tapue," while sexual intercourse was replaced with "grinding on the grinding stone." He then humorously depicted the movements of the old lady and her granddaughter as they thrust forward and backward while grinding on the supposed grinding stone, which intermittently elicited laughter from his audience. By the end of his performance, all the adults in the audience (including me) knew that the story was not about the two characters grinding guinea corn on the grinding stone but about sexual intercourse. All the foregoing authenticate my earlier assertion that age as a sociocultural form, impacts the types of tales that are often told and how these are told within the KKB oral context.

For further elaboration on the operations of age in the composing and performing of tales in the KKB oral context, I should add that I also observed that people who were advanced in age were better storytellers than younger folks – and adults generally told stories with more flare than children. On several occasions, child narrators struggled to remember story details and had to be helped by adults to compose their tales (as pertains in tale #9, for instance, where an adult from the audience takes over the performance and concludes the tale for a child narrator, and in tale #70, where a child narrator is assisted by two adults from the audience to flesh out his tale properly). But what is most important about the operations of age in KKB storytelling is that most child narrators do not only struggle to remember the right details to flesh out their tales, but they also often end their stories abruptly without stating the morals of the stories and signing off properly. This is why adults in the audience often take over their performances and conclude their stories properly for them – as is the case in the two examples above.

What is most striking about these child narrators' styles of rendition is the fast pace at which they often tell their stories. In their child-like nature, they often pile up phrases upon phrases, often connecting them with such conjunctions as "nka" (translated as "and" or "and then" as pertains in tales #70 and #12 for instance) and "le" (translated as "and" or "so" – as found in tale #9 for example). This gives their tales very fast rhythms, zero embellishments, and short durations. Within the space of about a minute, these child narrators are often able to tell their stories without any gestures or embellishments. Adult storytellers, on the other hand, often take their time to construct the plots of their tales, drawing on various narrative situations and oral techniques such as gestures, dramatic pauses, rhetorical questions, and repetitions to enhance their crafts. I will delve deeper into these oral and performance elements or forms in the next segment.

In the meantime, it suffices to point out that such styles of rendition associated with adults often give their tales relatively slower rhythms, add flare to their performances, and provide much space and time for them to construct their plots. This, perhaps, explains why, unlike child narrators whose narratives span at most two to three minutes, some adults' stories span as long as six to eleven minutes (as pertains in tales #13 and #31, where a storyteller employs gestures, dramatic pauses, and repetitions to flesh out his tales, and tales #18 and #8, among others whose narrators equally draw on the aforementioned narrative techniques to perform their stories). All these observations, and the foregoing discussions, essentially point to the fact that within the KKB oral storytelling culture, age impacts tale selectivity, details selectivity, and styles of performance. It appears, therefore, that age functions as a structuring sociocultural force, element, or form that determines the contents of KKB tales and the various styles or ways in which they are performed.

Most importantly, like gender, age equally shapes the KKB culture as it functions as another sociocultural force that occasionally destabilizes a highly age-stratified KKB society. As pointed out a few paragraphs earlier, in typical KKB communities, children are prohibited from sitting among adults. However, the performance of the KKB folktale provides a rare opportunity for this social barrier to be dismantled in order to allow children to also participate in the communal performances. As a result, during these performances, the age binary or stratification that exists in typical KKB communities is temporarily demolished. Such a momentary disruption in the social order provides yet another example of the destabilizing power of forms – in this case, age as a performance-related sociocultural form.

Age functions, within this context, as a social disorder that disrupts a normative social order that distinguishes between adults and children. Within the KKB storytelling culture, therefore, age (just like gender) serves as an opposition to a normative social structure that infringes on children's

freedom of association and creativity. In this respect, one could argue that age functions as a sociocultural form that destabilizes a highly stratified KKB society during storytelling – an act that can, in itself, be considered as an activist effort aimed at effecting change within the broader KKB society that occasionally discriminates against people on grounds of their ages. Age, thus, shapes not only the contents and performances of KKB folktales but also the KKB society as a whole.

Education: a threat to the form of the folktale?

Education is yet another important sociocultural force that appears to be fast influencing the contents and styles of rendering KKB folktales today. During fieldwork, it was observed that the educational backgrounds of a few storytellers had impacts on the contents of their tales and their styles of performing them. Regrettably, most of the educated people who were approached for interviews during the fieldwork flatly turned down the invitations on the grounds that they did not know how to tell their folk stories. Those who did honor the invitations were often not so helpful. It was observed that storytellers who were not educated made better storytellers than the educated ones – who are mostly the younger generation. This is understandably so because education comes with its advantages and disadvantages – one of such disadvantages, especially within the KKB milieu and other once-colonized contexts, is the disconnection of educated people from their oral traditions which, as explained in chapter two, they tend to consider as low culture. Those who still engage in their oral storytelling come to these performances with some memory and performance deficiencies as well as borrowed materials from other cultures where they either attended school or worked after school.

With regard to memory and performance, it was observed that these educated storytellers often told stories without any oral and dramatic embellishments (as is the case in tale #53 for instance); and most of their stories were not from the collective memory of the KKB people (that

is, their oral tradition) but from their personal or others' lived experiences. One such story was narrated in the Nasom community in the Saboba district by a storyteller called Tamanja, who related a story about two friends who clashed over a lady they were both interested in marrying.

According to the story (that is, tale #42), there lived two friends, Tilaar and Taakpaktorb. One day Tilaar went to the Saboba market and saw a lady, expressed interest in her, and the lady reciprocated. He then returned to his village and told his friend to accompany him on the Kpalba market day to visit the lady. During their visit, Tilaar proposed to marry the lady and she agreed. The lady then asked him to pay an amount of money as part of the dowry. Unfortunately, Tilaar did not have that sum of money so when they returned home, his friend lent him the money. Unbeknownst to him, however, while he was waiting for the customary timeframe to elapse before he would visit the lady and get intimate with her, his friend clandestinely returned to the lady, flaunted his wealth, and slept with her without waiting for the customary time to elapse. On the day Tilaar eventually returned to the lady, she told him that she had already slept with his friend so she was no longer in love with Tilaar but his friend. This resulted in a quarrel between the two friends, which eventually escalated into a communal conflict between their respective clans.

Instructively, any KKB who hears this narrative will immediately conclude that it is not quintessentially a KKB folktale but a story from, perhaps, a lived experience. First of all, as I pointed out in chapter two, the KKB folktale, like several others across the globe, is fictive in nature (Bascom 4; Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond* 44, "The Poetic and the Everyday" 6; Opoku-Agyemang 116; Cancel 75; Yitah 275). As a result, it is often silent on specific settings and specific character names. The setting of the story above is, therefore, rather oddly specific. The identification of "Saboba" as the epicenter of this story is interesting since the Saboba market is the biggest in the Saboba district today. The next biggest market in the district is the Kpalba market

– which is also mentioned by this storyteller. Apart from these, the main characters are assigned specific names such as Tilaar and Taakpaktorb. Such character and setting specificity are not typical of the KKB folktale which often stages its narrative situations in nameless settings, and whose actions are often performed by nameless characters, as pointed out in chapter two.

Besides these, the storyteller made a disclaimer at the beginning of his narrative to the effect that the story he was about to tell was meant to address changing trends in the contemporary world. He began the story thus: "Maah bi lin bu na n yi ke ki yaa: inimbiwuln dan pam. Inimbiwuln aa dan na, n yi ke ti chuun ki chaa kibanbangni ki kan baah joo tɔb bu ka soochi bi bi chee na. … N yi maah ban m di tiin ntiin mu na" (tale #42). This can be translated as: "I must say that enlightenment has dawned upon us. A lot of advancements have taken place. We have traveled far and wide and observed how other people live peacefully. … I'm drawing on these experiences to tell the following story" (tale #42). This disclaimer immediately tells his audience that his story is not quintessentially from the KKB folklore but a lived experience, or that it is a made-up story aimed at reflecting modern trends.

It is imperative to point out that other storytellers of this kind – like the narrator of tale #53 which relates how a soldier (a profession that is the preserve of the educated and is alien to the traditional KKB society) catches his cheating wife – will usually not begin their narratives with such explicit disclaimers as the one above. As a result, it will usually take typical KKB audience(s) and discerning foreign audience(s) to realize that content-wise, such stories were not handed down by past generations but are modern additions to the KKB folklore. That stories of this kind are beginning to make inroads into the KKB folklore in recent times is another indication that the KKB storytelling culture is flexible and, most importantly, that the KKB folktale, like several

others across the globe, serves pedagogical and activist purposes (Pullum 96; Sturm and Nelson 171). The latter claim certainly requires further elaboration.

Education is as much a function of the KKB folktale as entertainment. The KKB folktale, like several others, seeks to impart cultural values, instill decorous behaviors, and sometimes effect social changes. The need to educate, therefore, trumps the need to strictly pass down the oral heritage of the KKB people – in this case, their unblemished folktales. As a result, modern-day KKB storytellers (such as Tamanja), who have been exposed to education, occasionally draw on their educational backgrounds and experiences to tell stories such as tale #42 (that is, Tamanja's tale) in order to educate and/or effect social change(s) – something the storyteller himself points out in the disclaimer that precedes his narrative.

Pertinently, the contents of tale #42 serve to destabilize the traditional KKB marriage system fostered in tale #19, where parents play a key role in selecting husbands for their daughters, as discussed earlier regarding the theme of marriage by betrothal (among the KKB people). Unlike in tale #19, tale #42 presents the lady as the determiner of her husband – and not her parents, especially her father. What is more, she determines when to get intimate with her partner – not tradition. The KKB marriage by betrothal system, thus, comes under a subtle attack as a new marriage tradition is being fostered in Tamanja's story to reflect changing trends among the KKB people and the world around them. The storyteller declares this (at the outset) as his intent for narrating the story. Tradition is, as it were, pit against modernity in this story.

In order to do this effectively, the storyteller deliberately employs pseudo-historical allusions in his narrative. He intermittently juxtaposes what used to prevail in the past and what pertains in his tale – that is, the present time. For instance, in the course of the tale, he asserts that unlike in the past when premarital sex was not tolerated, in his story, Taakpaktorb engages in a

premarital affair with the lady in the story. This gives him an edge over Tilaar, who chooses to obey tradition and waits for the recommended days to elapse before becoming intimate with the lady. In effect, through this pseudo-historical allusion, the storyteller pits tradition against modernity – where Tilaar represents tradition and avoids premarital sex while Taakpaktorb represents modernity and consummates his relationship with the lady and eventually marries her.

Considering that KKB parents hardly impose husbands on their daughters these days and that premarital sex is a normal trend today, Tamanja's story essentially seeks not only to reflect this trend but also to educate on a new tradition. Ultimately, it appears to aim at destabilizing the normative KKB marriage protocols discussed earlier in relation to "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" (that is, tale #19). In this regard, one could argue that Tamanja's formal education has not only affected his worldview but has also influenced his tale selection and details selection.

This influence of formal education becomes even more glaring when one pays attention to the contents of tale #52, which is narrated by a student, and which details how a soldier catches his cheating wife. In that story, all the details such as the profession of the main character (that is, a soldier), the presence of a transistor radio in his bedroom, and the use of English sentences such as "Today no news" among other things, all point to the fact that this story – like tale #42 – is a recent addition to the KKB folklore and that it seeks to reflect modernity (in terms of some of the emerging new professions among KKBs and KKBs' exposure to modern technology). Consequently, one way or another, the exposure to formal education (and modernity) seems to influence the contents of the KKB tale (as pertains in tales #42 and #52 for example) – which is gradually giving rise to a set of folktales that appear to have pedagogy as their ultimate purpose.

That these tales seek to serve as pedagogical tools to educate the modern KKB about changing trends, gestures to the power of education as a structuring or constructing force that occasionally shapes the KKB folktale's contents and as a destabilizing force that destabilizes traditional KKB society and its institutions – such as marriage in tale #42 for instance. Education is, thus, not only a force (or form) that shapes the contents and performance of the KKB folktale, but also serves activist purposes aimed at destroying normative structures, institutions, and traditions among other things – and herein lies, again, the plurality inherent in forms: they can construct and/or destabilize (or even demolish completely) verbal materials and all kinds of social, cultural, political, and economic structures and constructs, among others.

What is more, that education is a major function of the KKB folktale – and several others across the world – makes it (i.e., education) all the more powerful in terms of constructing and/or destabilizing traditions, behaviors, perceptions, institutions, and systems, among other things. Education should, thus, not only be regarded as an external force that impacts KKB folktales' contents and performances but also as an inherent functional element that shapes individuals' behaviors and whole societies. The foregoing requires further elucidation.

Due to their pedagogical purposes, most KKB folktales are usually rich in moral lessons and etiological explanations that operate as educational materials for performers and their audiences. These educational contents serve not only as pedagogical materials, but, collectively, as a (corrective) social force aimed at sensitizing performers and their audiences during oral performances. The centrality of this social force accounts for the preponderance of moral lessons and etiological explanations in KKB folktales. During storytelling sessions, performers are often quick to point out these morals and etiological explanations either at the commencements of their tales or in their conclusions. Failure to do this will usually elicit interjections from some audience

who will usually point out such didactic information (as found in tales #9 and #52 for instance). The ends of such didactic contents are to construct and impart cultural values and proper behavior, and ultimately effect change(s) in individuals and the larger society by destabilizing or destroying what is 'un-cultural' and/or improper.

Based on the foregoing, education (as a functional element) acts as a force (or form) that shapes individual and collective behaviors while simultaneously correcting inappropriate behaviors and un-cultural values. It is for this reason that I argue that education does not only influence the contents and styles of performing KKB folktales but also acts as an activist tool for constructing and/or destroying the inappropriate or 'un-cultural' in order to effect desirable behavioral and sociocultural changes. Thus, as a form, education operates both at the extra-textual level as a compositional force and at the textual level as a functional element. As a functional element of the KKB folktale and others, it serves as an important sociocultural form that constructs and/or destabilizes – and sometimes completely demolishes – ideologies, perceptions, individual behaviors, and even established normative structures (such as pertains in tale #42, whose contents seek to destabilize long-established KKB marriage protocols by constructing and fostering a new marriage tradition).

Toward a more performance-sensitive formal engagement

For more insights into the constructing and/or destabilizing power of forms, it is important to turn more directly to some performance forms operating in the performance of KKB folktales. That form is, particularly, a destabilizer – and sometimes even a demolisher – becomes more evident when the KKB folktale is gleaned through a performance form such as the time for performing the KKB folktale. Even though in other contexts time might be regarded as a social construct, within

the domain of primary orature such as KKB folktales, it doubles as one of the performance forms that regulate performances.

As pointed out in chapter two, one cannot divorce indigenous performances from their traditional occasions. The performance of the KKB folktale is therefore inextricably linked to a specific time regime. As already discussed in that chapter, the performance of the KKB folktale is reserved for evenings – usually after supper as a form of relaxation. Performances during the day are therefore prohibited. It bears repeating that in the KKB storytelling culture, it is taboo to tell stories during the day. As explained by Ntakbi Liwallaa during my fieldwork in the Nasom community, "Our forebears wanted to discourage people from idling during the day and rather spend their time on their farms. When people return from work, they can tell stories while relaxing or shelling their groundnuts in the evening. But children are allowed, during the day, to discuss – not narrate – the stories that were told the previous evening" (Ntakbi 2022). This consequently places a limitation on the performance of these oral materials, thereby gesturing to the restrictive nature of this performance form within the KKB storytelling culture and other traditional performance contexts where performances are equally time- and occasion-bound. Forms can therefore be "limiting and containing" (Levine, *Forms* 6), often "constraining materials in a range of ways and imposing their order in situated contexts" (Levine *Forms* 11) such as this KKB oral one.

However, within the KKB storytelling culture, the power of forms to restrict is minimal due to the flexibility inherent in this particular oral performance context. Even though it is believed that anyone in breach of the prohibition of storytelling in the daytime stands in peril of suffering a misfortune such as stunted growth in children, there is a loophole that allows storytelling during the day. It is believed that anyone who wishes to tell stories during the daytime can do so by

plucking out one of his/her eyelashes or hair from the armpit, among other parts of the body, in order to ward off the ramifications of breaching the taboo against storytelling in the daytime. Thus, time (as a performance form within the KKB oral context) does not only draw on superstition to impose constraints on the performance of the KKB folktale, but it also undoes itself via the same medium. As it were, it destabilizes itself by allowing the occasional performance of the KKB folktale during the daytime.

I agree with Levine that "[e]ach constraint will encounter many other, different organizing principles, and its power to impose order will itself be constrained, and at times unsettled, by other forms" (Levine *Forms* 7). However, within the KKB oral performance context, this "unsettling" is not always caused by other forms, but can be self-triggered. Forms can destabilize themselves in much the same way as they do other forms, social constructs, verbal materials, and whole institutions among other things. This gestures, then, to their flexibility and resultant ability to effect change(s) internally even without being acted upon by other forms.

That said, it should quickly be pointed out that forms do not always work in conflict or in ways that destabilize them or others. Occasionally, forms work in concert with others to construct rather than to destabilize or demolish. This is what becomes evident when one observes critically the interactions between a performance form such as dramatic acts and an oral form such as voice characterization during the composition and performance of KKB oral tales. As pointed out on several occasions in this dissertation, the KKB folktale depends on the words, oral habits, and performance habits of various storytellers and their audiences. When a KKB storyteller is rendering an oral narrative, the person employs words and complements them with appropriate voice modulations and dramatic acts such as facial expressions, gestures, dramatic pauses, and other non-verbal cues. In tale #2, for instance, while rendering a tale about the confrontation

between the rabbit and the political head of his community (indigenously known as ubɔr), the storyteller breaks into gestures in the course of her rendition. As pertains in the translated tale in the Appendix and the video in the online repository (from circa 02:19 to 02:30 minutes of the video), she bends over the upper part of her body and raises her hands in the air while simultaneously uttering the direct speech the rabbit utters after he is stung by the scorpion ubɔr places near the egg he (the rabbit) tries to steal.

Also, in tale #13 which relates how the hyena deceptively eats the crocodile's hatchlings and gets punished, the storyteller intermittently breaks into gestures and intense facial expressions while simultaneously fleshing out the narrative orally. Snippets of these can be watched in the online video (from circa 00:41 to 00:47, 02:40 to 02:51, 03:30 to 03:43, and 04:05 to 04:17 minutes of the recording). Similarly, in tale #56 the same storyteller employs several dramatic acts to enhance the composition of his tale (as pertains, for instance, in 01:07 to 01:21 and 03:25 to 03:53 minutes of the video in the online repository). In addition, the narrator of tale #3 equally employs facial expressions and demonstrations (as shown from 02:23 to 02:27 and 03:05 to 03:23 minutes of the video in the online repository) to visually communicate the contents of his tale. Some of these dramatic acts – or rather, oral aids – are shown pictographically in Figure 5 below.

Fig. 5. Some KKB storytellers employing gestures and intense facial expressions to enhance their performances.

Such gestures and facial expressions as those described in the aforementioned examples – and shown visually in Figure 5 as well as the video recordings online – are some of the dramatic acts that are usually employed to offer graphic illustrations of characters' actions and the narrative situations being staged during the oral performances of KKB folktales. As a result, these oral dramatic aids contribute significantly to the composition and performance processes of the KKB folktale. It can be argued, then, that they are, collectively, a performance form often employed to construct more visually the verbal contents of oral narratives such as KKB folktales – and the several others across the globe that equally draw on the dramatic acts of performers to construct their contents more effectively.

When we speak of forms, we speak of the principles, ideas, categories, and institutions (Levine, "Strategic Formalism" 626, 632), among others, that shape or give existence to verbal materials, human experiences, and social formations. Visual images (whether static or motion) are a category or form of communication – namely, nonverbal communication. They are therefore forms for shaping or giving existence, "structure[s] and identit[ies]" (Turner 584) to various creative arts, objects, ideas, institutions, systems, and traditions, among others. Velten authenticates my assertion herein when he states that "[j]ust as performativity can be a quality of texts, so it can also be one of images," adding categorically that "[i]f images ... can take roles as media in a performance (a procession, liturgy, ceremonies, etc.), then they shape this performance since they are a part of it" (262).

For anyone who might still have doubts regarding the shaping or constructing power of static and motion images, turning to mimes as a form or category of drama will be very helpful. Whole plays can be composed and staged via this form without words. Opinions, ideas, traditions,

institutions, and systems, among other things, can be constructed and communicated via this form of drama. If actions speak louder than words, then visual forms such as mimes are far better constructors of the performative arts. In much the same way, the oral aids that are often employed during the oral performances of KKB folktales can be said to be better constructors of these oral materials than rhetorical forms such as the metaphor, synecdoche, and metonym, among others, that were discussed earlier in this chapter. As a matter of fact, sometimes the actions of performers help to visualize more effectively these structural forms, thereby intensifying their effects in narratives and on the audiences at storytelling sessions. It is precisely for this reason that I argue that the dramatic actions of KKB storytellers are more effective and affective forms for constructing KKB folktales than the words uttered by these storytellers.

On account of their orality, unwritten verbal materials such as KKB oral tales must always rely not only on the words of storytellers and their audiences but also on their dramatic movements, dramatic pauses, and facial expressions, among other things, to make the desired impact(s). Thus, multiple forms are often required to effectively construct KKB oral tales. To borrow a parallel but good example from Pirker's essay "Britain," "just as the 'social situation' of Victorian Britain demanded 'multiple tempos' and forms of representation" (296), the KKB folktale "requires a wide range of imaginative approaches" (Pirker 296) or creative tools such as voice modulation, gestures, appropriate facial expressions, dramatic pauses, and other nonverbal cues to effectively come alive. In this regard, dramatic oral aids serve as important compositional elements during the fleshing out of KKB folktales. It is this compositional functionality that makes them an important performance form during the composition and performance of primary orature such as KKB folktales. As it were, it makes them function as collaborators that work together with some oral forms such as voice characterization, for instance, to give shape to the KKB tale's contents.

As pointed out earlier, in tale #56 which relates the encounter between the rabbit and a magic-wielding testicle, for example, the narrator's words are at a point aided by his gestures to construct the rabbit's character and actions when the narrator mimics the rabbit while simultaneously demonstrating how the rabbit acted when the hawk snatched the testicle and flew away (see tale's video from circa 03:30 to 03:40 minutes). In this instance, his gestures and voice characterization of the rabbit ultimately help in constructing the tale's contents more visually for his audience. It is on this basis that I slightly disagree with Levine's proposal that forms be regarded as working "not in concert" ("Strategic Formalism" 633) and embrace Kornbluh's posture that leans toward the building power of forms (4ff, 33, 41ff, 51). The foregoing certainly gestures to the fact that forms sometimes work in harmony to create verbal materials and the human experiences contained in them. From all the preceding discussions, form's role as a constructor of verbal materials and the ideas, perceptions, traditions, institutions, or systems expressed in them and through them comes to the forefront, as oral visual aids such as those employed by this narrator, and the several others mentioned earlier, play an integral part in creating contents not only in oral narratives but also graphically in the minds of audiences during traditional performances such as the renditions of KKB folktales.

That said, previous discussions have equally established the destabilizing – and even demolishing – power of forms. In fairness to Levine, therefore, it should be noted that forms are never static nor definite. They can either work in concert or in conflict in the verbal materials, social formations, or human experiences they operate. This explains why this dissertation has adopted a pluralist approach to the study of the operations of forms in the KKB oral context so as to give as comprehensive as possible illuminations on the workings of various forms within the KKB oral context.

Communal knowledge construction

In furtherance of this agenda, community (or communal participation) is yet one of the forms worth exploring as far as the performance of the KKB folktale and the constructing and/or destabilizing power of forms are concerned. It bears repeating that the participation of audience(s), who sing along and interject with additional information, questions, affirmative responses, and objections to certain details during indigenous oral performances such as KKB storytelling, is crucial. As established in chapter two, the audience at any given KKB storytelling session are never passive observers but active participants who contribute to the composition and performance processes. As a result, the performance of the KKB folktale relies heavily on community as these performances are communal in nature and can never be staged by individuals as is sometimes the case in the Akan context where a person can choose to narrate a story to himself/herself (Mireku-Gyimah, "Story-telling" 175).

Within the KKB context, community therefore functions as a performance form that contributes to constructing folktales via oral performances. During fieldwork, it was observed on several occasions that the ultimate contents of the KKB folktales that were recorded were not the results of only storytellers but their audiences as well, as these audiences often contributed to fleshing out these tales through their comments, questions, reactions, and objections. For instance, in "Why the Python's Skin Has Dark-Brown Blotches" (that is, tale #5), which relates the costly friendship between the python and fire which ultimately renders the python homeless and scarred, one of the narrator's audience interjected with an objection as regards the place to which the python flees after his friend (fire) visits him and burns down his house. The narrator obliged, quickly corrected that detail, and continued his narration.

Similarly, in tales #30 and #84, titled respectively as "Sandee Marries Ubɔr's Daughter" and "Why Bibɔrb Don't Eat Pigeons," which respectively relate how the rabbit employs wit to win a wife in a contest and why Konkomba traditional political leaders do not eat pigeons anymore, the storytellers were each corrected by one of their audiences when they stated the wrong facts – the location of an event in tale #30 and the specific type of pigeon Konkomba traditional political leaders taboo in tale #84. On both occasions, the narrators accepted the corrections and integrated the right details before proceeding with the rest of their narratives. This performance characteristic is a common practice in most African storytelling cultures as well, especially in the Akan context, where storytellers are equally sometimes challenged by their audiences and compelled to add the right details during performances (Opoku-Agyemang 117).

It can be argued that all the foregoing essentially make these various audiences at these storytelling sessions co-composers of their oral verbal heritages. Should one, however, require further proof of the above assertion, a cursory viewing of tale #13's video in the repository will reveal that the tale is jointly composed by the storyteller and one of his audience who picks up the narration at one point when the storyteller breaks into excessive laughter and cannot continue the tale. On regaining composure, the storyteller takes over the performance and concludes the performance.

In addition to this, in tales #9 and #70, the storytellers are aided by some of their audiences to compose the concluding parts of their tales when it becomes apparent that they omitted certain details. In both instances, the members of the audience(s) in question briefly take over the performances and eventually conclude the tales for the storytellers. A similar thing happens in tale #71 where the storyteller forgets to sign off her tale and some of her audience generously do that

for her. Please see the concluding parts of these tales' videos and audio recording in the online repository for authentication.

Sometimes, the co-composition is masked in questions such as pertains in tale #49 where the storyteller forgets to mention a character's name and two of his audience request the name of that character. To satisfy them and sustain their interest in his performance, the narrator immediately identifies the said character as "Piigri" and proceeds with the performance. It is instructive to note that when members of the audience ask such questions, they already know their answers. They merely employ these questions as tacit reminders to storytellers to add certain details or elaborate on those details, or to draw other members of the audience's attention to such details. The question posed at the concluding part of tale #89 by a member of the audience who asks, "Is that the result of the reforging?" is, for instance, for the latter effect.

All the foregoing discussions gesture to the importance of community (or communal participation), as a performance form, in the composition and performance of the KKB folktale. They point to what could at best be described as the power of communal knowledge to construct and police the contents and transmission of the oral tales of the KKB people. Community certainly plays a pivotal role in determining the ultimate contents of KKB folktales, especially when one takes into account audiences' contributions and even objections to specific details during performances. While at face value, the latter can gesture to the restrictive nature of form in oral performances, especially given that storytellers can be challenged, I must however point out that the reverse is the case. Much akin to what Ruth Finnegan observes about Yoruba ijala chants (*Oral Literature* 13), in the face of objections from the audience to certain details, storytellers can defend the details being challenged or ignore the interjections entirely – as does, for example, the narrator of tale #1 who ignores one of his audience who tacitly prompts him (twice) to describe how ubɔr's

(i.e., the chief's) wives danced to the song that was sung by a mysterious aquatic creature called "kijabakr" in the story.

Clearly, there are no fixed set of details and sequence for fleshing out one's narrative. As aptly observed by Kwawisi Tekpetey regarding the Akan oral narrative called Anansesem, "One cannot speak with any strictness of an Ananse [story], for there is no fixed sequence in the order in which the episodes or narratives … are told" (75). The same pertains in the KKB context. As a result, and coupled with the fact that storytellers and their audiences can tap into this flexibility and co-compose tales, rather than delimiting, a performance form such as community provides flexibility, promotes instantaneous creativity or improvisation, and provides dynamism to enhance the esthetics and enjoyment of a performance. This ultimately points to the non-restrictive nature of this form. As rightly put by Opoku-Agyemang, communal participation and policing of details are not meant "to deny the freedom of the narrator" (117) for there exists in folklore the liberty "for tuning the content of [a] tale to meet current realities, including shared values" (118).

That a storyteller is at liberty to ignore or defend particular details during performances speaks volumes about the flexibility inherent in traditional oral performances such as KKB storytelling. But most importantly, this gestures to the fact that communal participation – and for that matter community as a performance form – does not hinder individual creativity but can be tapped into to enhance tales' constructions and performances. Admittedly, storyteller creativity (or improvisation) exposes the limitations of community (as a performance form) in determining the ultimate contents of the KKB folktale. It appears to destabilize community as a form by limiting its compositional and performance powers.

That said, the fact remains true that on many occasions, storytellers gladly integrate their audiences' interjections rather than defend their own choices of details. Throughout my fieldwork,

I never encountered a situation where a storyteller defended a detail that was contested by a member of the audience. What was the common practice, as the evidence provided in the previous paragraphs indicates, was that a few storytellers (such as the narrator of tale #1) ignored some of their audiences' interjections while the majority of storytellers accepted and integrated the interjections of their audiences. As the observations in these paragraphs further show, some members of the various audiences even briefly took over performances from certain storytellers and helped them compose their stories properly. All of these point to the power of community in tale construction and authenticate my earlier assertion that community plays a role in determining the contents of the KKB folktale.

It will appear, then, that just as individual creativity destabilizes community, the latter equally does the same to the former, and that the latter mostly seems to have its way during performances. But rather than preoccupying oneself with which form destabilizes the other, attention should be paid instead to the storyteller-audience negotiations that transpire during these indigenous performances where storytellers must creatively balance between asserting their creative rights and upholding communal standards. That said, that both community and individual creativity appear to place limitations on each other points to the destabilizing power of forms while in equal measure gesturing to the power of forms to either construct (or rather, reinforce) normative materials or reconstruct such materials or contents anew.

What is more, all the foregoing draw our attention to the interactions between performance forms such as community and their subforms (such as individual creativity/improvisation) in primary orature such as KKB folktales. Ultimately, these interactions prompt us to begin to look at forms and their affordances anew. They set us probing whether forms delimit or liberate the verbal art. Succinctly put, does community (and by extension its subform, individual creativity)

delimit or liberate the KKB folktale? Are forms rigid or flexible? From the preceding discussions and examples, it appears that forms liberate (rather than delimit) verbal arts such as KKB folktales. Performance forms such as community possess inherent flexibilities that allow subforms such as individual creativity or storyteller improvisation to operate and liberate the KKB folktale from unnecessary censorship. This intra-form interaction further productively occasions the birth of other (oral) performance forms – one of which is extradiegetic dialogues.

As a performance form, community provides an important form – that is, dialogue – which ultimately shapes the narrative flows of KKB oral tales. Such narrator-audience encounters as elaborated in the previous paragraphs, which are the results of the operations of community (and sometimes its interaction with individual creativity), introduce dialogic scenes into oral performances that would have otherwise been quite monotonous. Together with the occasional dialogues between various characters in the tales (as often pertains in the canonical genres – and which formal element scholars are often quick to point out in their formal engagements), the encounters between storytellers and their audience(s) serve as another important oral performance form that points yet to the nature and workings of forms in oral contexts such as the KKB one.

In literate contexts, dialogue is usually a literary form that operates in literary texts at the intradiegetic level where characters engage one another in various narrative situations. However, in the KKB oral context, dialogue operates both as a literary form and a performance form, especially when gleaned through the oral performance of the KKB folktale. Within this oral context, dialogue operates at two levels – namely, the intradiegetic level where characters encounter one another in the texts and the extradiegetic level where storytellers and their audiences encounter one another. These two levels of dialogue ultimately give KKB folktales (such as those in the Appendix for instance) a unique textual flow, as one can often distinguish between two

levels of dialogues in them – the one that operates as a compositional element and the other one that operates as a narrative element or tool. The foregoing certainly requires some further elaboration.

From the earlier discussions about the role of community in determining the contents of the KKB folktale, it can be argued that the dialogues that ensue from storyteller-audience encounters during performances are compositional in nature. These dialogues – though taking place outside the actual narratives – contribute additional materials that go a long way to flesh out the actual tales themselves. Since these extradiegetic dialogues are the direct results of the interactions between performers and their audiences during the composition and performance processes, it can be argued that they are, collectively, a performance form that contributes to shaping the various tales that are often composed during performances. That the various fieldwork observations sampled in the previous paragraphs present examples wherein various storytellers accepted and integrated the interjections of their audiences into their narratives is ample testament to this.

The dialogues that often ensue between the characters in the tales that are composed during such performances are, on the other hand, not compositional in nature, but operate, collectively, within these tales as a narrative development tool that contributes to giving each tale its narrative contents – namely, its subject matter, theme(s), atmosphere, and especially characterization among other things. But rather than go into these textual elements, I will stay the course of my present discussions aimed at detextualizing our formal engagements by shifting attention to the operations of these character dialogues in oral performances such as KKB storytelling. This automatically leads to a discussion on the operations of an oral form such as voice characterization, which is

often employed by storytellers to render character dialogues in primary orature such as KKB folktales.

Toward a more oral-sensitive formal engagement

Even though all the foregoing literary forms-, sociocultural forms-, and performance forms-based analyses offer illuminations on the oral tales of the KKB people, their performance context, and the KKB culture in general, they still fall short of accounting fully for the oral context from which they emerge. As a result, a complete formal engagement with these tales requires that attention be paid to the oral forms that are often employed to compose these oral materials. As already pointed out on several occasions in this dissertation, the composition and performance of these oral tales entail more than just the words (that is, the textual contents), genders, and ages of their narrators and audiences. A thorough interrogation of the formal aspects of these tales therefore requires equal attention to the storytellers' oral habits such as voice modulations, especially when they mimic various characters in the course of their performances in order to create dialogue.

Dialogue at the intradiegetic level, as already discussed, is a major component of the KKB folktale. During performances, various storytellers endeavor to integrate dialogues between various characters within their narratives. To do this, they often employ direct speech rendered in the stereotypical voices or idiolects of the various characters, especially the dominant, recurring ones such as the rabbit and the hyena. In the KKB storytelling culture, the rabbit is the acclaimed trickster character. It is often associated with a thin voice and a speech impairment that renders its pronunciations of certain words inconsistent with standard pronunciations. For instance, one might often hear the rabbit pronounce a word such as "n-yaaja" (translated variously as "my grandfather," "my boss," "my master," or "my lord" depending on the context) as "n-yaada;" or a word such as "paacham" (translated variously as "above," "heaven," "top," or "high" depending on the context)

as "paatam;" or the phrase "ntakpateer bu" (translated as "on a rocky ground") as "ntapapeen bu." Such abnormal pronunciations characteristic of the rabbit's speech are often sources of laughter during performances. They can therefore be said to serve comic purposes. The hyena, on the other hand, is the acclaimed unintelligent character in KKB folklore. It is often associated with gullibility and all kinds of rash decisions that are often punctuated by its impatient and deep voice during interactions with other characters.

During performances, storytellers seeking to render the direct speeches of these characters often draw on these stereotyped oral habits or idiolects of theirs to distinguish between their speeches. For instance, a storyteller who is narrating a story about a rabbit and/or a hyena might intermittently break into the thin voice and improperly articulated speech of the rabbit (as does the narrator of tale #43, from circa 01:07 to 01:10 minutes of the video and tale #56, from circa 03:33 to 03:37 minutes of the video) or the deep, impatient voice of the hyena (as pertains, for example, in tale #8, from circa 04:17 to 04:20 minutes of the video, tale #13, from circa 03:30 to 03:35, 03:55 to 03:59, and 04:27 to 04:38 minutes of the video, and tale #29 from circa 02:29 to 02:35 minutes of the audio recording). Such voice characterizations are one of the oral forms storytellers often employ to render character dialogues during their oral performances in the KKB storytelling culture and other African cultures such as the Lunda and Bwile of Zambia (Cancel 178, 221 and 231), among others. This is a major oral esthetic feature that contributes to breaking the monotony of rendering one's narrative in indirect speech throughout a performance. Apart from this, this oral form introduces oral drama into narratives as characters are made to interact with one another and reveal their traits. They are, thus, one of the narrative development tools that storytellers often draw on to develop their characters during their performances.

What is more, this oral narrative form serves as an important springboard for remembering story details for onward transmission. Due to their orality, primary orature such as KKB folktales must rely on the comic voices and speech mannerisms of stock characters such as the rabbit and the hyena, whose speech habits (as mentioned earlier) mostly elicit laughter from audiences (as is the case in tales #13 and #56 for instance), to help various audience(s) to remember certain details from storytelling sessions and then employ such details as starting points to remember stories and also tell them to others. Consequently, voice characterization does not only serve rhetorical purposes during performances but also tale circulation purposes. Most importantly, this oral form contributes to the development of oral narratives in such a way that audiences and story characters encounter one another more directly. The ultimate result of this is an engaged audience who will not only laugh at the characters' speech habits and actions but also experience more intimately the narrative situations being staged by these characters. The ripple effect of this will be the sustenance of these audiences' interest in the oral narratives or performances that storytellers present.

From all the foregoing, it can be argued that voice characterization is not only an oral compositional form used to construct oral narratives but also one tapped into to create an engaged audience during a performance. Here again, the constructing power of forms comes to the forefront: forms do not only construct narratives but also stimulate human emotions – or interest. They can therefore produce and elicit affective responses in and from audiences during performances – as is the case with the use of voice characterization in the KKB oral context under discussion.

The same affective result is produced via the pseudo-rhetorical questions that are sometimes employed to draw audiences directly into the oral narratives. During KKB storytelling sessions, the dialogues provided by communal participation offer some storytellers the opportunity

to involve their audiences in their narratives by intermittently asking them questions that bear a resemblance to rhetorical questions. In other contexts, such as in written literature, rhetorical questions fall under the domain of literary forms and usually require no (immediate or direct) responses as they are merely for emphasis, to draw attention to particular details, or for dramatic effects. However, in primary orature such as KKB folktales, such questions double, collectively, as an oral form employed by storytellers to break the monotony of their oral renditions in order to allow audiences to contribute to the composition and performance processes through their responses. Unlike in written literature, therefore, in the KKB oral context under discussion, these questions – which appear rhetorical at face value but actually function differently, for which reason I call them 'pseudo-rhetorical questions' (or for want of a better moniker, 'oratorical questions') – function as icebreakers employed to initiate – or even induce – audiences' participation by eliciting direct responses from them during performances.

Such questions can be termed oratorical questions in that their end is, among other things, to skillfully initiate physical oral exchanges between storytellers and their audiences at the very time of performance. Oratorical questions therefore possess a certain inherent immediacy that elicits audiences' immediate responses during such participatory performances as KKB storytelling. They create a conducive atmosphere for collaborative performances by storytellers and their audiences on such occasions. Similar to voice characterization already discussed a few paragraphs earlier, the ultimate effect of these oratorical questions is to create an engaged or interested audience who will help drive the communal performances.

Due to their compositional value, skilled storytellers such as the narrators of tales #13 and #14 make it a point to employ these questions to draw their audiences directly into their narratives during their renditions. In tale #13 for instance, during his performance, the storyteller draws his

audience into his tale via this oral form by asking them to assume the position of the characters in the tale. While relating how the hyena deceptively eats the crocodile's hatchlings and runs away, he asks his audience at a certain point, "So when he was being traced, wasn't it natural that the search party would update one another whenever they spotted his footprints and blood?"

As discussed in chapter two, this question essentially invites the narrator's audience to put themselves in the narrative situation of the search party in the tale in order to fully comprehend and experience more intimately the search team's actions during their search for the runaway hyena. The result of this question, then, is an affective response from the audience, who are required not only to answer verbally but also to move from operating at the extradiegetic level to the intradiegetic level where they assume the role of the search party in the story – even if briefly. Ultimately, this gives the audience the opportunity to experience the narrative situation and the actions of the characters more closely. Most importantly, it allows the storyteller to create a collaborative atmosphere wherein he and his audience can operate and co-reenact one of their oral heritages. As it were, it allows them to connect their oral heritage to their present time – a connection that creates what Kamau Brathwaite has described as an "[enjambement] of time/place/consciousness w/in continuums …" (qtd. in Ngũgĩ 75) wherein they operate through collective memory to recreate that oral heritage. In this regard, it can be argued that oratorical questions, such as the one above, function collectively as an oral tool (or form) employed for constructing oral narratives and eliciting affective responses from participants during traditional performances such as the performance of the KKB folktale.

This argument gains further credence in tale #14 where the storyteller employs the same oral form to invite his audience to participate directly in the narrative by assuming the position of the characters in the tale. While relating how a KKB political leader and one of his poor subjects

both scheduled their communal labor for the same day, the storyteller invites his audience to reflect on what they would have done, were they confronted with the narrative situation the characters in the tale were confronted with. As pointed out during discussions on "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," among the KKB people when a person requests communal help (indigenously known as nkpaawiin), everyone is expected to honor the request. In the context of this story, however, two people schedule their communal labor for the same day. This causes the storyteller to ask his audience, "Well, ubɔr has requested communal help; and a poor man has also done [the] same. Whose request will you honor?"

This oratorical question, like the one already discussed, does not merely demand a direct verbal response from the storyteller's audience, but essentially invites them to operate at the intradiegetic level of his narrative by assuming the position of the characters in the tale. Ultimately, the question draws the audience into the narrative, gets them engaged intimately in the narrative situation, and in effect, sustains their interest during the performance. Here again, the invitation to co-compose this tale is indirectly initiated by the storyteller via this oral form as the audience's response(s) will eventually become part and parcel of the tale being composed (as pertains in the translated texts in the Appendix where the various responses and interjections from audiences form integral parts of the tales). All the foregoing discussions point to the constructing power and the affective power of forms in oral narratives such as KKB folktales. Most importantly, the discussions gesture to the portability of forms (Levine, *Forms* 7, 11, 64) and, specifically, the ability of forms such as rhetorical questions to function differently in different verbal materials and cultural contexts such as the situated KKB oral context herein.

That forms operate differently in different contexts becomes even more obvious when one considers the operations of a form such as repetition during the (oral) rendition of the KKB

folktale. In written verbal arts, repetition is largely considered a literary form – and literary critics, especially traditional formalists, are always quick to point out patterns of repetition in texts and subsequently proceed to engage with them at the textual level. In her *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network,* Levine advances a step further by labeling this form "rhythm," categorizing it under the domain of social forms, and illustrating its operations using repeated patterns in various social formations and texts (7, 21, 49ff).

However, in the KKB oral context, repetition assumes an oral dimension, serving as an oral form or tool often employed during the oral performances of the KKB folktale – and other primary orature from Africa and across the globe. During traditional oral performances such as the rendition of KKB folktales, one marked oral technique often employed by storytellers is the repetition of certain details during their performances. These details might often be repeated in the same patterns or with slight variations. In tale #12, for instance, certain details are repeated by the storyteller in the same pattern on five different occasions: five different characters enter a silo to fetch food, see a lamb in the silo, touch it, and the lamb starts singing.

A similar repetitive pattern pertains in tale #8, where two sisters even utter the same words. In this tale, three sisters go to the riverside to wash their clothes. The first sister dries her clothes in the sun after washing them, the rabbit emerges from a nearby bush, and defecates on the clothes. After that, the second sister also goes to dry her clothes, sees the rabbit's fecal matter, and informs the first sister, who then replies: "Tiborbortibor, please wipe it off." After wiping it off and drying her clothes, the rabbit emerges from the nearby bush again and defecates on the second one's clothes again. After that the third sister goes to dry her clothes, also sees the rabbit's fecal matter, and informs her sister, who then also replies: "Dandarwee, please wipe it off."

Again, in tale #3, the narrator captures the near-death encounter between two friends (a hyena and a billy goat) and a hungry lion thus:

"Uchinn [i.e., the lion] turned angrily, with pointed claws, toward takɔ [the hyena]. Takɔ got the message: he turned his back to uchinn and the latter tore off some flesh and gave it to uŋɔja [the billy goat]. The latter dipped the flesh in the honey they had harvested and gave it to uchinn. On leaking it and tasting its sweetness, uchinn immediately swallowed the meat …"

A few sentences later, the same pattern is repeated by the storyteller thus: "Uchin turned toward takɔ, the latter turned his back, and uchinn tore off some flesh again and gave it to uŋɔja. The latter again dipped it in honey and gave it to uchinn."

It can be observed from the foregoing examples that during KKB storytelling, certain verbal patterns – and even specific sentences and words – are sometimes repeated on different occasions by storytellers. These repetitions become even more apparent in stories that have musical interludes as these interludes are often repeated several times in the course of the tales. Sometimes these repeated musical interludes have the same wordings (as pertains in tales #1, #5, #12, #19, and #22 among others) while on other occasions, they are repeated with slight variations (as found in tales #4, #17, #47, #50, and #74 among others).

It is instructive to note that these repetitions are a deliberate oral technique employed by storytellers for the benefit of their audiences. Due to their orality, traditional orature such as KKB oral tales rely on memory for survival. As a result, it is often important to employ oral forms that can help audiences pick up details and memorize them easily. One of such oral forms is the oral repetition of specific details, including musical interludes, during performances. In the course of oral narratives, repeated details are bound to be memorized and used as springboards for

remembering entire tales for onward retellings. In this regard, repetition is as much an oral form as it is a literary form. In primary orature such as KKB folktales, therefore, it possesses the plurality that is characteristic of most forms – it operates both at the textual level and the oral context from which the KKB folktale emerges. That said, it can be argued that its textual manifestation is only a by-product of its oral manifestation since the necessity to employ this form in primary orature stems from the orality of these verbal materials. It bears repeating, then, that repetition functions more as an oral compositional tool employed to construct tales orally for easy memorization and onward transmission, than as a literary form, in the KKB oral context under discussion. Be that as it may, whether being considered as a literary form, an oral form, or both, repetition remains, within the KKB folktale and its context, an important tool for developing plots orally, as it provides the opportunity to add and connect various episodes and characters' actions in one's narrative.

This ultimately gestures, again, to the constructing power of forms and their ability to build not just verbal materials but whole heritages such as the oral tales of the KKB people that depend on repeated telling(s) and retellings of tales across generations and times for survival. During such repeated telling(s) and retellings, variants get created, passed down, and recreated, thereby ensuring that this oral heritage remains active and contemporarily relevant at each point in history. That new tales emerge through these repetitions is not only proof that forms construct but also that forms destabilize. Whenever new tales or variants are created from old ones at each oral repetition (or retelling) of tales, the result is that old contents become destabilized by new contents. The new destabilizes the old in order to register its presence. This authenticates my earlier argument that forms are double-edged: they construct and/or destabilize – not just verbal materials but whole systems, institutions, ideologies, and heritages such as the oral heritage of the KKB people, especially their folktales.

Most importantly, all the foregoing discussions on the operations of repetition within the KKB oral context point to the fact that forms are not only flexible and timeless, but that they can sometimes impose their flexibility and timelessness on the verbal materials, heritages, systems, institutions, and ideologies that they construct or destabilize – a case in point being the KKB oral heritage under discussion herein. To this extent, forms have no boundaries, in terms of time and space. They can spread across diverse verbal materials, generations, and cultural contexts, and assume different affordances in different contexts and times (Levine, *Forms* 7, 11, 64). This is why it is imperative to continue probing the workings of forms in different contexts and verbal art forms across the globe in order to continue to gain as comprehensive as possible insights into what forms are, what they do, and what they can and cannot do.

4.2 Conclusion

As evidenced by all the preceding discussions, there are diverse forms at work in oral performances, especially in the performance of primary orature such as KKB oral tales. These forms range from literary or textual forms to sociocultural, performance, and oral forms. All of them offer diverse illuminations on the nature and workings of forms and therefore deserve equal attention in any formal engagement.

From all the discussions in this chapter, it is obvious that literary forms abound in KKB tales and help in diverse ways to illuminate the subject matters and themes of these tales. As pointed out already, in a tale such as "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist," literary forms such as synecdoche, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, and sarcasm, among others, are employed to develop the theme of self-exile in very graphic terms. Similarly, in "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband," literary forms such as metonymy, simile, and metaphor, among others, are deployed in exploring

the theme of marriage by betrothal in even more graphic diction. These various literary forms, as pointed out already, ultimately illuminate the textual contents of these folktales.

Though highly useful, such literary form-based studies unfortunately fail to shed better light on the sociocultural context from which these tales emerge. As a result, attention to the operations of sociocultural forms such as teamwork and marriage, among several others, within these tales and their sociocultural context is necessary for comprehending fully KKB tales and the KKB milieu in general. Gleaned through these forms, as reflected in the sample folktales employed in this chapter, the KKB folktale and its sociocultural context become more comprehensible to readers, especially those operating from outside this cultural domain.

Notwithstanding, such a new formalist engagement with form is still largely text-grounded and fails to account for the performance and oral contexts from which KKB folktales emerge. Consequently, and as discussed earlier on, a new formalist should equally be interested in performance-sensitive sociocultural forms such as gender, age, and education and how these impact the contents and performances of KKB folktales. In addition, a more oral performance-sensitive new formalist should be interested in the operations of performance forms such as the time for performing KKB folktales, the dramatic aids that are employed during these performances to visualize oral narratives, the extradiegetic dialogues between storytellers and their audiences, and the role(s) community plays during these performances. Such a new formalist should equally be interested in exploring the workings of oral forms such as voice characterization, oratorical questions, and repetition, among others, during such traditional oral performances. As discussions in this chapter have established, all these are important forms that shape the contents and performances of KKB folktales. They work in concert, and sometimes in conflict, to offer better

illuminations on KKB tales, the KKB milieu, especially the oral and performance contexts from which the tales emerge, and the debate on the workings of forms.

It is for this reason that ample time and space have been devoted in this dissertation to exploring broadly the operations of these diverse forms in the KKB folktale and its milieu in order to ascertain how they reinforce and/or challenge certain concepts of form. It is imperative to point out that the forms discussed in this chapter are merely a microcosm of the various forms operating in the KKB folktale and its cultural context. Those discussed herein are just samples aimed at drawing attention to the nature or operations of forms in situated oral contexts such as the KKB one so as to push for the detextualization of our formal engagements. As all the discussions in this chapter indicate, a detextualized formal engagement will ultimately offer insights into the interactions between form and performance and form and orality, thereby making our formal engagements more inclusive and offering more illuminations on various concepts of form – some of which, especially those discussed in this chapter, I shall now summarize (or rather, reiterate) in the next chapter, by way of concluding this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

5.0 Studying form from the margins: toward an oral performance-sensitive formalism

When Plato first floated his thoughts on forms in the *Republic*, he probably never envisioned that they would court so much interest and controversy and transcend so many generations and cultures as they have. From its classical manifestations in his Socratic dialogues to date, the concept of form has evolved remarkably, broadening our comprehension of what forms are, could be, could do, can, and cannot do. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the term has been defined, undefined, redefined, and applied in different disciplines, thus prompting scholars such as Kramnick and Nersessian to argue that "no single discipline or field-specific concept [can assume] absolute … priority over others" (652).

In formalism, the term has been broadened from its classical abstractions in Plato's *Republic* (Books 5-7) – where "forms are (the) intelligible but not visible" (202) ideal beings, shapes, or ideas from which every human concept, quality, system, object, and shape, among other things, draws its existence – to its somewhat concrete linguistic inclinations in traditional formalisms such as Russian Formalism, New Criticism, and Explication de Texte, among others, which regard form as the linguistic tools or devices employed by artists to construct verbal arts (Lemon and Reis 86-87; Margolin 815; Jakobson, "Modern Russian Poetry" 62; Bressler 50). In more liberal formalisms such as the Chicago Criticism, Moral Formalism, and New Formalism, the moniker assumes an even broader character. As evidenced by the discussions in chapter one, these strands adopt a pluralist approach to form, in that they regard forms not only as the linguistic structures operating in texts, but also as the social, cultural, political, and all other ordering or "… organizing principles that encounter one another inside as well as outside of the literary text"

(Levine, *Forms* 15). Thus, in modern formalism, especially New Formalism, scholars such as Theile have argued, among other things, that "a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective" (17; qtd. in Dinkler 4).

Adopting this modern, broadened, pluralist concept of form as its theoretical framework, this dissertation has explored at length the various literary, sociocultural, oral, and performance forms operating in the textual contents and oral performance context of the oral tales of the KKB people of Ghana. The dissertation has made the argument that despite the broadened, pluralist character form assumes in modern formalism, there still exists a knowledge gap occasioned by the overconcentration of studies in form and its affordances on written literature and the textual contents of unwritten literature, thereby resulting in an increasing neglect of the oral performance contexts from which oral works such as KKB folktales and others of similar properties across the globe emerge.

Operating from the margins, the study has employed the oral tales of the KKB people as a case study to explore the nature and workings of forms in minor, situated oral contexts such as the KKB one. Discussions on the various forms explored herein have not only reinforced certain concepts of forms but also offered illuminations on how some forms operate in orality and performance in oral cultures such as the KKB one. Among other things, the discussions have reinforced the likes of Levine's postulation that forms travel and assume different affordances in different verbal and cultural contexts. Forms can 'transgress' materials, times, spaces, and cultures and be reconfigured in remarkable ways to meet local needs. These mobility and reconfiguration tendencies (of forms) somewhat find authentication in Neumann and Nünning's assertion that "The journeys of theories are characterised by selective appropriations, productive

misunderstandings and discontinuous translations according to historical and local circumstances" (5). Edward Said, before them, made similar assertions that "Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel" (226) and that when a theory or an idea meets receptivity, it gets "transformed by its new uses, its new position in [the] new time and place" (227). The discussions in this dissertation, especially in chapter four, have essentially affirmed these scholars' postulations, as they have confirmed that – like theories or concepts – when forms travel, they never remain the same but adapt to suit their host materials and cultures.

These discussions have particularly drawn on the co-existence and collaboration between various normative genre categories such as prose, poetry, and drama in KKB folktales and the collaboration between forms such as voice characterization and dramatic oral aids during the oral performances of KKB folktales to argue that when forms travel, they can adapt to situated cultural needs by working in harmony to construct verbal arts and various human experiences and constructs. Most importantly, the discussions have offered a counterbalance to Levine's proposal that forms be regarded as working "not in concert" ("Strategic Formalism" 633) by proposing that forms be equally regarded as working in harmony sometimes to construct verbal arts and the perceptions, institutions, traditions, and systems, among other things, that those verbal materials foster or mirror.

Consequently, my approach to forms in this dissertation has been pluralist in nature: I have sought, throughout the discussions on the operations of forms in primary orature such as KKB folktales, to gesture to the constructing and destabilizing (or sometimes demolishing) power of forms. From the discussions on the operations of some literary forms in "Why the Wasp Has a Tiny Waist" and "Lalaachi and Her Shapeshifting Husband" to the operations of sociocultural forms such as teamwork and marriage in these tales to the operations of other sociocultural forms

such as gender, age, and education in the oral performances of these tales and the others explored herein, I have endeavored to demonstrate the power of forms to construct and/or destabilize – or sometimes completely destroy – verbal contents, perceptions, behaviors, traditional practices, whole institutions such as marriage, and several other aspects of the human experience.

From such discussions have also emerged other affordances of forms such as form's activist role in resisting oppressive regimes (such as patriarchy, oppressive marriages, and age and gender binaries, among others) through the construction of new narratives, traditions, and systems to reflect modern trends. This activism, thus, thrives on form's ability to destabilize and (re)construct verbal contents, perceptions, institutions, traditions, and systems, among other things. However, its destabilizing and constructing powers are not limited to verbal contents and sociocultural formations. Forms can equally destabilize other forms, as Levine has helpfully pointed out (*Forms* 7). Most importantly, forms can destabilize themselves without being acted upon by other forms – as pointed out in chapter four regarding the self-destabilizing nature of a performance form such as time within the KKB milieu discussed in this study.

What is more, forms can give rise to other forms. As discussed in chapter four, oral forms such as oratorical questions have the ability to induce communal participation during performances. Such communal participation then places community at the center of performances as storytellers and their audiences collaborate to compose and co-compose tales. I have already discussed and demonstrated at length (in that chapter) the power of community in determining the ultimate contents of KKB folktales. So I will only add here, as far as the present discussion on the ability of forms to give rise to other forms is concerned, that communal participation in turn gives rise to other performance forms such as the extradiegetic dialogues that ensue between storytellers and their audiences, which ultimately contribute to giving primary orature such as KKB folktales

their unique textual flows. As already established in chapter four, such extradiegetic dialogues, thus, contribute to constructing the contents of KKB folktales and the ideologies, traditions, institutions, structures, and systems, among other things, promoted in them and through them.

While the foregoing assertion regarding the power of community to determine the ultimate contents of KKB folktales might gesture to the constraining nature of forms, I should reiterate the argument that I made in chapter four to the effect that community (as a form) does not place restrictions on the contents and performance of the KKB folktale (Opoku-Agyemang 117 and 118). As discussed in that chapter, community possesses a certain inherent flexibility that allows its subform (that is, individual creativity) to operate. Thus, it bears reinforcing the assertion that forms are flexible and that they can be circumvented when the need arises. Most importantly, the preceding and the discussions on this in chapter four point to the fact that forms cannot only give rise to other forms, they can also possess subforms that can work against them to limit their powers or operations. Thus, forms can liberate verbal arts rather than delimit them – especially primary orature such as KKB folktales.

From all the discussions in this dissertation, and of course the other numerous studies in form in literary scholarship, it can be concluded that forms possess endless possibilities. What they are and can do are endless. They can operate in diverse materials and contexts and offer remarkable illuminations on themselves, various creative arts, and various cultures. It is therefore imperative to end this dissertation with the call for more engagements with form in diverse materials – be they written, oral, or visual – and from diverse cultural contexts, especially from oral, situated, marginal ones such as the KKB one explored in this dissertation. Such diverse formal engagements will not only contribute to our decolonization efforts, the decentralization of knowledge, and the detextualization of studies in form, but will also continue to reinforce and offer new insights into

various concepts of form and how they could be applied productively in various cultural contexts and materials.

As far as my new formalist discussions on the KKB oral context in this dissertation are concerned, it is clear that when formalism and its concepts of form are migrated to oral situated contexts such as this KKB one, they need to be expanded to rope in the interactions between form and orality and form and performance in order to fully account for the oral and performance-sensitivity of such oral literatures as KKB folktales. Hence, my argument in this dissertation has been that our studies in form should not continue to overconcentrate on written literature at the expense of "orature and performative arts" (Phalafala 202). Neither should our formal engagements with orature be limited to drawing on the textual contents of oral works to understand their poetics and cultural contexts. Equal attention should be paid to the illuminations these oral works and their poetics offer directly on the nature and workings of forms in oral, marginal contexts such as the KKB one and other similar ones across the globe. Such a comprehensive approach to studying forms, it bears summing up, will ultimately contribute great insights from the margins of the literary canon that will further advance our understanding of forms and their operations in verbal arts and their contexts – as this dissertation has done, I hope, using the KKB oral context.

APPENDIX

Sample English translations of KKB folktales

Tale #2: Sandee pays for stealing ubɔr's ram

(As narrated by Binkpetaab Baabayii in Chagbaan on 24/03/2022)

Introduction

The following story details one of the rare moments in Konkomba folklore when the rabbit, who is the acclaimed trickster character, suffers at the hands of other characters. In this story, his cunny nature gets him into trouble with the firefly and the leader of his community. According to the story, in the midst of famine, the firefly shares with the rabbit a secret that will enable them to feed their families. However, the rabbit tries to pull a fast one on the firefly so the latter abandons him in the bush. Wandering in the bush alone, the rabbit ends up in their community leader's house, eventually steals his goat, and is punished as a result.

Story

(You may access the oral performance via https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/e4b0ab2a-5efa-4554-b740-ebf082c7525a or the QR code below.)

"Famine once broke out in a certain land," Baabayii starts her story without the usual opening formality of announcing her intent to tell the story and eliciting a response from her audience.[1] She then continues as follows: In this land lived two good friends – sandee and naapilmoon. At night, naapilmoon would usually go hunting for food. With the aid of his light, he would discover wild guinea fowl eggs and take them home to feed his family.

One day, sandee visited his friend and realized that naapilmoon and his family had eaten eggs. Sandee inquired: "My friend, where did you find these eggs to feed your household?" In reply, naapilmoon told his friend that at night, he went out in search of food for his family and that with the aid of his light, he would usually find wild guinea fowl eggs and collect them for his family's consumption. Sandee got interested and told his friend to call him later that night when he was going food-hunting again so that he could tag along. Naapilmoon agreed.

At nightfall, naapilmoon called sandee and the two set off for the bush. The former generously used his light to show the latter the way so it was easy for sandee to tag along. The two went deep into the bush and finally arrived in the area naapilmoon usually found the wild guinea fowl eggs. He flashed his light and they found the first collection of eggs. Sandee immediately called dibs on the eggs, so his friend allowed him to have them. After a while, naapilmoon found another set of eggs, whereupon sandee called dibs on them as well. This continued throughout their food-hunting expedition that night.

At a point, naapilmoon asked his friend: "Have you had enough?" His friend responded in the affirmative. Naapilmoon then told his friend that it was time they returned home. On saying this, he took off as fast as he could and left sandee behind. Sandee yelled after his friend, begging him to stop and collect some of the eggs. However, his friend would not listen. Left without naapilmoon's light to guide him home, sandee wandered in the dark and ended up in ubɔr's house.

On entering the house, sandee told ubɔr that he had brought him a gift from his hunting expedition. According to him, he was aware of the toll the famine had taken on families; hence his decision to bring ubɔr those eggs to enable him to feed his children. Ubɔr happily received the eggs and gave them to his wives to cook.

When the eggs were cooked, one of ubɔr's wives served her child. Sandee drew closer to the child and attempted to take the egg. The child started crying. Sandee immediately feigned ignorance and said: "Typical of children! You've been given an egg to eat; why are you crying?" But the reality was that he attempted to pick the child's egg; so the child was crying in protest.

Ubɔr soon realized what was happening, nodded his head, and placed unoon near the child. The next time sandee made an attempt to pick the child's egg, he got stung by unoon. Sandee fell over, started rolling on the ground and kicking all over the place in pain while shouting: "Even though ubɔr's mother died in the dry season, I'm mourning (for) her this rainy season." *(The storyteller repeats this three times while simultaneously demonstrating with raised hands and bending over her upper body – as shown below.*

On the third occasion, her audience join in, and all break into laughter at the end. After this, Baabayii resumes her rendition as follows:)

Sandee was in trouble! But after rolling, kicking, and shouting for a while, he regained his composure. He then decided to give his share of the cooked eggs to ubɔr and set off homeward. However, the mischievous sandee didn't go home directly. Ubɔr had a backyard maize farm where he usually tied his sheep. In retaliation for what ubɔr did to him, sandee decided to steal one of his rams. On reaching home, he killed the ram and feasted on it with his family to placate his anger.

The next day ubɔr couldn't find one of his rams so he sent word round the village that his ram had disappeared from his sheep-pen. No one owned up so ubɔr concluded that sandee must have stolen the ram. He subsequently summoned the entire community to his palace and confronted sandee. The latter refuted the allegation, insisting that he knew nothing about the lost animal. Ubɔr allowed the matter to rest and told the community to return the next day and help him roof one of his rooms. At that point, ubɔr noticed that sandee had a hat on so he instructed him to take it off as a mark of respect for his kinaakook.[2] But sandee refused. Ubɔr therefore asked everyone to don a hat when returning the next day.

The following day, the entire community gathered at the palace again. Everyone wore a hat, save sandee who had two hats on. When all had assembled, ubɔr ordered everyone to take off his or her hat. All obliged, including sandee – who took off only one of the two hats. All efforts to get him to take off the second hat proved futile, as sandee argued that since everyone took off one hat, it was only fair that he took off only one hat as well. Sandee had his way again.

The roofing of ubɔr's room eventually commenced. When the roofing was almost done, sandee – who happened to be the only one who could knot the ndipinju – was asked to climb and knot it. While sandee was at it, ubɔr contracted a whirlwind to blow off sandee's hat. This disoriented sandee and he hit his head against the pot he was about to suspend over the ndipinju. Unfortunately, one of the broken pieces of the pot got stuck in the middle of his head. That's why to date, the rabbit has a mark in the mid-scalp region of his head.

(On hearing this, the audience variously respond, "M-ennn! M-hm! Ooooo! Mbo mbo mbo mbo …!" to indicate that they've enjoyed and learned something from Baabayii's tale. All laugh and clap for her.)

Notes

1. In the Konkomba storytelling culture, one can plunge straight into his or her story without seeking permission in the form of announcing an intent to tell the story and receiving permission in the form of a response from the audience. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, or if the storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one.

2. In the Konkomba culture, and the Ghanaian culture in general, it is rude for one to don a hat in the presence of an elder. When entering ubɔr's palace, therefore, irrespective of whom one is, the person will have to take off the hat. This is why ubɔr orders sandee to take off his hat in this story.

A glossary of Likpakpaln words

kinaakook: a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubɔr's palace, kinaakook usually has a stage or a raised platform where ubɔr sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. Thus, kinaakook can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, kinaakook can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for ubɔr or the authority of ubɔr. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that "Kinaakook has spoken" – meaning, "Ubɔr has spoken."

naapilmoon: Likpakpaln word for a firefly.

ndipinju: the knotted topmost part of the roof (usually thatch) of a spherical room. The roof is typically conically shaped. The vertex of the roof is usually skillfully tied to give the roof a nice, pointed tip like that of a cone. The fine-tuning of the vertex therefore requires a lot of skill; so not everyone can do it. The skill is largely passed on from father to son or through apprenticeship. After tying the vertex, a hollow metal piece, a pot, or even a calabash without a base covering may be suspended over it. In the case of this story, a clay pot without a base covering is given to sandee to suspend over the vertex.

sandee: Likpakpaln word for a rabbit, bunny, or hare. Sandee is the wisest and trickster character in Konkomba folklore. It is notorious for often using its cunning and witty nature to deceive other characters or wriggle its way out of difficult situations.

ubɔr: the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubɔr is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise. Thus, Konkombas practice the patrilineal system of inheritance.

unoon: Likpakpaln word for a scorpion. Unoon is one of several heteronyms in Likpakpaln. When pronounced with a falling intonation, it refers to a bird. But when pronounced with a rising intonation, it refers to a scorpion – as pertains in this story. The plural form is inoon.

Tale #5: Why the python's skin has dark-brown blotches

(As narrated by Wumbein in Chakping on 16/03/2022)

Introduction

The following story is one of many, in Konkomba folklore, that seek to offer insights into why a python's skin is multi-colored. In this story, the storyteller relates the costly friendship between a

python and fire, which ultimately results in the former's house being gutted by fire, forcing him to flee to the riverside. Worst of all, the fire incident leaves the python forever scarred and multi-colored.

Story

(You may access the oral performance via https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/07c792f9-6514-40e5-b832-007e4c1fad4c or the QR code below.)

"There once lived a wild creature," Wumbein commences his story without the usual opening formality of announcing his intent to tell the story.[1]

"Ehen!" *(Some audience respond amid unintelligible chatter to assure the storyteller that they're paying attention to him.)* Wumbein continues:

The creature was known as ujuun. He used to visit his friend ŋŋmii, and the two would usually eat together.[2] One day ujuun invited ŋŋmii to also visit him. However, his friend replied: "Ujuun, I can't come to your house. Continue coming to my house instead." But ujuun insisted, "No! It's only fitting that if you frequent your friend's house, he should also visit you one day."

So, one day ŋŋmii decided to visit his friend ujuun. As he set off, he started singing:

(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in.)

Likpakpaln transcript

Ki cha la'i kuur?[3]

'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama! 2x

Njɔ le yin ma.

'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!

M bui maa choo ya.

'Kan dama dama ye'i – kan dama!

U bui ki m dan na.

'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan damaaaa!!!

After walking a distance, he resumed singing:

Likpakpaln transcript

Ki cha la'i kuur?

'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama! 2x

Njɔ le yin ma.

'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!

M bui maa choo ya.

'Kan dama dama ye'i – kan dama!

English translation

Where to, when it's so dry?

I've seen wonders – seen wonders! 2x

My friend has invited me.

I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

I said I won't come.

I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

He insisted that I should come.

I've seen wonders – seen wonders!!!

English translation

Where to, when it's so dry?

I've seen wonders – seen wonders! 2x

My friend has invited me.

I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

I said I won't come.

I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

U bui ki m dan na.

He insisted that I should come.

’Kan dama dama ye’i – ’kan damaaaa!!!

I’ve seen wonders – seen wonders!!!

On walking further, he repeated the song:

Likpakpaln transcript	**English translation**

Ki cha la’i kuur?

Where to, when it’s so dry?

’Kan dama dama ye’i – ’kan dama! ⎦ 2x

I’ve seen wonders – seen wonders! ⎦ 2x

Njɔ le yin ma.

My friend has invited me.

’Kan dama dama ye’i – ’kan dama!

I’ve seen wonders – seen wonders!

M bui maa choo ya.

I said I won’t come.

’Kan dama dama ye’i – kan dama!

I’ve seen wonders – seen wonders!

U bui ki m dan na.

He insisted that I should come.

’Kan dama dama ye’i – ’kan damaaaa!!!

I’ve seen wonders – seen wonders!!!

By this time, ŋŋmii had walked closer to his friend’s house. As a result, ujuun and his wives could hear him from a distance. They rushed to the wall at the entrance of their house and fixed their gaze in the direction from which ujuun’s friend was approaching. Ujuun asked his wives to open the gate quickly and let his friend in. As he inched closer to the house, ŋŋmii repeated his song:

Likpakpaln transcript	**English translation**
Ki cha la'i kuur?	Where to, when it's so dry?
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!⎦2x	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!⎦2x
Njɔ le yin ma.	My friend has invited me.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
M bui maa choo ya.	I said I won't come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
U bui ki m dan na.	He insisted that I should come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan damaaaa!!!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!!!

At this point ujuun announced to his friends and neighbors that his friend was coming to visit him. After a while, ŋŋmii resumed singing as he approached:

Likpakpaln transcript	**English translation**
Ki cha la'i kuur?	Where to, when it's so dry?
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!⎦2x	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!⎦2x
Njɔ le yin ma.	My friend has invited me.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
M bui maa choo ya.	I said I won't come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

U bui ki m dan na.	He insisted that I should come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i – 'kan damaaaa!!!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!!!

Meanwhile, ujuun had retreated into his kinaakook and instructed his wives to get ready to welcome his friend without delay.[4] However, his wives rushed to him and informed him that their house was on fire. Ŋŋmii had set their house ablaze on entering. Ujuun subsequently fled his home to escape the blaze. Since then, the bush …

"The riverside," cuts in one of Wumbein's female audience, prompting the storyteller to correct himself as follows:

… Yes, the riverside has been his home. Whenever the dry season is approaching, he quickly moves closer to the riverside.[5]

"The burns he sustained when ŋŋmii visited him are the blotches on his skin," chips in another of Wumbein's audience.

"Enn!" Wumbein agrees with him and concludes amid applause:

"Ehen! That's why the python's skin has dark and brown blotches."

"That's true; that's true," concurs one of his audience while another one, who appears to be more interested in why pythons now live in the wild, quizzes:

"So that was what drove the python into the bush?"

To this, Wumbein responds in the affirmative – "Yes, the riverside."

(After these exchanges, the next storyteller commences his tale.)

Notes

1. In the Konkomba storytelling culture, one can plunge directly into his or her story without seeking permission in the form of announcing an intent to tell the story. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, or if the storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one.

2. It is a common practice in the Konkomba culture for close friends, especially the youth, to share meals regularly. The practice is often a mark of the depth of a friendship as close pals will usually visit each other's houses and eat together as part of the things they do together. It's a symbol of trust between two or more friends. It also feeds into the Konkomba communal living spirit as this practice ultimately unites the families of friends.

3. This line is a truncation of the Likpakpaln interrogative clause, "Ki cha la ki ni kuur kina?" (transliterated as "Where to, when it's so dry?"). But it can be translated in this context as "Where am I going in this dry weather/season?" Note that the phrase, "Ki cha la" is non-subject specific. The subject is only determined contextually. As a result, in other contexts, the phrase could be translated variously as: "Where are you going?" / "Where is he/she/it going?" / "Where are we going?" etc.

4. In the Konkomba culture, this "welcoming" will often commence with the offering of water, after which kola nuts, tobacco, or a local drink called pito can be offered – depending on the guest's preference or what is available. After this, food can then be served. The guest will either eat together (from the same bowl) with one of the host's children or with the host, if they have a close relationship (e.g., as friends or relatives). The former case (i.e., a child of the host eating together with the guest) is known in Likpakpaln as lisambichur /lisaˈmbitsur:/ (transliterated as "the act of holding a bowl").

5. Here, the correction effected by one of Wumbein's audience points to the fact that even though the individual Konkomba (KKB) storyteller has the liberty to select, add, and/or omit certain details in a tale, the audience can still serve as checks and balances on the veracity of his/her details. This underscores the communal ownership and policing of the development of tales among KKB communities. However, individual storytellers can always agree or object to and defend any detail or details that are contested by their audience.

A glossary of Likpakpaln words

enn! is one of the interjections used to say 'yes' in Likpakpaln.

kinaakook: a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubɔr's palace, kinaakook usually has a stage or a raised platform where ubɔr sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. Thus, kinaakook can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, kinaakook can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for ubɔr or the authority of ubɔr. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that "Kinaakook has spoken" – meaning, "Ubɔr has spoken."

ŋŋmii (also spelled **mmii):** Likpakpaln word for fire.

ujuun: Likpakpaln word for a python.

Tale #14: The communal labor requests of ubɔr and the poor man

(As narrated by Liwallaa Ntakbi in Nasom on 16/03/2022)

Introduction

This story relates how the head of a community and a poor man both scheduled their requests for communal help for the same day and ended up losing their farm parties to a crab. Centered on a Konkomba practice called nkpaawiin, the story highlights the communal spirit among Konkombas and calls for mutual respect and consideration for others irrespective of one's social or political status.

Story

(You may access the oral performance via https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/5c1ddc62-ab74-41e6-9a0c-5dbc0d67c435 or the QR code below.)
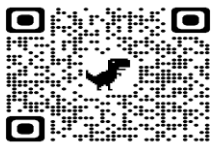
"There once lived a poor man who called for nkpaawiin," Ntakbi commences his performance directly without the usual formality of announcing his intent to tell his story or without seeking permission to tell the story.[1]

"M-hn!" responds his audience.

 Ntakbi proceeds as follows:

Unfortunately, the ubɔr of their village also scheduled his nkpaawiin for the same day. "Well, ubɔr has requested communal help; and a poor man has also done same. Whose request will you honor?" Ntakbi asks his audience directly.

"Ubɔr's nkpaawiin is paramount," responds the audience.

M-heen! *(Ntakbi nods in agreement and continues his tale as follows:)*

On the day of the two ikpaawiin, those who went to farm for ubɔr needed water and sent someone to fetch some from a nearby river. When the person got to the river, he saw a crab that was drumming kiluŋ, so he started dancing to the music. After a while, ubɔr realized that the person they had sent to fetch water had not returned. So he sent another person to find out what was amiss. When the person got to the river, he heard the sound of the kiluŋ and saw the one they had sent to fetch water dancing to the crab's music. *(Ntakbi starts singing:)*

Likpakpaln transcript	**English translation**
Ŋma yi liduln ee?	Who owns this sound?
Tiyamɔ aaduln ee.	Tiyamɔ's sound.
Den deen den deen;⎤ Tiyamɔ aaduln ee. ⎦2x	Den deen den deen;⎤ Tiyamɔ's sound. ⎦2x

The second person also started dancing to the music and consequently failed to return to ubɔr's farm. So after a while, ubɔr sent another person – and several others afterward. But none of them returned. As a result, ubɔr finally had to go there himself.

On reaching the river, he saw all the people he had sent dancing to the crab's music. What is more, he also discovered that the people who were farming on the poor man's farm, which was just a stone's throw away from the riverbank, were also dancing to the crab's music.

So when someone requests communal help on a particular day, do not schedule your communal labor request for the same day. In the end, no work was done on both ubɔr's farm and the poor man's farms. Well, …

"They both lost!" the audience interjects.

"They both lost!" Ntakbi agrees, and concludes:

This is the end of the story.

Note

1. In the Konkomba storytelling culture, one can plunge directly into his or her story without seeking permission from the audience or without announcing his/her intent to tell the story. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, or if the storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one.

A glossary of Likpakpaln words and phrases

den deen den deen: the storyteller's onomatopoeic expression of the sound produced by the kiluŋ the crab was drumming.

kiluŋ (also spelled **kiloŋ)**: an hourglass-shaped drum with round skin coverings at both ends. Known variously as dondo, tama, dundun, kalungu, or lunna across West Africa, it is usually placed under the armpit and struck with a stick to produce music. One can change the pitch or tone

of the sound by compressing and releasing the strings connecting the two skin coverings at both ends. This makes kiluŋ suitable for use as a talking drum in some West African cultures.

nkpaawiin: communal activity. Among Konkombas when one is swamped with work, he or she can ask for the help of others, who would usually respond generously in their numbers provided the "help-seeker" has been participating in ikpaawiin (plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farm work, is building, flooring or roofing a house, shelling maize/corn, cracking groundnuts, or thrashing guinea corn among other physical activities. Such occasions are not just for working but also for communal interaction and bonding.

ubɔr: the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubɔr is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise.

Tale #17: Why the wasp has a tiny waist

(As told by Waja Ngnalbu on 21/02/2020 in Chamba, Ghana)

Introduction

The following story relates how the wasp's self-exile from his community eventually deformed him. It presents the wasp as a loner who refuses to participate in communal activities and thus incurs the wrath of his kith and kin. The story, grounded in the communal spirit of Konkomba funerals (particularly the njeen and kinachuŋ cultural dances), celebrates teamwork and depicts the centrality of communal living among Konkombas. The storyteller makes this clear at the outset of his narrative when he commences his tale with its moral lesson before relating the tale itself.

Story

(You may access the oral performance via https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/6b3a7a76-1fa2-4bdd-8e72-a4959c514428 or the QR code below.)
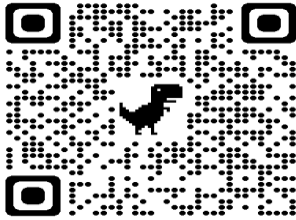
"Do you know why the wasp has such a tiny waist?" asks Waja.

"We don't know; tell us; why?" the audience respond variously.

Waja then continues as follows:

It is important to participate in communal activities with others whenever the occasion arises. Once upon a time, there lived a wasp and his kin. They lived together with other members of the community in peace and unity. The wasp however decided to be a loner, excluding himself from all communal activities. He neither attended any funeral nor participated in any nkpaawiin. One day the wasp received news about the demise of his in-law and had to leave for the funeral. Unfortunately, because he had not been attending other people's funerals, no one wanted to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. Left with no other option, he decided to go alone, carrying with him all the instruments needed to perform the njeen and kinachuŋ: he picked up ligangaln; he tied tibaln around his ankles; he strapped kiloŋ to one shoulder; he slung an axe over the other shoulder; he picked up his uduun in his hand; he tied all the other tinachincheen around his waist and hit the road running.[1] As he journeyed, he sang this song:

Likpakpaln transcription   **English translation**

Chorus

M faa mbiin ee   *I've let out a loud cry*

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa. ⎤2x   *[But] the world stands aloof; he stands aloof.* ⎤ 2x

Gum gum gum gum   Gum gum gum gum (hits ligangaln)

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.   The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Tou tilouti   Tou tilouti (blows liwul)

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.   The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Chakta chakta   Chakta chakta (dances with the tibaln around

                                                                    his ankles)

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.   The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Chorus

M faa mbiin ee   *I've let out a loud cry*

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwaaa.   *[But] the world stands aloof; he stands aloof.*

As he drew closer to his in-law's house, he intensified his singing, drumming, and dancing:

Likpakpaln transcription   **English translation**

Chorus

M faa mbiin ee	*I've let out a loud cry*
Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa. ⎤ 2x	*[But] the world stands aloof; he stands aloof.* ⎤ 2x
Tou tilouti	Tou tilouti (blows liwul)
Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.	The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.
Gum gum gum gum	Gum gum gum gum (hits ligangaln)
Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.	The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.
Chakta chakta	Chakta chakta (dances with tibaln)
Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.	The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.
Gang galaang ga	Gang galaang ga (hits dawul)
Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwaaa.	The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

From a distance, his in-laws heard the singing and drumming and speculated that the wasp and, perhaps, his kin were arriving. Some of them remarked sarcastically, in reaction to the wasp's appearance at the funeral grounds – the first of its kind – that: "Bo! Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode." Out of curiosity they rushed out and fixed their eyes in the direction of the singing and drumming. The wasp soon emerged, staggering under the weight of all the kinachuŋ musical instruments he was carrying and playing. On helping him take the musical instruments off his body, the wasp's in-laws discovered that the tinachincheen around his waist had compressed his waist into a tiny size. All their efforts to get his waist to return to its normal size proved futile.

That is why, to date, the wasp's waist is so tiny. Tiin tiin kolb. Maatiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaajatiib aapɔagbem na.

Note

1. "… and hit the road running" is my translation of the Likpakpaln idiom, "le u fii ler nsan bo (ki cha), which literally but nonsensically translates: "and he fell on the road going." Its closest English equivalent is "to hit the road." But because the English equivalent does not capture the sense of urgency and enthusiasm suggested in the Likpakpaln idiom, I introduced this enthusiasm by adding the word "running" from the English idiom, "to hit the ground running," which suggests an enthusiastic start to an activity but does not mean to set off on a journey. To therefore communicate the idea of the wasp setting off energetically/enthusiastically, I had to amalgamate the above English idioms into, "… and hit the road running."

A glossary of Likpakpaln words and phrases

bo: an interjection used by Konkombas to express surprise.

chakta chakta: the Konkomba onomatopoeic words for the sound made by ankle bangles when one stomps the ground when dancing.

gang galaang ga: Konkomba onomatopoeic words for the sound of dawul (i.e., a two-pieced hollow metal musical instrument used to produce music by alternatingly hitting both hollow metal parts with either a stick or the horn of an animal).

gum gum gum gum are onomatopoeic words Konkombas use to describe the sound of a big local drum.

kiloŋ (also spelled **kiluŋ):** an hourglass-shaped musical instrument with round skin coverings at both ends. Known variously as dondo, tama, dundun, kalungu, or lunna across West Africa, it is usually placed under the armpit and struck with a stick to produce music. One can change the pitch or tone of the sound by compressing and releasing the strings connecting the two skin coverings at both ends. This makes kiloŋ suitable for use as a talking drum in some West African cultures.

kinachuŋ: the cultural dance of the Konkomba people. It is a communal dance that requires the effective participation of a large group rather than an individual. Though mostly associated with funerals, it can also be performed outside funeral occasions such as in church, at social events, and at political gatherings among others.

ligangaln: a cylindrical drum with skin coverings at both ends. It comes in different sizes that determine the sound it produces. The big drum (ligangaln-sakpeln) produces bass or a low-pitched sound while the small drum (kiganganbik) usually produces a high-pitched sound.

Likpakpaln is the language spoken by the Konkomba people of Ghana and Togo.

liwul: a local wooden flute.

maatiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaajatiib aapɔagbem na: transliterated as "May my story diminish and diminish and diminish while I grow and grow as tall as my ancestors' wild kapok tree." This is one of the numerous ways in which a Konkomba storyteller can end his/her story. This ending and its numerous variants suggest that Konkombas believe that storytelling (or entertainment in general) has health benefits, especially healthy physical growth. The association of storytelling with physical growth is so entrenched in the Konkomba belief system that it is even believed that when a child engages in storytelling during the daytime – for

Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings after supper – he or she will have stunted growth.

njeen: a procession. Normally kinachuŋ commences with a procession; but this is not a hard and fast rule.

nkpaawiin: a communal activity. Among Konkombas when one is swamped with work, he or she can ask for the help of others, who would usually respond generously in their numbers provided that the "help-seeker" has been participating in ikpaawiin (plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farm work, is building, flooring or roofing a house, shelling maize/corn, cracking groundnuts, or thrashing guinea corn among other physical activities. Such occasions are not just for working but also for communal interaction and bonding.

tibaln: ankle bangles used to dance kinachuŋ. They consist of small pieces of metal sewn onto animal skin; and are usually worn around the ankle by dancers or performers.

tiin tiin kolb: translated as "the end of my story." This is the most common and easiest way to end one's story in the Konkomba storytelling culture. However, a storyteller can also choose to use this as a prelude to the end of the story and then finish with another statement such as the one used in this story or a statement nominating the next storyteller.

tinachincheen is a collective noun that refers to all the musical instruments or accompaniments – such as drums, rattles, gongs, flutes, bangles, etc. – used in the performance of njeen and/or kinachuŋ.

tou tilouti: the onomatopoeic words used by Konkombas for the sound of a local flute.

uduun: a round-shaped hollow metal used to produce music by incessantly brushing over its surface a small nut-like ring worn on one's thumb. It is shaped like a gong but consists of only one hollow metal piece.

Tale #19: Lalaachi and her shapeshifting husband

(As told by Upiibor Asima)

Introduction

 This tale relates the painful experience of a beautiful girl who refuses to marry any of the young men her father chooses for her and ends up marrying her preferred man, who turns out to be a python with shapeshifting abilities. Fundamentally, the tale presents the beautiful girl as ego-inflated and disobedient, as a result of which she ends up marrying a python and suffers the consequence thereof.

Story

(You may access the oral performance via https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/1147f8e4-0d6a-4af2-b2d4-6e32da8c76b3 or the QR code below.)

"Datiin man," Asima announces her story.

"Daya." *(Audience's response)*

There lived a beautiful girl called Lalaachi in a certain village. She had beautiful black hair and a skin as smooth as shea butter. Her beauty was a common subject on the lips of many young men

in the village and the neighboring villages. Many suitors consequently came to ask for her hand in marriage. Unfortunately each time a young man was approved or chosen for her by her father, Lalaachi refused to marry him, insisting that she wanted someone more handsome and more deserving of her beauty.

One day her father and his kith and kin were hanging out with some guests in his *kinaakook* and the girl was asked to wait on them. On entering the *kinaakook* to serve them *pito*, Lalaachi spotted a very handsome young man in the midst of the guests. She immediately fell in love with him and ran to her mother's room to inform her. Her mother later informed her father about the matter. However, her father refused to endorse her choice on the grounds that the young man was not from their village and that he was a foreigner he hardly knew. The girl broke down and cried for days, refusing to eat. The father eventually summoned her one day and gave her a calabash and told her to wash it without breaking it. If she succeeded in washing the calabash without breaking it, he would then give her his blessing to marry the young man. Unfortunately, try as Lalaachi might, the calabash got broken. But she pulled a fast one on her father by sticking the broken pieces of the calabash with *nkpasɔkpiin* and took the mended calabash to her father. Her father saw the patched calabash but never opened his mouth.[1]

The next day he called his kinsmen and informed them about the young man his daughter had fallen in love with. One day the young man was invited to the man's house and the girl was given to him in marriage after the traditional requirements were painstakingly met.[2] After that the young man took Lalaachi to his house, which turned out to be an anthill in the middle of a thick forest. On their first night together, whilst they were sleeping in the anthill, the young man shape-shifted into a python. Lalaachi became terrified but could not return to her village because of the shame of facing her parents and all the young men she had turned down in her village. She

therefore stayed with her shape-shifting husband and soon became very ugly with long unkempt hair and an emaciated body.

One day a hunter who was returning from his hunting expedition stopped near the anthill where Lalaachi lived with her python husband to catch his breath. Since the hunter was also hungry, he decided to chop some firewood and roast some of his game meat and eat. Whilst lying in the anthill, the girl heard the hunter chopping the firewood nearby and started singing a song:

Likpakpaln transcription   **English translation**

Chorus:

Kichɔk kin gaar kpo kpo   *The axe that is chopping kpo kpo*
Ke nte aachɔkbik ee.   2x   *Like my father's little axe.*   2x

Udaan ti tuk nna Wapu ee   The person should go and tell my mother Wapu

Ke n-nyunyunn kpaln nnyunbun   That my tears have become a well

Ki m lu ki nyu kaa nyi nkpin   From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water.

Tuk nte Waja ee   Tell my father Waja

Ke n-yikpir kpaln ukeenja   That my hair has become elephant grass

Ki m baa ki kuln kaa nyi idɔbu.   Which I use to make fire without collecting firewood.

Chorus:

Likpakpaln transcription	English translation
Kichɔk kin gaar kpo kpo	*The axe that is chopping kpo kpo*
Ke nte aachɔkbik ee.	*Like my father's little axe.*

On hearing Lalaachi's song, the hunter paused and listened to find out where the song was emanating from. Realizing that the hunter was listening, she repeated her song. The hunter then ran home and told the girl's parents that he had heard a voice similar to their daughter's and that the person had mentioned their names in her song, so he suspected that the voice belonged to their daughter who got married to that stranger some years back.

The next day Lalaachi's parents organized a search party and stormed the forest in search of her. When they got to the spot where the hunter had heard her song, they started chopping firewood; and Lalaachi, upon hearing, started singing her song again:

Likpakpaln transcription   **English translation**

Chorus:

Kichɔk kin gaar kpo kpo	⎤ 2x	*The axe that is chopping kpo kpo*	⎤ 2x
Ke nte aachɔkbik ee.	⎦	*Like my father's little axe.*	⎦

Udaan ti tuk nna Wapu ee	The person should go and tell my mother Wapu
Ke n-nyunyunn kpaln nnyunbun	That my tears have become a well
Ki m lu ki nyu kaa nyi nkpin	From which I drink without going anywhere to fetch water.
Tuk nte Waja ee	Tell my father Waja

Ke n-yikpir kpaln ukeenja   That my hair has become elephant grass

Ki m baa ki kuln kaa nyi idɔbu.   Which I use to make fire without collecting

firewood.

Chorus:

Kichɔk   kin   gaar   kpo   kpo   *The   axe   that   is   chopping   kpo   kpo*

Ke nte aachɔkbik ee.   *Like my father's little axe.*

On hearing the song, the parents rushed in its direction and found their daughter Lalaachi in the anthill and took her home.

"My dear sisters and aunts," Asima addresses her female audience directly at this point, "what you desire most, might not be God's ordained plan for you. In life, do not be as stubborn as Lalaachi and get into trouble. If you fail to heed advice from elders, you may end up like Lalaachi who married a complete stranger because of his good looks against the counsel of her parents and paid dearly for it. M tiin ntiin ka mu gur ki gur ka m muun ki muun chaa ke n-yaaja agbinbel ya.

Notes

1. *To not open one's mouth* is a Konkomba expression for silence or failure to utter a word. The expression employs a negated image of a speaking person to communicate silence. Such image-evoking expressions are often employed by KKB storytellers to help their audiences remember details of their oral tales so as to be able to retell them.

2. In the Konkomba culture, the marriage requirements (i.e., the dowry) range from farming for one's prospective in-laws in what is traditionally called lichookuul, patronizing or

drinking at a fee a local drink called pito, which must be brewed by the prospective bride, and buying a list of items for the prospective bride's family among other things. Thus, the road to a KKB marriage is usually long – or takes time – and requires a lot of patience, commitment, and due diligence on the part of a prospective son-in-law and his relatives. The word "painstakingly" has been used deliberately in this sentence to gesture to this lengthy KKB marriage process.

A glossary of Likpakpaln words and phrases

datiin man: translated as "Permission to tell a story." This is one of the numerous ways to commence one's story in the Konkomba storytelling culture. It is aimed at drawing a storyteller's audience's attention to himself/herself in order to ensure that they are listening or ready to listen.

daya: one of the typical responses a Konkomba storyteller elicits from his/her audience after announcing an intent to narrate a tale. It is used to assure the storyteller that the audience are paying attention.

kinaakook: a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubɔr's palace, kinaakook usually has a stage or a raised platform where he sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. (Ubɔr is the political head of a Konkomba community.) Thus, kinaakook can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, kinaakook can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for ubɔr or the authority of ubɔr. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that "Kinaakook has spoken" – meaning, "Ubɔr has spoken."

kpo kpo: onomatopoeic words Konkombas use to describe the sound produced when one hits wood with an axe during the chopping of firewood.

m tiin ntiin ka mu gur ki gur ka m muun ki muun chaa ke n-yaaja agbinbel ya: translated as "May I tell my story such that it diminishes and diminishes whilst I grow and grow as tall as my grandfather's only kapok tree. This is one of the numerous ways of ending one's story in the Konkomba storytelling culture.

nkpasɔkpiin: the milky sticky or gluey sap of the Shea tree.

pito: a locally brewed beverage of the Konkomba people (and a few other northern ethnic groups in Ghana). It is made out of guinea corn. Though it can be consumed as a sweet beverage, it is mostly fermented into an alcoholic drink.

NOTES

1. The ethnic groups mentioned here are only a microcosm of all the minority ones in Africa. See *Joshua Project*'s "People Cluster: Guinean" (www.joshuaproject.net/clusters/181) and Tishkoff et al.'s "The Genetic Structure and History of Africans and African Americans" (1040) for a comprehensive list of the population distribution of various majority and minority ethnic groups in Africa and a graphic representation of the population distribution of the various ethnic groups in Africa respectively.

2. *Likpakpaln* is the language spoken by the Konkomba people; while *Itiin* are the Konkomba folktales that have been passed down orally from generation to generation.

3. See Chimamanda N. Adichie. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED*, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/up-next?language=en#t-1102947. Accessed 15 June 2019.

4. These students include Sarah Bremer, Jasmine Hofmann, Miriam Gramoschke, and Anna Kuntze.

5. By *pioneer formalists*, I mean only those theorists, critics, and scholars who constituted the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (the *Opoyaz*), the Moscow Linguistic Circle, and later the Prague Linguistic Circle.

6. See David Myers' "Formalism Redux" in *Play Redux: The Form of Computer Games* for a similar idea. Myers puts it thus: "… the Russian formalists believed that the work of art itself was the only object necessary to understand and evaluate that work" (41).

7. Jakobson claims that "Although poetry may use the methods of emotive language, it uses them only for *its own* purposes. The similarities between the two kinds of language and the use of poetic language in the way that emotive language is used frequently leads to the assumption

that the two are identical. The assumption is mistaken because it fails to consider the radical difference of *function* between the two kinds of language" (Lemon and Reis 96).

8. See footnote 49 of Gerald Janecek and Peter Mayer's translation of Shklovsky's "On Poetry and Trans-Sense Language" (16) for details on the creative method employed by Alexander Blok and Mayakovsky.

9. In "The Theory of the Formal Method," Eichenbaum states categorically that "The break with Potebnya was formulated definitely in Shklovsky's essay 'Potenbya'" (Lemon and Reis 88), as though Shklovsky rejected outright (rather than agreed or continued from) Potebnya's notion that poetic language is imagistic. Earlier in this essay, in a rather uncharitable criticism that fosters his agenda to prove that the Russian formalists broke away from Potebnya's and other Symbolists' ideas, he mocks Potebnya and Veselovsky's legacy as he tacitly creates the impression that they (the formalists) broke ranks with them because their ideas were obsolete. He claims that "[t]he theoretical heritage which Potebnya and Veselovsky left to their disciples seemed to lie like dead capital …" (83). Elsewhere he even launches a harsher salvo at their legacy thus:

> Something characteristic and significant has happened. There used to be "subjective" criticism – impressionistic, philosophical, etc., presenting its "meditations" about this and that. There also used to be "objective" scholarship – academic, internally hostile toward criticism, a lecturing from the cathedra full of certitudes. And suddenly all of this became a laughable anachronism. The scholarly certitudes preached from cathedras turned out to be naive babble and the critics' meditations a mere empty set of words, more or less clever chatter. What was demanded was a business-like criticism – precise and concrete – that would encompass both genuine theoretical ideas and genuine keenness of perception.

Both pedantic [*intelligentskij*] criticism and scholarship began to be viewed as

dilettantism; both were sentenced to death. (qtd. in Steiner, *Russian Formalism* 25)

Such vitriolic criticisms as the foregoing have over the years created the erroneous

impression that the Russian formalists had to completely oppose and replace a failed Symbolist

intellectual system, which is certainly not the case. As Tomashevsky rightly points out, "… one

should not assume that the new school rejected the entire heritage of Russian scholarship. If it

<u>sometimes</u> opposed Veselovsky's and Potebnya's ideas, it did so merely to emphasize its own

independent stance" (qtd. in Steiner, *Russian Formalism* 27). He adds that "… the new school is

obligated to these two predecessors and that it borrowed many of its basic concepts from them"

(27). I have deliberately underlined the adverb, *sometimes,* to support my argument that there was

sometimes a convergence of ideas between some Russian formalists and Symbolists like Potebnya,

as evidenced in Shklovsky's agreement with Potebnya that imagery is a component of poetic

speech, even though the former goes further to point out that not only imagery but also sound and

other devices characterize poetic language. Thus, if anything at all, there is a marked ideological

continuity from where Potebnya left off rather than a break, as Eichenbaum seeks to suggest.

Eichenbaum himself, contradictorily, echoes this theory continuity when he notes that Shklovsky

postulates that imagery is just "as important as such other devices of poetic language as simple

and negative parallelism, comparison, repetition, symmetry, hyperbole, etc. …" (Lemon and Reis

87). See Lodge 15 for similar details on this.

10. Underlining is mine. I seek, here, to draw attention to this pioneer formalist's emphasis

on literary technique, rather than poetic message, as the measuring tool for a literary work. In other

words, the literary techniques employed in a work and how the artist manipulates them to

communicate meaning are what make the work literature. This same idea is captured by Matejka

and Pomorska thus: "… the specificity of art is expressed not in the elements that go to make up a work but in *the special way they are used*" (12).

11. Shklovsky begins his "Art as Technique" with an attack on Potebnya's claim that "Art is thinking in images" and that "Without imagery there is no art, and in particular no poetry" (Potebnya 83; Richter 775; Lemon and Reis 22). However, as already intimated in the main text and note 8, in principle, Shklovsky does not break from Potebnya's idea; so his scathing attack in this essay is rather unnecessary and self-serving, to say the least. That notwithstanding, he makes very profound contributions (to the debate on imagery) that ultimately advance or clarify the nature and place of poetic imagery in poetic language or poetry, as earlier discussions in the main text indicated.

12. Artistic economy, termed the "law of the economy of creative effort" by Shklovsky in "Art as Technique" (Richter 777; Lemon and Reis 25), refers to the conscious presentation of ideas or texts in simple or unveiled language in order to minimize readers' or hearers' efforts to reach or obtain poetic meaning. This is particularly advocated by Herbert Spencer in his *Philosophy of Style: An Essay* (11).

13. *Skaz* refers to a Russian oral narrative form. The word comes from *skazát*, which means "to tell" or "to say." It is often associated with the short story and the fairy tale. Also, written narratives that "imitate [the] spontaneous oral account in its use of dialect, slang, and the peculiar idiom of that persona" are called *Skaz*. Known writers who have used this are Nikolay Leskov, Aleksey Remizov, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Yevgeny Zamyatin. For further details, see "Skaz" in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (www.britannica.com/art/skaz).

14. See Ladislav Matejka's "The Formal Method and Linguistics" in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, pp. 281-95 for further details on the relationship between Russian Formalism and Linguistics.

15. See *The Holy Bible*, John 1:1-3 for a contextual comprehension of Trotsky's sarcasm.

16. Also see Richter's *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends,* pp. 759-60 for more details on the history and tenets of Neo-Aristotelianism.

17. For more details, see *Joshua Project*'s "Konkomba."

18. In addition to this corpus (of written literature) are numerous scholarly publications or works on the Konkomba people and various aspects of their history and culture. Despite the occasional linguistic and content inaccuracies in some of them – such as Jean-Claude Froelich's translation of the Likpakpaln word *ubwor* as "God" instead of *a chief* or *king* (in "Le *kinã* et le *nwi* des Konkomba") and Tait's inaccurate assertion that the migration and resettlement of a section of KKB "kinsmen" at a new location creates "a new clan," especially when they "discover" a "shrine" ("The Political System of Konkomba" 214), among others – these works offer very valuable anthropological, ethnographic, historical, and cultural insights into the Konkomba people of Ghana and Togo. Tait's "Konkomba Sorcery" and Froelich's "Le *kinã* et le *nwi* des Konkomba," for instance, provide very important windows into aspects of the Konkomba belief system while Hans Peter Hahn's "Die Töpferei der Bassar, Konkomba, Kabyè und Lamba in Nord-Togo" and *Die materielle Kultur der Konkomba, Kabyè und Lamba in Nord-Togo: Ein regionaler Kulturvergleich* offer profound insights into the material culture of the KKB people (of Togo) – and their neighbors such as the Bassar (or Bassari), Kabye (or Kabre), and Lamba, with whom they trade in these artifacts.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned works (and the numerous others available) do not engage in literary studies or comprehensive formal literary analyses of Konkomba primary literature, especially their folktales – not even Abraham Kwesi Bisilki's article, which commendably "venture[s] into *Bikpakpaam* folktales, looking at how this oral genre mirrors the gender phenomenon of the people and, by extension, provide[s] some solid ethnographic data on the *Bikpakpaam* as a people" (349). This has occasioned and made all the more important my current dissertation aimed at engaging comprehensively with forms and their affordances in Konkomba folktales and their oral performance context in order to shed formal illuminations on the nature and operations of forms in these folktales and their milieu. That said, the foregoing does not in any way detract from these existing works' worth as they have certainly earned their places in anthropological, ethnographic, sociolinguistic, and historical scholarship – as well as the ever-increasing secondary literature on the KKB people. The list of these publications is inexhaustible; but, in addition to those already highlighted, the following are some noteworthy ones:

• Aba Brew-Hammond's *Folktales as Source Material for Children Stories: A Retelling of Some Northern Tales*;

• Hans Peter Hahn's "Zur Siedlungsweise verschiedener Ethnien in Nord-Togo;"

• Jean-Claude Froelich's "Les Konkomba du Nord-Togo" and *La Tribu Konkomba du Nord Togo*;

• Joseph Udimal Kachim's "African Resistance to Colonial Conquest: The Case of Konkomba Resistance to German Occupation of Northern Togoland, 1896-1901" and *Staying on the Margins: Konkomba Mobility and Belonging in Northern Ghana, 1914-1996*;

• David Tait's *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*;

• Cliff Maasole's *The Konkomba and their Neighbours from the Pre-European Period to 1914*;

• Benjamin Talton's *Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality*; and

• Henryk Zimoń's "Guinea Corn Harvest Rituals among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana."

See the Works Cited section for the full bibliographical details of these works.

19. See Gérard Genette's *The Architext: An Introduction* for an interesting and elaborate discussion on the classical three major genres of literature. Also see Plato's *Republic*, Book 3 for the earliest attempt at genre theory and literary genre classification.

20. For discussions and examples of various folklore genres and subgenres, see Trudier Harris' "Genre" (511ff).

21. The association of Ananse stories with the unreal (or the untrue) is so widespread in the Ghanaian society that when someone tells an unbelievable story or says something bordering on falsehood, it is often termed *Anansesem* (i.e., an Ananse story).

22. Some storytellers do not wait for any response(s) from their audience(s) after announcing their intent to tell their stories. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been in progress for a while. See the beginnings of tales #12, #21, #24, #49, and #99 for examples of this.

23. Underlining is mine. I seek to draw attention to the fact that our formal engagements are largely text-centered.

24. Along similar lines, Monroe Beardsley defines form thus: "The form of an aesthetic object is the total web of relation[s] among its parts …." See Beardsley 168.

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Research Experience

• **MPhil. English thesis**

Title: *The Generational Link between Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko: A Case Study of a Selection of Their Prose Works.*

Description: The thesis investigates the issues that have engaged the attention of these two prolific Ghanaian female writers and establishes continuity in their thematic concerns, while simultaneously showing a dividing line between the two in their stylistic approaches, with the ultimate aim of demonstrating that both female writers transcend gender issues with regard to the themes they explore in their respective works.

• B.A. English dissertation

Title: *A Comparative Analysis of the Theme of Cultural Conflict in The River Between and Ancestral Sacrifice.*

Description: The dissertation draws affinities and dissimilarities in the way Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Kaakyire Nyantakyi explore the theme of cultural conflict in their respective novels.

• Publications:

2023: "'Ti Tiin Itiin': An Introduction to the Performance Esthetics of the Konkomba Folktale" (At press)

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2. "Translating Indigenous Orature: A Veiled Act of Intimate Engagement with Form and Culture" (Colloquium, the Department of British and Postcolonial Studies, Leibniz Universität Hannover, Germany)
3. "Exploring Konkomba Folktales from a New Formalist Perspective" (Guest Lecture, the Department of British and Postcolonial Studies, Leibniz Universität Hannover)

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Affidavit/Affirmation of the "Regulations on the Principles for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf"

I declare on my honour that the dissertation has been written by me independently and without inadmissible outside help, in compliance with the "Regulations on the Principles for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf."

Düsseldorf, 19/07/2024
Place, Date   **Signature**