

The Aesthetic of the Dangme Dirge

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Abstract

The Dangme people express their cultural beliefs and thoughts through various literary genres. This study examines the aesthetics of the Dangme language in dirges by analysing both performance and textual elements, focusing on the structural and stylistic features that highlight the beauty of the language. It also documents the structures, components, and significance of the dirges to preserve the cultural knowledge for future generations of the Dangme. The study's data was collected using the ethnographic method which involves studying texts within the context of a particular social group in natural settings over time. The researcher collected data at funeral grounds in Yilo Klo and Manya Klo in the Eastern Region of Ghana, as well as in Adaa and Nugo in the Greater Accra Region. The researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive approach to thematic analysis as the data analysis procedure. The findings reveal that repetition serves as a key structural technique in Dangme dirges, intensifying the mourners'

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emotions and reinforcing their messages. The dirges also heavily rely on metaphor and symbolism as dominant literary devices. They also feature other stylistic elements such as ideophone, apostrophe, and personification. Beyond their poetic richness, Dangme dirges serve multiple functions: they cast insinuations, reflect on the deceased's life, express grief, and highlight the deceased's unpreparedness for the transition to the ancestral world. By documenting and transmitting this knowledge, the study aims to contribute to the revitalisation and preservation of the Dangme language

Keywords: Dangme, dirge, mourners, performance aesthetics, textual aesthetics, techniques.

Résumé

L'esthétique des chants funèbres du peuple dangme

Le peuple dangme exprime ses croyances culturelles et ses pensées à travers divers genres littéraires. Cette étude examine l'esthétique de la langue dangme dans les chants funèbres en analysant à la fois la performance et les éléments textuels, en se concentrant sur les caractéristiques structurelles et stylistiques qui soulignent la beauté de la langue. L'étude documente également les structures, les composantes et la signification des chants funèbres avec pour objet de préserver les connaissances culturelles pour les générations futures du peuple Dangme. Les données de l'étude ont été recueillies à l'aide de la méthode ethnographique, celle-ci consistant à étudier des textes dans le contexte d'un groupe social particulier, dans un cadre naturel et au fil du temps. Le chercheur a recueilli des données dans les cimetières de Yilo Klo et Manya Klo, dans la région Eastern du

Ghana, ainsi qu'à Adaa et Nugo, dans la région Greater Accra. Le chercheur a utilisé l'approche inductive de l'analyse thématique de Braun et Clarke (2006) comme procédure d'analyse des données. Les résultats révèlent que la répétition est une technique structurelle clé dans les chants funèbres du peuple Dangme, intensifiant les émotions des personnes en deuil et renforçant leurs messages. Les chants funèbres s'appuient aussi largement sur la métaphore et le symbolisme en tant que procédés littéraires dominants. Ils comportent également d'autres éléments stylistiques tels que l'idéophone, l'apostrophe et la personnification. Au-delà de leur richesse poétique, les chants dangme remplissent de multiples fonctions: ils lancent des insinuations, réfléchissent sur la vie du défunt, expriment le chagrin et soulignent l'impréparation du défunt à la transition vers le monde ancestral. En documentant et en transmettant ces connaissances, l'étude vise à contribuer à la revitalisation et à la préservation de la langue Dangme.

Mots clés: Dangme, chant funèbre, pleureuses/pleureurs, esthétique de la performance, esthétique textuelle, techniques

Introduction

Societies cherish their unique cultural practices, as Oppong and Osei-Bonsu (2018, p.73) assert. The Dangme of Ghana have deeply valued cultural rites for birth, puberty, marriage, death, and funerals. A body of wisdom is embedded in Dangme culture, which currently faces threats from the influence of Western culture. The lack of proper documentation of Dangme cultural heritage could lead to its loss, depriving future generations of this body of their identity and wisdom in the dirges.

The belief that every individual born into the world must eventually face death (Huber, 1993) is encapsulated in the

Dangme proverb, *gbeno gbayitso kpasaa we si nge he kake*, meaning “death’s ladder does not lean on only one place” (Huber, 1993, p.192). Similarly, Nyumuah (1998) asserts that death is an inevitable phenomenon in the physical world. The Dangme believe in life after death, as do many African societies, and view death as a transition from this world to the ancestral world where life continues. During this transition, funeral rites are performed to bid farewell, honour the deceased, and usher them into the ancestral realm. As part of these rites, dirges are sung to celebrate and commemorate the deceased. Nketia (1955) opines that dirges honour the deceased, convey communal grief, and affirm the interconnectedness between the living and the dead. Nketia further asserts that mourners¹ usually personalise dirges by recounting the deceased’s virtues, social roles, and familial relationships within society. Among the Dangme, dirges play a crucial role in strengthening social bond. They often cast insinuations, blame death, reflect on the deceased’s life, and highlight the challenges faced by those left behind and the potential challenges the deceased is likely to face in the ancestral world. The Dangme believe that until the final funeral rites are completed, the spirit of the deceased hovers on earth. This is why the final funeral rite amid the performance and singing of dirges is significant to the Dangme.

A small body of work documents aspects of Dangme oral literature. These include Accam (1972), Aborchie (2007), Caesar (2015), Dautey (2016), Tetteh (2016), Tanihu (2017), and Owulah (2021), which examined proverbs, folklore, myth, libation prayer, lullabies, work songs, war songs, dirges, and traditional Klama songs. However, in general, these works did not extensively analyse the genres. The study discusses ten Dangme dirges, focusing on their performance and textual aesthetics. It explores how the techniques employed in these dirges align with their themes, thereby highlighting their

¹ These mourners usually comprise family and community members who come to mourn with the deceased’s immediate family.

aesthetic value. The study answers the following research questions: (1) How are Dangme dirges performed? (2) What textual aesthetics can be identified in the Dangme dirge? (3) What synergy lies between the techniques and the themes in the Dangme dirge?

A brief note on the Dangme and their language

Dangme refers to both the language and its speakers. The Dangme people, formerly called *La*, ‘the people of La’ (Puplampu, 1953), are located in Southeastern Ghana, mainly in the Greater Accra and Eastern regions. According to Dakubu (1987), in addition to the Greater Accra and Eastern regions, Dangme is also spoken in parts of the Volta Region. Similarly, Ameka and Dakubu (2008, p.215) cite Dakubu (1966) and Sprigge (1969), who argue that several small communities east of the Volta trace their origins to Dangmeland even though most of them have shifted to Ewe. It is important to note that currently, aside from their main homelands, Dangme people are dispersed across the country and beyond. Apronti (1972) describes the Dangme area as culturally and linguistically cohesive, with the people recognising a common heritage and speaking a mutually intelligible language. Dangme (Kwa, Niger–Congo), has seven mutually intelligible dialects: Adaa, Nugo, and Gbugblaa (coastal dialects), and Many Kloo, Yilo Kloo, Sɛ, and Osudoku (inland dialects). It should also be noted that the people of Kpomi, who previously spoke the Kpomi dialect of Dangme, have shifted to Ga (a sister Kwa language) as their daily language, although they have retained their Dangme names (Caesar, 2013, p.13).

Related literature on death, funerals, and dirges in Africa

Mbiti (1990) argues that in African cultures, death is not the end of one’s life but a continuity that leads one to the ancestral

world; it is a significant rite of passage marking the transition from the living to the ancestral realm. He further emphasises the continuity between the living, the dead, and the unborn, asserting that death is not the end but a transformative event that leads to another phase of existence. Similarly, Okpewho (1992) asserts that death is not viewed as a loss in all African communities. He says in some communities, it is regarded as an inevitable and normal part of life that should not destabilise individuals. Thus, depending on how a community perceives death, lamentation may or may not be present in a dirge. Dangme belief in a life cycle, which posits that individuals live in a spiritual world before birth and transition to an ancestral world after death aligns with these views.

Anyidoho (2002) observes that funerals are more of a celebration of life amidst death, while Nketia (1955) considers funerals an occasion for lamentation. Finnegan (1977) highlights that dirges are not mere expressions of grief but intricate oral poetic forms that link personal loss, communal memory, and the acknowledgement of mortality. She notes that dirges serve as a cultural bridge between the living and the dead. Their performance is evocative, with rhythmic intonations enhancing the emotional impact of the words. These performances transcend mourning, becoming communal acts of remembrance and renewal. Nuobepuor (2019) also notes that the physical composure and nonverbal disposition of the performer, together with the audience's reactions, create an ideal communication platform for addressing issues of socio-cultural importance.

According to Nuobepuor (2019, p.23), a dirge is “a poetic piece which is not only to effect grief and lament but also to celebrate the entirety of life once lived after the occasion of one's death.” Similarly, in Dangme, dirges are used to lament, venerate, and celebrate a person's life after passing. The contexts in which dirges are performed hold significant importance in African communities. Finnegan (2012) contends that among the Akan and Limba, the occasions for lamenting vary from one community to another and that dirges are often

sung around the corpse while it is being prepared for burial. Among the Akan, this is followed by public mourning, during which the corpse lies in state, and dirges are sung. According to Nketia (1955, p.15), as cited by Finnegan (2012), “the actual burial may or may not be accompanied by elegies: among the Akan, it is not, while among the Limba, all normal burials should be accompanied by singing.” Finnegan (2012, p.146) adds that deaths are often celebrated with memorial ceremonies, which are typically accompanied by songs that may include funeral songs and panegyrics for the deceased. Nuobepuor (2019, p.31) argues that the performance of the Dagaaba dirge involves active participation of the audience, and their reactions influence the interpretation and understanding of the art piece.

Boadi (2013) highlights Akan funeral dirges as profound expressions of grief that blend personal sorrow with communal values, emphasising themes of death, transition, and continuity. According to Boadi, in Akan funeral dirges, grief is expressed indirectly through evocative imagery and references to ancestral connections. Agawu (1995) examines how the Northern Ewe of Ghana celebrate life’s journey from birth to death through rhythmic expressions in rituals and ceremonies. Agawu indicates that funerals showcase rhythm’s profound role, with dirges serving as a central feature. He further argues that apart from lamenting, dirges are poetic and musical expressions of grief and celebration that honour the deceased’s life and ensure their transition to the ancestral realm.

According to Yakub and Agyekum (2022), in Nzema, death is commonly conceptualised through metaphors linked to physical experiences such as a journey, departure, return, invitation, prolonged sleep, or losing a battle. They argue that Nzema perceive death as retirement, subtraction, or bereavement, and living in darkness or being lost at a crossroads. Burial is metaphorically understood as hiding or preserving, while burying is likened to sowing seed. A coffin is seen as an individual’s house, a cemetery or grave as a place of rest or improvement, and a corpse as an object.

Literary devices

Literary devices or figures of speech, as Agyekum (2013, p.183) states, “occur whenever a speaker or writer, for the sake of the freshness or emphasis of some point of interest, departs from the usual denotations or normal use of words.” Tetteh (2016) examines the style and literary devices used in Dangme Klama songs, identifying metaphors, parallelisms, repetitions, and other literary devices as prominent features of Klama songs. Prominent literary devices identified in the traditional work songs discussed by Tanihu (2017) include parallelism, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, idiophones, and symbolism. Atoh (2017) argues that figurative language enhances interpretation by evoking mental images in the listener’s mind. Atoh again opines that the use of figurative language extends word meanings beyond their typical linguistic context and assigns new meanings. Repetition is the primary structural technique and stylistic device prominent in the Dangme dirge. Okpewho (1992) observes that repetition is a characteristic element of performance art. He further asserts that phrases and statements repeated frequently are referred to as formulas, while the broader structure of event details is described as the theme, which he considers an expanded form of the formula (see also Nuobepuor, 2019, pp.38–39). Prominent figures of speech in Dangme dirges include symbolism, apostrophe, ideophones, personification, and imagery. Agyekum (2013, p.113) defines a theme as the major, dominant, or central idea of a work of literature, including stories, novels, plays, and poems.

Methods and Data Sources

The study adopted the ethnographic method of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) describes ethnography as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period by collecting primary observational and interview data. Ethnography was

chosen as it allows the researcher to observe how texts are created, interpreted, and used within the cultural context of a particular social group of community (Creswell, 2007).

For this study, the researcher observed members of the Adaa, Nugo, Manya Klo, and Yilo Klo communities at eight funeral grounds to examine how dirges were created, interpreted, and used. Adaa and Nugo were selected because they constitute two of the three coastal dialects, while Manya Klo, and Yilo Klo were chosen because they constitute two of the four inland dialects. Data collection methods included observation and focus group interviews. The researcher observed the singing and performance of dirges at the funeral grounds and recorded them with permission from the singers. Other observations recorded included physical gestures such as the mourners pointing their fingers at the corpses and waving at them as though they were alive. The researcher's observations and analysis relied on textual and performance aesthetics as both are considered essential to understanding dirges within African cultures.

The researcher recorded the dirges and took field notes of what was observed. Following this, the researcher met with three members from each of the mourners in a focus group to discuss aspects of the dirges. The researcher then transcribed the data, generated codes, and identified themes for analysis. The thematic analysis followed the six-step approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). These steps include familiarisation with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and analysing the themes. This inductive approach provides a detailed account of the themes generated from the data, offering insights into the aesthetics of Dangme dirges.

The Dangme dirge

In discussing the dirges, their performance and textual aesthetics were described and analysed. In the singing and

performance of Dangme dirges, the mourners often repeat them multiple times to emphasise the message they wish to convey. In their discussions, the researcher explores their aesthetics through an analysis of both structure and technique, considering both performance and textual elements. The researcher also examines their themes and evaluates the synergy between the techniques and these themes.

Dirge 1.

<i>Nɛ o yaa nɛ ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hɛɛ we nyu kɛ tɔ</i>	You did not carry along bottle with water
<i>Kuma maa ye mo.</i>	You will be thirsty.
<i>Nɛ o yaa nɛ ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hɛɛ we nyu kɛ tɔ</i>	You did not carry along bottle with water
<i>Kuma maa ye mo.</i>	You will be thirsty.

Dirge 2.

<i>Nɛ o yaa nɛ ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hɛɛ we sa kɛ bo</i>	You did not carry along mat and cloth
<i>Fɛɛ maa ye mo.</i>	You will feel cold.
<i>Nɛ o yaa nɛ ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hɛɛ we sa kɛ bo</i>	You did not carry along mat and cloth
<i>Fɛɛ maa ye mo.</i>	You will feel cold.

Analysis of Dirges 1 and 2

Performance aesthetics

The performance of the dirges often involves physical gestures, such as the mourners pointing at or waving toward the corpse, reinforcing the impression that the deceased is present and

attentive. The mourners' body language, combined with the emotive recitation of the lines, adds a dynamic and interactive element to the performance.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

The major structural technique employed in these dirges (1&2) is the use of repetition. Dirge 1 is structured as a single stanza with six lines. Lines 1–3 are repeated as lines 4–6, creating emphasis and unity within the composition. According to Saanchi (2002, p.417), repetition in verbal art forms gives unity to the composition and aids memorisation. According to Saanchi (2002), “repetition underscores the loss and highlights the pathos of the situation, serving as a great aid to mourning” (p. 417). In Dirge 1, the repetition of lines intensifies the sorrow expressed by the mourners, reinforcing the mourners' grief over the deceased's departure. Lines 1 and 2, and lines 4 and 5, are enjambed.

Similarly, Dirge 2 employs a parallel structure, maintaining a synonymous relationship in theme and technique, especially line repetition. Saanchi (2002, p.419) cited Lowth (1778) to have argued that synonymous parallelism expresses “the same sense in different but equivalent terms, where a proposition is repeated with variations in expression but retains the same meaning.” In both dirges, repetition serves to emphasise the mourners' sorrow and communicate the gravity of the deceased's unpreparedness for the journey to the ancestral world and the potential challenges the deceased may face as they journey there.

Literary devices

Imagery

In Dirge 1, the imagery of travelling to a hot land is evoked, with the deceased being told they will need a water-filled bottle to

quench their thirst during the journey. Dirge 2, however, portrays a journey to a cold land, where the deceased is informed of the need for a mat to sleep on and a cloth for warmth. In other words, in dirge 1, the image of travelling unprepared to a hot land evokes the anxiety of loss, symbolizing the deceased's vulnerability without water to quench their thirst whilst in dirge 2, the image of travelling to a cold land without mat and cloth highlights the physical and emotional hardships faced by the deceased. These images reflect the Dangme belief that the ancestral world requires adequate preparation, as it, like this world, is fraught with challenges. Both dirges affirm the Dangme and African belief, discussed by Nketia (1955) and Mbiti (1990), that life extends into the ancestral world. Nketia (1955) highlights that the cultural significance of dirges lies in their ability to reflect beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife, while Mbiti (1990) notes that death is not the end of life but a transformative event leading to the ancestors.

Symbolism

Symbolism, the use of symbols to represent ideas or concepts (Annan, 2017), is a prominent literary device in Dangme dirges. In Dirge 1, *nyu kɛ tɔ* "bottle with water" symbolises the essential support the deceased failed to bring on their journey, representing something precious left behind. The mourners lament that the deceased did not carry this "helper" on their journey to the ancestral world, increasing the likelihood of encountering challenges. *Kuma* "thirst" symbolises challenges, problems, or suffering the deceased may face without this helper. This symbolism conveys to the audience the need to mourn the deceased, acknowledging the difficulties they may encounter in the afterlife.

The structure of Dirge 2 mirrors that of Dirge 1, but instead of *nyu kɛ tɔ* "bottle with water" and *kuma* "thirst", the symbols *sa kɛ bo* "mat and cloth" and *fie* "cold" are used to represent the same concepts of preciousness (helper) and problem, respectively. In other words, *sa kɛ bo* "mat and cloth"

symbolises preparedness or support for the cold, akin to the “helper” in Dirge 1, whilst *fiε* “cold” symbolises suffering or challenges faced during the journey. So, the conceptualisation of “helper” and “problem” among the Dangme is symbolised by *nyu kε tɔ/ sa kε bo* and *kuma/ fiε*, showing parallelism in the two dirges.

Apostrophe

Apostrophe, according to Agyekum (2013), involves addressing someone or something absent, invisible, or not ordinarily spoken to. In both dirges, the mourners address the deceased as though they were alive and listening. Here, physical gestures, such as the mourners pointing at or waving toward the corpse, reinforce the impression that the deceased is present and attentive. This is evident in the following lines:

Dirge 1:

<i>Nε o yaa nε ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hεε we nyu kε tɔ</i>	You did not carry along a bottle with water
<i>Kuma maa ye mo</i>	You will be thirsty

Dirge 2:

<i>Nε o yaa nε ɔ</i>	As you are going
<i>O hεε we sa kε bo</i>	You did not carry along a mat and cloth
<i>Fiε maa ye mo</i>	You will feel cold

Theme

The theme of Dirges 1 and 2 is unpreparedness or untimely death. The mourners lament the deceased’s lack of preparation for their journey to the ancestral world, emphasising the challenges they may face there and also symbolising unfinished responsibilities/endeavours. The mourners express despair, reminding the deceased of their unfinished responsibilities and

lack of readiness for their journey. The theme indicates a transition of life from the real world to the ancestral realm, hearkening to Nketia's (1955) and Mbiti's (1990) assertion that life extends into the ancestral world, and mirroring Yakub and Agyekum's (2022) assertion that the Nzema conceptualize death through metaphors associated with physical experiences, such as a journey and departure.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The techniques/literary devices and performance elements work in harmony to reinforce the theme of unpreparedness. For instance, the use of repetition emphasises the mourners' grief and the persistent challenges faced by the deceased. Imagery enables the mourners to visualise the deceased's plight, eliciting a deeper emotional connection. Symbolism vividly conveys the concept of essential preparation for the journey, such as carrying water or clothing. Apostrophe also personalises the dirge, making it feel as though the deceased is being directly addressed, creating a powerful emotional resonance for the mourners.

Dirge 3.

<i>Amane ba wo ngo tɔ oo</i>	Death has come for
	salt container
<i>Kɛ je motu</i>	Since morning
<i>Wa yi ngo nɔ oo</i>	We did not eat any
	salty food
<i>Amane ba wo ngo tɔ oo</i>	Death has come for
	salt container
<i>Kɛ je motu</i>	Since morning
<i>Wa yi ngo nɔ oo</i>	We did not eat any
	salty food

Analysis of Dirge 3

Performance Aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 3 involves vocal expressions of grief, including the repetition of lines and the use of the ideophone *oo*. These elements are accompanied by physical gestures such as pointing or waving, enhancing the audience's emotional connection to the dirge. The mourners' body language and vocal intonations amplify the sorrow conveyed through the words, creating a powerful communal mourning experience.

Textual Analysis

Structure

Dirge 3 is structured as a single stanza with six lines. Lines 1, 2, and 3 are repeated in lines 4, 5, and 6, respectively. This repetition emphasises the intense pain caused by the death of the deceased, emphasising the mourners' grief and loss. The repetition also provides unity to the dirge, creating a rhythm that enhances its emotional depth. In this dirge, *ngo to*, “salt container” is a symbol representing the deceased. Salt is a valuable commodity essential for human sustenance, used for purposes such as flavouring food, preservation, and removing stains, among others. The reference to the salt container being taken implies the total loss of the salt itself, symbolising the irreplaceable value of the deceased.

Literary Devices

Symbolism

The use of *ngo to* “salt container” signifies the deceased being invaluable and irreplaceable, much like salt in daily life. Similarly, *ngo no* “salty food” represents the deceased's priceless contributions to the community, emphasising the sustenance they provided. The mourners lament that death, by claiming the deceased, has deprived them of this precious source of sustenance or livelihood. The metaphorical hunger *ke je motu*,

“since morning, they had not eaten anything,” captures the community’s deep sense of loss, portraying the deceased as the foundation of their lives and emphasising the difficulty of continuing without them.

Personification

Personification is evident in this dirge, particularly in lines 1 and 4. Agyekum (2013, 187) defines personification as “a figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term is made to perform what humans do.” Similarly, Annan (2017) explains that personification involves imagining a non-living entity as having human characteristics or feelings. In Dirge 3, death is personified in the line *Amane ba wo ngo to* “death has come for the salt container.” This anthropomorphic depiction of death coming for the deceased enhances the dirge’s emotional impact and weight.

Ideophones

The sound *oo* in lines 1, 3, 4, and 6 expresses pain and grief. This auditory imagery underscores the mourners’ agony over the loss of the deceased and conveys the depth of their sorrow since the person’s demise.

Theme

The theme of Dirge 3 focuses on the incapacitation of the deceased’s family and the community, and a reflection on the deceased’s life. The Dangme people believe in life after death and reincarnation. However, this dirge highlights the emotional impact of death, evoking anxiety and despair among the mourners. The Kasena people of the Upper East Region of Ghana similarly use dirges to convey the pain of loss and the deceased’s significance (Taluah, 2013).

The mourners sing the dirge to inform the audience about the profound pain caused by the deceased’s death. It

reflects on how helpful the deceased was to their family and society. The dirge emphasises the deceased's sense of responsibility, particularly in fulfilling their primary and social duties. By likening the deceased to the bedrock of the people, the mourners lament the community's current "starvation", metaphorically expressing their despair over losing such a vital figure. This theme aligns with the assertions of Taluah (2013) and Nuobepuor (2019). According to Taluah, dirges often convey messages about life and death, boasting about ancestral lineages and reflecting on the deceased's role and commitments during life. Nuobepuor argues that some Dagaaba dirges celebrate the good deeds of prominent individuals in their society.

The Synergy between the techniques and the theme

The technique and performance aesthetics in Dirge 3 effectively reinforce its central theme. For instance, repetition intensifies the mourners' anguish and ensures the audience fully grasps the dirge's emotional and thematic resonance whilst symbolism vividly communicates the importance of the deceased and the community's sense of loss, aligning with the theme of incapacitation. Also, personification humanises death, making it a tangible force to blame, which amplifies the mourners' emotional expression of grief. Ideophones also provide an auditory representation of pain, drawing the audience deeper into the mourners' sorrow. The integration of these techniques with the theme of incapacitation creates a cohesive and impactful narrative. The dirge not only mourns the deceased but also invites the audience to reflect on their significance, fostering a collective experience of grief and remembrance.

Dirge 4.

Mo ya ye popu ne o ba

Go and plead and come
back

<i>Mo ya ye popu ne o ba</i>	Go and plead and come back
<i>Jokue eme a he ne o je o de</i>	It is not good to leave the children
<i>Mo ya ye popu ne o ba</i>	Go and plead and come back

Analysis of Dirge 4

Performance aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 4 involves vocal variations and gestures that align with the emotional tone of the dirge. The repeated lines are delivered with increasing intensity, reflecting the mourners' despair. The mourners point toward the deceased in the course of their performance. This symbolises their plea for the deceased to return. The emotive recitation of the dirge fosters a shared sense of loss and connection among the audience.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 4 is structured as a single stanza with four lines. Line 1 is repeated in lines 2 and 4 to emphasise the intensity of the singers feelings about the deceased and to amplify the sorrow caused by their passing. In this context, the singers urge the deceased to plead with the ancestors and return to life. This concise structure enhances the dirge's focus on its emotional and thematic elements.

Literary devices

Imagery

The anxiety of loss in Dirge 4 is captured through the imagery of a person who has offended someone and is asked to plead for forgiveness before returning to fulfill their responsibilities. This metaphor captures the anxiety of loss and the mourners' longing for the deceased to return and is reminiscent of the grief expressed indirectly through evocative imagery and references to ancestral connections, which Nketia (1955) and Boadi (2013) note for the Akan funeral dirge.

Symbolism

Jokuε εme, “the children”, symbolises the people left behind by the deceased, particularly those who depended on them for support and care. The dirge conveys that those left behind will suffer in the absence of the deceased, highlighting the need for the deceased to plead with the ancestors to allow him/her to return to life and care for their people. This symbolism suggests that the deceased was the bedrock of those they left behind.

Apostrophe

The mourners employ apostrophes by addressing the deceased as though s/he were alive. This use of the apostrophe is evident throughout lines 1–4, adding emotional depth to the dirge.

Theme

The theme of Dirge 4 is the incapacitating effect of death on the family and the community. The mourners sing to express how unbearable the loss of the deceased is to their family and society. It reflects the mourners' plea for the deceased to seek permission from the ancestors to return to the living world and resume their responsibilities. The dirge highlights the sorrow

and sense of loss felt by the community and underscores the deceased's importance in providing support and stability.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The literary devices and performance aesthetics effectively reinforce the theme of incapacitation. The use of repetition in the dirge intensifies the mourners' grief and reinforces the dirge's central message. Symbolism captures the dependency of the community on the deceased, illustrating their central role. Imagery highlights the mourners' emotional turmoil and longing for reconciliation, deepening the impact of the theme. Apostrophe personalises the dirge, making the plea feel direct and heartfelt, which aligns with the theme of loss and despair. The performance aesthetics, such as gestures and tone, heighten the communal expression of sorrow, allowing the audience to connect with the dirge's message. This synergy ensures that Dirge 4 resonates deeply with the mourners and the community, fostering collective mourning and reflection on the deceased's importance.

Dirge 5.

<i>A gbe le ne</i>	They killed him/her and
<i>A ke le nitse ne e gbo</i>	They said it was his/her destiny to die
<i>A bua oo</i>	They have lied oo
<i>A gbe le ne</i>	They killed him/her and
<i>A ke le nitse ne e gbo</i>	They said it was his/her destiny to die
<i>A bua oo</i>	They have lied oo

Analysis of Dirge 5

Performance aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 5 is dynamic and participatory. The mourners typically surround themselves in a circular form or divide themselves into two groups facing each other, and create a visual and symbolic confrontation. While singing, they point fingers at one another to convey the accusatory tone of the dirge to dramatise their suspicions. The performance is accompanied by maracas, hand clapping, and occasional whistling, which add rhythmic and emotional depth to the delivery. These gestures and sounds not only deepen the dirge's intensity but also involve the audience, fostering a communal experience of grief and suspicion.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 5 is structured as a single stanza with six lines, where lines 1–3 are repeated in lines 4–6. The use of repetition in this dirge emphasises the intensity of the message the mourners wish to convey by reinforcing the emotional weight of the composition. In other words, the repetition highlights the mourners' anguish and serves to draw the audience's attention to the dirge's underlying message.

Literary devices

Metaphorical lamentation

The dirge uses indirect accusations to suggest that the death of the deceased may not have been natural. These metaphorical lamentations reflect the mourners' sorrow while casting doubt on the circumstances surrounding the death. This is reflected in the lines:

<i>A gbe le ne</i>	They killed him/her and
<i>A ke le nitse ne e gbo</i>	They said it was his/her destiny to die
<i>A bua oo</i>	They have lied oo

Ideophone

The ideophone *oo* in lines 3 and 6 is an auditory expression of pain and serves to underscore the mourners' sorrow and accusation towards those they believe are responsible, casting insinuations that the deceased did not die naturally. This sound enhances the emotional resonance of the dirge and symbolises the community's shared grief.

Theme

The primary theme of Dirge 5 is the casting of insinuations regarding the circumstances of the deceased's death. The dirge reflects the community's suspicion that someone or a group of people may have played a role in the death. This theme aligns with the Dangme belief in both natural and unnatural causes of death, highlighting the community's interpretation of death as a complex and sometimes contentious event. In Dangme culture, natural deaths are believed to occur when an individual grows old and dies of age-related causes, while unnatural deaths are attributed to accidents such as drowning, burning, or motor accidents, as well as to spiritism. Like some Sisaali dirges composed to reveal the cause of death or to serve as a warning (Sanka, 2010, p.157), this dirge serves as a metaphorical outlet for expressing grief while indirectly accusing those perceived to be responsible.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The literary devices, structure, and performance elements of Dirge 5 work cohesively to reinforce its theme. Repetition used in the dirge ensures that the dirge's accusatory message and grief resonate strongly with the audience, emphasising the mourners' suspicions. Also, the use of the ideophones enhances the emotional expression of the dirge, making the sorrow and accusations real. Metaphorical lamentation provides a nuanced way to address suspicions without confrontation, aligning with

the theme of insinuation. This synergy creates a powerful lamentation that not only mourns the deceased but also addresses communal concerns about the circumstances of the death. The combination of techniques ensures that the dirge resonates deeply with the mourners, fostering both reflection and collective sorrow.

Dirge 6.

<i>Amane lee</i>	Death lee
<i>Mo hu mo oo</i>	You too (blaming death)
<i>Aa oo</i>	Ao!
<i>Amane lee</i>	Death lee
<i>Mo hu mo oo</i>	You too (blaming death)
<i>Aa oo</i>	Ao!

Analysis of Dirge 6

Performance aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 6 involves expressive gestures, such as pointing fingers toward the sky or at fellow mourners, symbolising the mourners' frustration and despair. These physical movements, combined with the repetition of lines and the use of ideophones, create a dynamic and emotionally charged performance. The audience is drawn into the mourners' grief and their attempt to hold death accountable.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Like Dirge 5, Dirge 6 is structured as a single stanza with six lines. Lines 1–3 are repeated as lines 4–6. This repetition emphasises the mourners' intense emotions, reinforcing the dirge's focus on sorrow and the blaming of death.

Literary devices

Personification

In this dirge, personification is employed as the mourners' address and blame death as a sentient entity capable of being addressed and blamed. This personification is evident in lines 1–2 and 4–5. In these lines, the mourners personalise death and blame it as if it can hear and respond.

Ideophone

The dirge also incorporates ideophones to enhance its emotional expression. The ideophone *lee* is a sound used to call out, symbolising the mourners summoning death to confront it for causing the demise of their loved one. Similarly, *aa oo* are sounds of pain, used by the mourners to convey their anguish and sorrow while blaming death. These ideophones contribute to the dirge's overall tone of grief and lamentation.

Theme

The fundamental theme of Dirge 6 is the theme of blaming death. The dirge portrays death as a malevolent force responsible for the loss of the deceased. The dirge reflects the mourners' helplessness and sorrow, emphasising the profound emotional impact of death. The repetition of accusations and emotional tone highlight the mourners' desperate need to assign blame and find solace in their grief.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The textual and performance aesthetics in Dirge 6 coherently work to strengthen the theme of blaming death. This aligns with the theme by giving voice to the mourners' grief and frustration. Performance gestures, such as pointing and vocal intonation, create a vivid, communal expression of grief that enhances the dirge's thematic resonance. Also, repetition strengthens the

mourners' accusations, stressing the persistent impact of the loss. The use of personification also transforms death into an entity that can be confronted, making the mourners' accusations more direct and personal. The ideophone /ee adds layers of emotional intensity, enabling the audience to feel the mourners' pain and sorrow more acutely. Collectively, these elements create a powerful lamentation that captures the mourners' sorrow while fostering a shared experience of mourning within the community.

Dirge 7.

<i>Maayo lee o ma lo oo?</i>	Mother /ee are you coming?
<i>Ee-ee i ma!</i>	Yes, I am coming!
<i>Bomyo ko ne nu mi oo.</i>	An animal has caught me.
<i>I nge jee ee.</i>	I am removing it.
<i>Bomyo ko ne nu mi oo.</i>	An animal has caught me.
<i>I nge jee ee.</i>	I am removing it.

Analysis of Dirge 7

Performance aesthetics

The call-and-response format is central to the performance of Dirge 7. In the course of the performance, the lead singer acts as an interrogator in line 1 while the other mourners respond sorrowfully with line 2 as the deceased. The lead singer and the other mourners together sing the other lines in 3–6. This interaction creates a dynamic performance that engages the audience emotionally. Gestures such as pointing toward the sky or waving enhance the visual impact of the dirge, while vocal variations and the repetition of lines amplify its emotional resonance.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 7 is structured as a single stanza with six lines, where all lines stand independently, conveying complete meaning without relying on others. Lines 1–3 are repeated as lines 4–6 to emphasise the mourners' message. The dirge's call-and-response format intensifies its emotional intensity and communicative purpose.

Literary devices

Symbolism

The dirge makes use of symbolism to convey its complex idea about death and loss through accessible and relatable imagery, such as *bomyo* 'animal', which represents death. *Maayo* "mother" symbolises the deceased, for whom the mourners are lamenting. Interestingly, *Maayo* is used to represent any deceased individual, regardless of gender and age, emphasising its general reference to the dead rather than to mothers specifically. *Bomyo* "animal" symbolises death or a significant challenge faced by the deceased, illustrating how the deceased was metaphorically caught and unable to return.

Apostrophe

In this dirge, the mourners employ apostrophe by addressing death as though it were a human being present before them. They also interact with the deceased as if they were alive. This is evident in the line *Maayo lee o ma lo?* "Mother *lee* are you coming?" where the mourners question the deceased. In response, the deceased, speaking metaphorically, states that they are coming but were caught by an animal along the way. This exchange is reflected in the following lines:

"Ee-ee i ma!

Bomyo ko nɛ nu mi oo.

Yes, I am coming.

An animal has caught

I ngɛ jee ee	me.
Bomyo ko nɛ nu mi oo.	I am removing it
	An animal has caught
	me.
I ngɛ jee ee.”	I am removing it.

Ideophones

The ideophone /ee is a sound of shouting to call someone in Dangme. It adds a layer of emotion by depicting the mourners' desperate attempt to communicate with the deceased, who lies motionless. Additionally, oo is used to intensify the mourners' cries, highlighting the depth of their sorrow and their longing for the deceased to return.

Theme

The theme of Dirge 7 revolves around the incapacitating nature of death and the agony experienced by the deceased and those left behind. The dirge expresses the mourners' unbearable grief by asking the deceased whether they are coming back. The response, describing how the deceased was metaphorically caught by an animal (death) and is struggling to free themselves, illustrates the pain and finality of death. This dirge emotionally communicates the mourners' profound sense of loss and the anguish caused by the deceased's departure.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The literary devices and performance aesthetics of Dirge 7 work cohesively to support its theme. The call-and-response structure fosters communal participation, making the dirge a shared act of mourning that amplifies the collective sorrow. The use of apostrophe personalises the dirge, creating a direct connection between the mourners and the deceased, which deepens the expression of grief. Symbolism also conveys complex ideas about death and loss through accessible and

relevant imagery, such as the “animal” representing death. Finally, the ideophones, *lee* and *oo* add auditory depth, intensifying the dirge’s emotional impact and engaging the audience’s senses. The synergy ensures that the dirge resonates deeply, both emotionally and thematically, leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

Dirge 8.

<i>I ho oo maayo lee i ho oo.</i>	I am gone oh mother I am gone
<i>I ho oo maayo lee i ho oo.</i>	I am gone oh mother I am gone
<i>No ne ba je mi blo</i>	The one who came to accompany me
<i>Ke o ya ne o de</i>	If you go inform
<i>Maayo ke i ho oo.</i>	Mother that I am gone
<i>No ne ba je mi blo</i>	The one who came to accompany me
<i>Ke o ya ne o de</i>	If you go inform
<i>Maayo ke he ne i su ne o lee i ho oo.</i>	Mother that where I have reached now- means I am gone.

Analysis of Dirge 8

Performance aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 8 is marked by vocal variations, where the repeated lines are delivered with increasing intensity. The use of the ideophone *oo* adds an auditory dimension that conveys profound sorrow. Physical gestures, such as waving to indicate that the deceased is gone forever, accompany the performance to symbolise the mourners’ despair and their attempt to connect with the deceased. The fluidity created by the enjambed lines mirrors the mourners’

unbroken lamentation, enhancing the dirge's emotional resonance.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 8 is structured as a single stanza with eight lines. Repetition is a key structural feature in the dirge, where line 1 is repeated as line 2 to emphasise the mourners' sorrow. Also, lines 3 and 4 are repeated as lines 6 and 7, reinforcing the mourners' pain. Lines 3–5 and 6–8 are enjambed. This means the lines must be read together for their full meaning to emerge. This creates a flowing narrative that mirrors the mourners' emotional journey.

Literary devices

Symbolism

The term *maayo* “mother”, used in lines 1, 2, 5, and 8, serves as a symbol representing the mourners. In these lines, the deceased metaphorically informs those left behind that they are gone forever, reinforcing the finality of death.

Personification

The deceased is personified throughout the dirge and portrayed as though they are alive and directly informing the mourners of their departure. This personalisation creates an intimate and poignant connection between the deceased and the mourners, amplifying the emotional impact of the dirge.

Ideophones

The ideophone *oo* appears in lines 1, 2, 5, and 8, symbolising sorrow and giving emphasis to the shared pain of the mourners and the deceased. Again, *lee* appears at the beginning of the dirge in lines 1 and 2. The sound *lee* is a sound of calling. It reflects the agony of the deceased as they desperately attempt to alert those they have left behind to the immense pain they are enduring, emphasising that there is no possibility of returning to life. The use of these ideophones enhances the dirge's emotional depth, symbolising the profound sorrow expressed by the deceased as they metaphorically communicate their eternal departure to the mourners.

Theme

The theme of Dirge 8 is the agony of the deceased. The dirge portrays the deceased as experiencing pain and sorrow, communicating this to the mourners. The mourners sing on behalf of the deceased, conveying that the deceased is gone forever. In Dangme culture, it is believed that when someone dies, both the mourners and the deceased may experience pain. The facial expression of the deceased when laid in state is often interpreted as an indication of whether they are at peace with their death or not. Reflecting this belief, the mourners perform Dirge 8 to articulate the deceased's perspective, informing the mourners of their eternal departure and the pain accompanying it. The dirge, therefore, portrays the deceased as experiencing pain and sorrow, reflecting this Dangme cultural belief that death affects both the living and the deceased. Also, the belief that the deceased's facial expression at rest reflects their emotional state underscores the community's connection to the deceased's suffering.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The performance and textual aesthetics in Dirge 8 work together to reinforce its theme of agony. Performance

aesthetics such as vocal modulations and gestures visually and audibly amplify the dirge's emotional depth. Repetition also intensifies the mourners' expression of grief and ensures the audience's focus on the dirge's emotional core. Ideophones *oo* and *lee* enhance the auditory impact, making the mourning more natural. This synergy creates a powerful lament that communicates both the mourners' despair and the deceased's perspective, aligning with the Dangme cultural beliefs about the shared pain of death. The dirge not only mourns the deceased but also deepens the communal understanding of the emotional weight of death.

Dirge 9.

<i>Amane lee!</i>	Death <i>lee!</i>
<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Amane lee!</i>	Death <i>lee!</i>
<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>O koni si wa pe Goliath.</i>	You are stronger than Goliath.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Amane lee!</i>	Death <i>lee!</i>
<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>O gbeo fuu</i>	You have been killing many
<i>Se o gbaja hyi we.</i>	But your hunting bag does not get full.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>O joo enyo bime a bua.</i>	You make wicked people happy.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Amane lee.</i>	Death <i>lee!</i>
<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Lohwe dikalo.</i>	Wicked animal.

<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.
<i>Yiwutsotse.</i>	Wicked one.

Analysis of Dirge 9

Performance aesthetics

The performance of Dirge 9 is performed aggressively. This includes dramatic gestures and vocal variations to enhance its emotional intensity. The mourners point toward the sky, at each other, and the audience to symbolise confrontation with death. The repetition of harsh descriptors such as *Yiwutsotse!* “Wicked one!” and *Lohwe dikalo!* “Wicked animal!” are delivered with escalating intensity. The use of *lee* adds an auditory dimension to the dirge, emphasising the mourners’ anguish and anger.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 9 is structured into two stanzas, each comprising 12 lines. Each line conveys a complete and meaningful thought. The mourners utilise repetition throughout the dirge to emphasise their grief and to develop its theme. In stanza 1, lines 1–3 are repeated as lines 4–6 and lines 9–11. These repetitions express the mourners’ sorrow and their admonishment of death, which they blame for taking their loved one. In a mournful tone, the mourners repeatedly describe death as wicked in lines 3, 6, 8, 11, and 12, emphasising their frustration and anger. The repetition not only reinforces the emotional intensity of the dirge but also underscores how powerless the mourners feel against death. Similarly, in stanza 2, the mourners repeatedly refer to death as wicked in lines 15, 17, 20, 23, and 24.

Literary devices

Symbolism

Symbols feature prominently in the dirge. *Gbaja*, “Hunting bag” symbolises the insatiable nature of death, reflecting its unending appetite for taking lives, whilst *Lohwe dikalo*, “Wicked animal” symbolises the ruthless nature of death, likening it to a predator without empathy for its prey.

Apostrophe

The mourners employ apostrophe to address death directly, as though it were a human being. This is evident in lines such as:

Amane lee! Death *lee!*

The mourners call out to death before admonishing it, describing it as wicked and unkind. The ideophone *lee* is a sound of calling in Dangme culture. It is normally used in addition to someone’s name when the person is called repeatedly without responding. In other words, it is often employed when the caller is dissatisfied or frustrated. Its use in this dirge emphasises the mourners’ anger and disappointment with death. The lines following this ideophone convey harsh, accusatory remarks, such as:

<i>O tsa hi!</i>	You are bad!
<i>Yiwutsotse!</i>	Wicked one!
<i>Lohwe dikalo!</i>	Wicked animal!

Personification

Personification is another prominent device in Dirge 9. Death is anthropomorphised and portrayed as a human-like entity with malicious intent. The following lines in the dirge reflect this:

<i>O tsa hi!</i>	You are bad!
<i>Yiwutsotse</i>	Wicked one!
<i>O koni si wa pe Goliat.</i>	You are stronger than Goliath.

<i>O gbeɔ fuu</i>	You have been killing many
<i>Se o gbaja hyi we</i>	But your hunting bag does not get full.

In these lines, death is described as a bad and wicked person, a hunter whose bag never fills despite killing many, and as being stronger than the biblical Goliath. These anthropomorphic descriptions highlight the mourners' perception of death as a relentless and insatiable force despite its intangible nature.

Metaphor

Death is metaphorically compared to a bad person, intensifying the mourners' accusations and grief. Example:

<i>Amane lee!</i>	Oh death!
<i>O tsa hi.</i>	You are bad.

Biblical allusion

The mourners compare death to Goliath, the giant and powerful Philistine referenced in *1 Samuel 17:4*, and even describe death as more powerful than Goliath. This metaphorical comparison reflects the mourners' perception of death as an immense and formidable force, emphasising its overwhelming power and dominance.

Theme

The theme of Dirge 9 is agony. The mourners vividly express their pain and despair over the loss of their loved one. This agony is articulated through harsh descriptions of death, portraying it as wicked, insatiable, and cruel. The mourners anthropomorphise death, accusing it of being stronger than Goliath, a joy-bringer to wicked people, and a relentless hunter who is never satisfied. These accusations run consistently

through lines 2–24, emphasising the mourners' emotional distress and frustration with the inevitability of death.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The combination of dramatic gestures, escalating vocal intensity, and the repeated lines heightens the emotional resonance, drawing the audience into the dirge's agonising lament. Symbols like *Gbaja* and *Lohwe dikalo* paired with auditory elements like *lee* reinforce the mourners' portrayal of death as an insatiable and cruel force, aligning seamlessly with the theme. By addressing death as if it were a human entity, the mourners create a personalised confrontation that is both verbal and performative, intensifying the communal expression of grief. These techniques provide depth to the mourners' accusations, allowing the audience to understand the magnitude of their despair and the emotional weight of their loss. The integration of performance and textual aesthetics in the dirge ensures that it is both a poignant or emotional expression of grief and a communal act of mourning. The techniques employed amplify the mourners' emotions, while the thematic focus on agony resonates deeply with the audience, fostering collective reflection on the inevitability of death.

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 10. | <i>Kayo ya nu kungwobi</i> | Hawk went to catch chick. |
| | <i>Kayo ya nu kungwobi.</i> | Hawk went to catch chick |
| | <i>Dade po mi.</i> | Machete cut me. |
| | <i>Dade ya mi.</i> | The cut was deep. |
| | <i>I bime lee.</i> | My children <i>lee</i> . |
| | <i>Dade po mi.</i> | Machete cut me. |
| | <i>Dade ya mi.</i> | The cut was deep. |
| | <i>I bime lee.</i> | My children <i>lee</i> . |

Analysis of Dirge 10

Performance aesthetics

This dirge is performed in a non-aggressive manner, unlike Dirge 9. The mourners, moving sorrowfully in a group, sing the dirge while creating an atmosphere of shared grief. The audience is actively drawn into the performance, becoming part of the collective mourning as they respond to the mourners' calls.

Textual aesthetics

Structure

Dirge 10 is structured as a single stanza with eight lines. Line 1 is repeated as line 2, line 3 is repeated as line 6, line 4 is repeated as line 7, and line 5 is repeated as line 8. This repetition enhances the thematic development of the dirge, emphasising the mourners' heartbreak over the deceased's demise. Each line is meaningful and contributes to the overall expression of grief.

Literary Devices

Symbolism

The mourners use several symbols to represent different elements of the dirge: *Kayo* "hawk" symbolizes death, portrayed as a predator; *kungwobi* "chick" represents the deceased, who is depicted as the vulnerable prey taken by the hawk; *dade* "machete" and *ya mi* "the cut of the machete" symbolize death and the pain it has inflicted on the mourners; *mi* "me" represents the mourners themselves, highlighting their grief; *I bime* "my children" symbolizes the family members and loved ones, as well as the audience mourning with the family. The mourners metaphorically describe death as a hawk that has caught its prey (the deceased), vividly conveying their sorrow and sense of loss.

Ideophones

The ideophone *lee* is used as a sound of calling, adding a sensitive force to the dirge. The mourners call out to the

audience to express their grief and share the pain of their loss. This is particularly evident in lines 5 and 8, where the mourners cry out: *I bime lee* “My children *lee*.”

Theme

The theme of Dirge 10 is the pain and heartbreak caused by death. The dirge portrays death as a relentless force or a predator, *kayo* “hawk” that has taken a cherished individual or the prey “chick” from the community. The repetition, symbolism and use of ideophone *lee*, highlight the mourners’ emotional connection to the deceased and their shared grief or impact of loss on the family and the entire community.

The synergy between techniques and theme

The literary devices, structure, and performance elements in Dirge 10 work cohesively to reinforce its central theme. Repetition amplifies the mourners’ sorrow, emphasising the enduring nature of their grief and drawing the audience into the emotional core of the dirge. The metaphorical description of death as a predator (hawk) and the deceased as prey (chick) vividly conveys the mourners’ perception of death and its impact, helping the audience understand the depth of the loss. These techniques underscore the pain and heartbreak caused by death, which is the central theme of the dirge. This synergy ensures that Dirge 10 serves as both a lamentation and a collective act of mourning, deeply resonating with the audience and reflecting the cultural significance of the dirge in expressing loss and solidarity.

Conclusion

The Dangme dirge is an intricate blend of textual and performance aesthetics, where structure and literary devices work seamlessly to convey profound themes of grief, loss, and communal connection. The dirges emphasise the Dangme

people's cultural beliefs about death as a transition to the ancestral world. They serve as vehicles for both individual expression and collective mourning, capturing the emotional weight of loss and the enduring impact of the deceased's life.

Dangme dirges are performed with a combination of physical gestures, vocal variations, and dynamic group arrangements. Performances include pointing gestures, waving, and dramatic vocal modulations, which enhance the emotional depth of the dirges. Call-and-response formats, especially in dirges like 7 and 8, engage the audience and foster communal participation. Some dirges, such as Dirge 10, are performed in a non-aggressive manner, creating a sombre atmosphere, while others, like Dirge 9, adopt an intense and confrontational tone.

Repetition, symbolism, ideophones, personification, imagery, apostrophe as well as metaphor are the major stylistic devices found in the Dangme dirges. Repetition is a key structural element across all dirges, emphasising grief and reinforcing thematic messages. Common symbols found include: *nyu ke to* "bottle with water" and *kuma* "thirst" for essential support and challenges, respectively; *kayo* "hawk" and *kungwobi* "chick" representing death and the deceased, respectively; *gbaja* "hunting bag" symbolises death's insatiability. Also, sounds such *lee* and *oo* express sorrow and intensify emotional connection. Death is often anthropomorphised, being addressed directly or blamed for its actions. Rich visual and emotional depictions or images, such as travelling unprepared to harsh lands or the deceased struggling with metaphorical challenges, reflect the community's view of death.

Also, literary devices like repetition, symbolism, and apostrophe align closely with themes such as unpreparedness, agony, and blaming death. Performance aesthetics, including gestures and vocal delivery, amplify the dirges' emotional resonance, making them effective tools for communal mourning. The combination of textual and performance elements ensures

a cohesive presentation of the themes, making the dirges deeply impactful.

Dangme dirges serve as cultural artefacts, preserving beliefs about death and the afterlife, such as the continuity of life in the ancestral world. They reflect communal values, such as solidarity and shared mourning, and act as tools for expressing collective grief and reinforcing social bonds.

This study complements existing literature on African dirges, such as Nketia's (1955) focus on dirges as tools for lamentation and communal bonding, and Mbiti's (1990) view of death as a transformative passage. Unlike the Akan or Limba dirges, which vary in performance context (see Finnegan, 2012), Dangme dirges consistently involve direct engagement with the audience and the deceased, highlighting unique cultural expressions of grief. These similarities and differences enrich the broader understanding of how dirges function within African societies as both artistic and communal practices.

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