

**Narrating Humanity to the African Child:
Deconstructing the Hero Figure in Naana J.E.S. Opoku-
Agyemang's *Who told the Most Incredible Stories*
(Vols 1-5)**

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Abstract

The figure of the hero is central to how cultures and societies construct themselves and articulate a stable fundamental ethos. It is also a site of intense deconstruction because the figure of the hero is one way of normalizing or consolidating existing norms. Yet, within the Ghanaian context, virtues and depictions of heroism are represented through the function of the trickster character. Drawing on Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, the paper explores how traditional notions of heroism are subverted in Opoku-Agyemang's *Who Told the Most Incredible Stories* (Vols. 1–5) through character foiling as a means of creating alternative forms of heroism. The paper shows that alternative

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models of greatness and/or heroism are encapsulated in the values of community. The paper is significant in that it echoes the role of literature in upholding and interrogating ideals of heroism in contemporary Africa and shows how literature contributes to thinking about new forms of subjectivities. Lastly, this paper is significant in how it opens up discussions on the figure of the hero in Ghanaian literature in general, and on the Ananse stories in Opoku-Agyemang's volumes in particular.

Keywords: African child, deconstruction, heroism, humanity, Opoku-Agyemang

Résumé

Raconter l'humanité à l'enfant africain : Déconstruction de la figure du héros dans *Who told the Most Incredible Stories (Vols 1-5)* de Naana J.E.S. Opoku-Agyemang

La figure du héros est centrale dans la manière dont les cultures et les sociétés se construisent et articulent un ethos fondamental stable. Aussi, cette figure constitue un sujet de déconstruction intense, la figure du héros étant utilisée comme un moyen de normaliser ou de consolider les normes existantes. Pourtant, dans le contexte ghanéen, les vertus et les représentations de l'héroïsme sont représentées à travers la fonction du personnage du tricheur. S'inspirant du monomythe de Joseph Campbell, l'article explore la manière dont les notions traditionnelles d'héroïsme sont subverties dans *Who Told the Most Incredible Stories (Vols. 1-5)* de J.E.S. Opoku-Agyemang en déjouant les personnages avec pour objet de créer d'autres formes d'héroïsme. L'article montre que les modèles alternatifs de grandeur et/ou d'héroïsme sont encapsulés dans les valeurs de la communauté. L'article est important dans la mesure

où il fait écho au rôle de la littérature dans la défense et la remise en question des idéaux de l'héroïsme dans l'Afrique contemporaine et montre comment la littérature contribue à la réflexion sur de nouvelles formes de subjectivités. Enfin, cet article est significatif en ce qu'il ouvre des discussions sur la figure du héros dans la littérature ghanéenne en général, et sur les histoires d'Ananse dans les volumes d'Opoku-Agyemang en particulier.

Mots-clés: enfant africain, déconstruction, héroïsme, humanité, Opoku-Agyemang

*How would heroism be kept alive in our aging earth if not by each fresh, young generation that begins anew the epic of the human race?*¹

Context

For children worldwide, a good story is a story with heroes and heroines – stories with inspiring individuals. This explains the craving for the Harry Potter and Twilight series and the motivation for most children trying, without success, to emulate their cartoon giants. What is intriguing, as the opening quotation indicates, is how younger generations assess and reassess the concept of heroism in a changing society. Within the African context, conceptions of heroism, particularly in children's literature, are intricately linked with trickster tales (Ebewo, 2004). This connection, as I argue, prompts an equivocal understanding of heroism, which leaves the child in limbo about the boundaries, tolerances, and realistic expressions of humanity. In other words, there is a niche for realistic prose that gives children an understanding of a particular culture but,

¹ Allison & Goethals (2020). *The heroic leadership imperative: How leaders inspire and mobilize change*. West Yorkshire: Emerald.

more importantly, provides them with models of greatness beyond the mask of the trickster figure (Huck *et al.*, 1987, as cited in Hourihan, 2005). I make this claim bearing in mind Vecsey's (1981) claim that "the trickster in world folklore is a threat to the rules of societal and cosmic order, a paradoxical figure whose antics mock the seriousness of rules, the sacrality of beliefs, and the establishment of rituals" (p. 161). While most studies on the Akan trickster Kweku Ananse in the Ghanaian context (Mwinlaaru & Nkansah, 2018; Opoku-Agyemang, 2018; Tekper, 2008; Tekpetey, 1979; Yankah, 1983) confirm Vecsey's (1981) argument, Mireku-Gyimah (2018) holds the view that the Akan trickster, Kweku Ananse, is "not an absolutely bad character and that no matter how notorious he may seem, he has some good traits" (p. 23). Although she tries to justify Kweku Ananse's irregular behaviour by stressing how he becomes ambivalent about the everyday human experience, she does not dismiss the troubling inconsistencies in his character and how they negatively affect the child reader.

Thus, this paper is guided by two important questions. Firstly, what is the African child's understanding of heroism beyond media literacies and the figure of the trickster? Secondly, what role does literature play in shaping, upholding, and interrogating ideals of heroism? Such a reading is important in terms of how it unsettles the child's psychological allegory in terms of the hierarchy of values that these stories construct. Close to my critique in this paper is Ebewo's (2004) attempt at exploring the psycho-subconscious effect that children and adults draw from African folktales involving the trickster. He argues that some of these stories may influence children's characters and turn them into "hardened criminals and agents of contemporary corruption" (p. 57). Although Ebewo's argument finds affinity with the concerns of this paper in terms of the relationship between the power of imitation and child development, his focus was not to emphasize the need to preserve children's humanity by re-assessing the nature of the

fictional heroes in children's literature, particularly within the Ghanaian context.

In Africa, storytelling is used to transmit values, pass on traditions and codes of acceptable behaviour, and uphold and preserve good social order. To demonstrate the power, influence, and significance of a story, Chinua Achebe asserts that:

...It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story ... that saves our progeny (off-spring) from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us (Achebe, 1987, p. 50).

In engaging with Achebe regarding the potential of the story to define, frame, and shape worldviews, my argument is that the story must be stripped of ambiguities that may hamper its intended pedagogical motivations. The story must alter its guises to evoke specific ethical and philosophical orientations. Such a re-evaluation of the function of the story is necessary as it helps to clarify cultural images of being. Scholarship on children's evaluation of heroism indicates that children confuse the concepts of hero and villain (Ma Varela, 2018; Spanothymious et al., 2015). Part of this misperception is because, more often than not, the trickster figure and the hero in so many of the world's oral traditions are often united in one character. It is this character conflation and the shifting relationship between the trickster and the hero that blur the ethos of true heroism.

My focus in this paper is to examine how Opoku-Agyemang's children's stories reassess the primitivist context in which heroism is constructed. Using Joseph Campbell's *Monomyth* and Jacques Derrida's *Deconstruction* as its

theoretical framing, the paper analyzes the characters in three out of the twelve stories that feature the trickster figure in the five volumes of Opoku-Agyemang's *Who Told the Most Incredible Stories*. Even though all the stories in the volumes are centered on Ananse, the criterion for inclusion in this essay is that the stories must see the trickster character, Kweku Ananse, embark on a journey, go through an initiation or renewal and then a return. The paper is structured into four parts, beginning with the justification for the theories underpinning the paper. Part two focuses on the author selection and plot summary of the selected stories. Part three is a reconceptualization of the idea of heroism within the African context. Part four constitutes the analysis of stories, while part five summarizes the major findings and conclusions derived from the analysis.

Theories

Folkloric analysis has taken different routes especially with the influences from the structuralist tradition. Theorists like Propp, Dundes, Jung and much later Campbell have looked at the systemization of narratives in order to formulate ways to attend to nuances that may be overlooked within the context of interpretation and meaning making. The theory of the *Monomyth* developed by Joseph Campbell in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* describes a number of stages along the hero's journey. These stages in the hero's journey are broadly categorized into three basic parts: separation/departure, initiation, and return. In the stage of separation or departure, according to Campbell, the hero begins in a familiar environment and receives an invitation to an unfamiliar world. Here, the hero, upon invitation, ventures forth on an adventurous journey of discovery and moves into a phase of initiation where the hero encounters challenges and is expected to surmount the trials with or without intervention. The final stage of the hero's journey, which is the phase of

return, is marked by an epiphany: the hero returns home with a renewed understanding of his old environment.

Following the post-structuralist debate about the incongruence between language and multi-perspectival meanings, Derrida's framework of deconstruction seeks to uncover complex foundations with the hope of dismantling previously held worldviews by reversing hierarchies and mastering codes found in texts. Hence, the theory prompts the possibility of alternative perspectives. While Campbell's monomyth helps explain the traits of true heroism based on the outcome of the hero's journey, akin to Propp's narrative functions, Derrida's deconstruction provides a framework for narrative criticisms such that there is a reaction to the imposture of being. Derrida's model helps subvert traditional notions of heroism by resolving the conflicting ideals between the trickster character and the figure of the hero.

The Author

Born on November 22, 1951, in Cape Coast, Ghana, Naana Jane E. Sam Opoku-Agyemang is an accomplished literary scholar, administrator, educator, political leader, and creative artist. Graduating with master's and doctorate degrees from York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1980 and 1986, respectively, Opoku-Agyemang taught and worked at the University of Cape Coast, where she held various administrative offices, including Head of Department of English, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Warden of Adehye Hall, Valco Trust Fund Postgraduate Hostel, and Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. Opoku-Agyemang became the first female vice-chancellor of a public university in the Republic of Ghana in October 2008. She was Ghana's Minister of Education until January 2017 and its first female vice-president in 2025. On the international front, Opoku-Agyemang served as Ghana's representative to the Executive Board of the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in October 2009.

Who Told the Most Incredible Stories is a collection of children's tales that provide deep insight into human life and experience. Specifically, the tales emphasize the essence of African lifestyles and ways of understanding. Given their utility in visualizing the world through narration, it is important to evaluate how the tales succeed in reshaping both children's and adults' minds about the concepts of heroism in the African context, especially as most of the stories prominently revolve around the trickster figure, Kweku Ananse. It is important to mention that since their publication in 2015, Opoku-Agyemang's volumes of Ananse stories have yet to receive scholarly attention. This paper is thus significant for opening up discussions on the figure of the hero in Ghanaian literature in general and Opoku-Agyemang's volumes on Ananse in particular.

Reconceptualizing Heroism

At a glance, folk stories appear to advance monolithic conceptualizations of heroism, particularly with the involvement of tricksters. In striking and very immediate ways, this orientation becomes official, especially when the tricksters are mostly the protagonists in these stories. Hence, the tricksters are ostensibly made to assume the role of ethical and philosophical bearers of the messages in these stories. Kern (1958) admits that "the hero of a book no longer has to be heroic. He may indeed be the very opposite. He owes his denigration as a hero solely to the fact that he is the book's leading character" (p. 94). From this purview, the hero in any folk story can be conceived beyond the trickster to include any character endowed with a concentration of human qualities and a sheer range of signifying practices that are beneficial to other characters and the extended community. This is why the technique of character foiling in Opoku-Agyemang's volumes of

Ananse stories are crucial for framing alternative modes of heroism. In this regard, heroism is not restricted to the jurisdiction of gods and demi-gods transcending the common man in skill, strength, and valor but is a life-sustaining approach to the everyday experience. In the world of Opoku-Agyemang's collection of Ananse tales, I argue that heroism is not restricted to, but inseparable from the passion and intensity necessary to ensure a progressive communal experience. Despite the realities of contemporary worlds, the stories evoke a dialectic relationship between gender, performance, and society, so that the hero is a complete cultural ambassador. This appraisal reiterates Aderoju's (2021) assertion that "the new type of hero is an ordinary man with no special qualities or powers. He does not function as an autonomous unit in society; rather, he represents a particular social group, cultural set, sensibility, or communal ideal" (p. 2).

Analysis

This section constitutes the analysis of the stories. Three stories from three volumes would be analyzed. These stories have purposefully been selected to articulate how the author's considerations of the concept of heroism are expressed. The selected stories include *Kweku Ananse and His Five Wives* (Vol. 1), *How Kweku Ananse won the hand of the princess* (Vol. 3), and *Kweku Ananse's Attempt at Innocence* (Vol. 4).

Not Quite Heroism: Materialism, Gloss and the Outward Trappings of Wealth

Kweku Ananse and His Five Wives is a story about Kweku Ananse and his friend Odasanyi. Odasanyi is everything Kweku Ananse is not. Odasanyi is very rich, kind, selfless, and sensitive. Kweku Ananse is poor and cunning. The only thing the two friends have in common is that they are both bachelors. Odasanyi is bothered about his status and calls on his friend, Ananse, to journey in search of wives. On the day of the journey,

Ananse saw that he stood little chance at getting a wife, looking at Odasanyi's posh appearance. Ananse tricks Odasanyi into exchanging clothes with him, and he lands himself five women while Odasanyi goes home with one. On their return, Ananse's women live as parasites, and they subsequently frustrate him until he kills Odasanyi and his wife and takes over their wealth. After this, Ananse feels insecure about his five wives and takes steps to divorce them so that he can enjoy the wealth alone. The ghost of Odasanyi's wife makes Ananse's dream impossible.

Conceptions of heroism in the African context are usually intertwined with material wealth. Part of this sensibility is because heroism is conceptualized along noble dimensions – an assemblage of traits that represent the best of humanity. And more often than not, material wealth becomes the prototypical symbol of heroism. Such assumptions, as I argue, complicate the child's understanding of true heroism. The narrative in *Kweku Ananse and His Five Wives* carefully dismantles the contradictory ethos of heroism, focusing on the knowledge acquired on the hero's return and the author's technique of character foiling. Arguably, the hero's call to adventure is a call to fix a gap in specific cultural experiences and indigenous knowledge. Hence, the crux of the adventure in *Kweku Ananse and His Five Wives* is a journey to reconstruct meaning as far as the traits that represent heroism are concerned. And we reach this conclusion if we pay attention to Ananse's admonition to Odasanyi at the onset of their journey:

When the two of them met at the appointed time, Ananse wore a patched pair of shorts and a shirt [...] he wore no sandals on his feet. [...] Odasanyi on the other hand wore a pair of velvet shorts which he had thrown his exquisite kente cloth, he had a couple of rings on his finger, a heavy gold chain with a pendant shaped like a stool. He wore a pair of black slippers, the kind which only royalty wore in the olden days. Ananse saw immediately that he stood very little chance of

convincing the family of any woman of his worthiness, given the way he looked. [...] He told his friend since he was already poor, he needed the appearance of wealth to attract mates [...]. Odasanyi fell for the trick and quickly exchanged his clothes for those of Ananse. (Opoku-Agyemang, 2015, pp. 77-80)

Although Kweku Ananse's caution to Odasanyi reiterates patriarchal stereotypes about women being easily allured by poshness and comfort, it problematizes the need to rethink conceptions of heroism, particularly in ways that prioritize epistemic insight on cultural practices and values over cultural prejudices. This discovery guides what behaviors demand admiration. This is why the misery of Ananse's women and the fortunes of Odasanyi's wife become avenues for reconstructing the meaning of heroism. The re-education of these women inadvertently clarifies the relational facade between the outward trappings of wealth and heroism. It is also important to emphasize the fact that the exchange of clothes between the two friends is symbolic for two reasons. First, through the physical exchange of clothes, the trickster assumes the role of the story's anti-hero and subsequently diverts the moral of the story to Odasanyi, the actual hero. By so doing, we reach an understanding of true heroism through the character traits of Odasanyi. Odasanyi is thus an embodiment of the totality of the human condition required for the survival of the new community. On a metaphorical plane, the exchange dispels the ambiguities in the hero's virtues, especially as the trickster figure and the hero are no longer united in one character. Hence, through the careful juxtaposition between the two friends, the author suggests that conceptions of heroism must be weaned from gloss and the outward trappings of wealth, and that alternative models of greatness and/or heroism are encapsulated in virtues such as honesty, modesty, and the values of community. The purpose of this technique is also to redefine the moral attitude of the hero.

What happened to Kweku Ananse? [...] When the charge of murder was laid and his oldest wife narrated the whole episode just like Maanan had described it, Kweku Ananse was so overwhelmed that he could not even deny it. He just stared right ahead of him, paralyzed with guilt. At the suggestion of an elder that Ananse be killed in order to appease the dead, Ananse jumped into the rafters from where he is hanging. (Opoku-Agyemang, 2015, p. 89)

One characteristic value of the hero's return according to the Campbell model is the quality of rebirth, where the hero is expected to show maturity because of the new nature s/he assumes. In this regard, Ananse's psychological disposition when the charge of murder is laid against him may be read as a sign of possible transformation given his reluctance to justify his actions. However, by 'jumping into the rafters from where he is hanging', Ananse denies himself the freedom to live. I argue that although Ananse's behaviour deviates from heroic norms, his character is only expedient in how it highlights a cultural good towards humanity.

When a Not-A-Hero is a Hero: Kweku Ananse and the War Against Community

The story in *How Kweku Ananse Won the Heart of the Princess* is a tale of how Ananse deceives a community of animals to win the heart of Okondor, the King's daughter. Once upon a time, the king of the animals got tired of his daughter's attitude of rejecting suitors and made a decree that anyone who was able to provide a gourd of palm wine and water from the spring would have his daughter's hand in marriage. The animals entered the contest despite viewing the king's demand and the game of exchange as problematic in relation to the princess's worth. Kweku Ananse is quick to realize that he stands no chance considering the speed and smartness of the animals involved in the race. So, he entices them with tunes from a flute he had

carved from a bamboo tree and dubiously counsels his competitors to get it since it would add aesthetic flair to the contest and increase their chances of winning. While the animals were at it, Ananse took advantage of their gullibility and strolled majestically to the palace of the king, where he was hailed and pronounced the winner of the contest.

In this story, Opoku-Agyemang deconstructs the idea of heroism through a dystopian representation focusing on how the trickster expands and advances African communal values from an anti-hero perspective. This subversive perspective allows us to reach an understanding of the essential parts of heroism. Another reputedly important marker of heroism within the African context is rising to fame. This perception superimposes a burden on both young and adult minds to desire celebrity, without respect to integrity in the rise to fame. Thus, more often than not, notoriety becomes characteristically idiosyncratic since it tends to highlight personal accomplishments, particularly with the shifting meanings of fame in modern society. Therefore, fame no longer becomes a fragrance of heroic deeds, given the psychology of heroism within contemporary public spheres. Drawing on the foregoing, Ananse's win in the marriage contest is not quiet heroism because it ignores fundamental loyalties in action and withers the African way of moral rectitude. Additionally, his behavior occasions a systemic shift from social cooperation to self-seeking interests. The African cosmology imagines the hero occupying a place of sacrifice which does not exclude self-fulfillment. Rather, it is self-fulfillment that is beneficial to the community.

Central to the hero's journey in Campbell's proposition is the task of finding and bringing back "something that the world lacks" (Campbell, 2004, p. 120). In other words, the hero's return must occasion the need to reorganize the social order of being in such a way as to inspire positive energy. Hence, we read Ananse's journey to victory as a collectivistic ambivalence

– “a degree of internal conflict one experiences between her or his individual preferences and collectivistic values and norms” (Akdoğan & Çimşir, 2022, p. 19). In ‘The Trickster as an Agent of Chaos & Order: How the Duality of a Trickster’s Identity Allow Them to Represent both the Primitive & the Modern’, James (2020) maintains that:

The trickster is representative of both sides of the coin, his chaos and foolishness are a representation of man’s primitive past, however, his wit and ability to use unconventional methods to produce beneficial results can be seen as a part of man’s transition to the modern and an age of knowledge. Thus, he is simultaneously both the figure of disorder and a scapegoat in primitive society as well as a culture-hero who makes the existence of modern society possible (James, 2020, p. 1).

While I recognize the trickster’s quality of ambivalence given the paradoxes in human experience, the paper argues that although Ananse (the trickster) performs a necessary social function by mapping out strategies for survival in an unjust environment, he (Ananse, the trickster) is a not-yet-hero, especially as he evades the order of things. And we reach this conclusion based on the author’s intentions of envisaging a future course through the dystopian purview. This approach breeds a modest pessimism that restricts our imagination of the trickster figure as a hero, especially as the purpose of this dystopian reading is to help untangle heroism from fame. Hereafter, heroism is arguably infamous in so far as it does not constitute a dubious public spectacle and does not aspire to radical social transformation. Ananse is thus a not-yet-hero but an agent in a civilizing process. Heroism should be conceived in terms of marked impact not simply the corrective influence the trickster’s journey affords. Indeed, although the trickster stages a discovery into new ways of seeing and operating within a given society, the disruption of the rule based process to success

should inform our understanding of true heroism. In other words, at the heart of heroism are the celebration of moral character, redemptive vision and the impulse for the operation of ethical systems that lead to the formation of healthier communities.

Framing the Idea of the New Hero: Kweku Tsen and Meaning-Making in the Hero's Name

The narrative in *Kweku Ananse's Attempt at Innocence* is about Kweku Ananse and his friend, Kweku Tsen. The two were great farmers who had experienced drought after the planting season. In their desperation, Kweku Tsen (hereafter referred to as KT) seeks assistance from Onyankopon, the god of the skies. Onyankopon pities KT and tells him to take two small sticks and tap lightly on the hump of the hunchback for rain. KT did as he was directed, and there was ample rainfall in the village. KT's praises were sung all through the village. Kweku Ananse's discontent and thirst for knowledge would not allow him to rest until he pressured KT to tell him the secret behind the success. KT gave in to Ananse's demand, and he (Ananse) approaches Onyankopon for the same assistance. He is obliged by Onyankopon, and Ananse quickly finds the hunchback and taps his hump. Delighted at the results, Ananse could not wait the three-day period before the next tap. He gets a pestle and uses that to strike the hunchback, eventually killing him. Ananse hides the body of the hunchback on a ripe mango tree and dubiously invites KT to pluck mangoes from the same tree. Unsuspecting, KT aims at the mango, and to his shock, the body of the hunchback comes falling. Ananse accuses KT of killing the hunchback and demands that he turn himself in. A few hours later, Ananse is unsettled by how happy KT is when he returns from Onyankopon. KT tells him the news of the prize awaiting whoever brings the body of the hunchback to Onyankopon. Ananse feigns excitement for his friend, drowns his friend in drinks, and takes the lead to Onyankopon to confess his deed and turn in the body of the hunchback.

The resolution of the plot in *Kweku Ananse's Attempt at Innocence* appears to throw off the regular notoriety of Ananse's character as someone who gets away with wrongdoing. However, his attempt at innocence is arguably a way to re-assure himself of his craftiness and to strengthen social perceptions of him. These intentions notwithstanding, his attempt at innocence divulges a persuasive commentary on the nature of heroic deeds, focusing on the significance of charactonyms as referents of human experience. In literary interpretations, character names function as tools that give an authentic impression of an author's ideology. In other words, names help to construe meaning in ways that clarify an author's purpose in a narrative. Naming practices among the Akans of Ghana for example reveal important insights into their patterns of social and cultural organization. To quote Agyekum (2006), "Akan names are not arbitrary but they are based on socio-cultural and ethno-pragmatic contexts. [...] that there is an inherent element in the name that corresponds with the bearer's mental and social behaviour" (p. 208). Drawing on the foregoing, I argue that the name Kweku Tsen is not arbitrary. It divulges intimations that define the traits of the new hero in postcolonial Africa. Convinced of his innocence in a crime he has been falsely accused of, Kweku Tsen does not hesitate to shoulder responsibility for what he has been accused of. His decision to own up to the crime is because he values peace and also because he was not disposed to destroy the sanctity of the bond he shared with his friend. Kweku Tsen believed in justice and, more importantly, transcending the ordinariness of being. Specifically, /Tsen/ literally translates as /straight/, /upright/, /good/, and /righteous/. Per the symbolic weight of the name and its semantic standing, we get a glimpse of the binary opposition between the two friends as hero and anti-hero, drawing the line between illusion and reality and highlighting the quality of the hero beyond Ananse's usual schemes and duality. Kweku Tsen also reifies a moral need for uprightness in behavior and an emotional and mental need to

understand and come to terms with the values of the community. My contention in this analysis is that Opoku-Agyemang does more than assign names to her characters. She carefully deconstructs the image of the hero beyond the character of the trickster and recalibrates the hierarchy of values that define true heroism. Hence, beyond artistic inspiration, Kweku Tsen personifies the story's foresight by illustrating and communicating ideas about the nature of the new hero. He also disavows any illusion about the makeup of heroic deeds and rejects the over-emphasized status of the trickster as Africa's prototype of heroism.

Conclusion

Drawing on Campbell's monomyth and Derrida's deconstruction, the analysis in this paper has demonstrated that Opoku-Agyemang's volumes of Ananse stories carefully demystify the inherent ambiguity of the trickster-hero phenomenon in children's literature. The analysis of the three stories shows that through the technique of character foiling and the symbolic relevance of exchange, the trickster figure, Kweku Ananse, becomes an anti-hero who remains useful in so far as he highlights the cultural good in the hero. Drawing on the implicit utopian hope in the stories, the paper demonstrates that the trickster is a not-yet-hero who remains in transition and yet is an obligatory agent of a civilizing process. Thus, the trickster is in a state of becoming authentic as far as African conceptions of heroism are concerned. The paper has also shown how Opoku-Agyemang exploits character names as avenues for rethinking heroism in the African context. Given these creative ways of untangling heroism, the child reader is unlikely to misconstrue the hierarchy of values the stories present. The paper concludes that heroism within the African context must be cautiously untangled from material possessions, fame, and wiliness. Rather, heroism is not restricted to, but inseparable

from the passion and intensity necessary to ensure a progressive communal experience.

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