

person. Oktavec's work is a broad overview. However, by not presenting the reader with some of the faces and voices of the people who communicate with heaven through the medium of the milagro, she leaves out an important component of her research: the people for whom the milagros mean so much in those moments of prayer or thanksgiving.

Wolfgang Mieder & Alan Dundes, eds. **The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb**. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. Pp xxi + 330. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

David Adu-Amankwah
Indiana University

“Nyansa nni baakofo ɔ tirim”

This Akan proverb states something to the effect that no one person has monopoly over wisdom. *The Wisdom of Many*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, confirms this view. First, it is a collection of twenty scholarly essays on the proverb. Second, the contributors are drawn from such diverse fields as psychology, linguistics, literature, anthropology, and folklore. Finally, the writers draw on Chinese, African, Yiddish, Irish, Finnish, and Spanish examples.

The editors' decision to open the book with an essay other than their own is appropriate; they should not claim monopoly over wisdom since that would have placed them beyond the boundaries of credibility. They begin with an essay by Archer Taylor (the accredited doyen of proverb studies) entitled “The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One,” which leads the reader to discover the full title of the book. The essays bring out the multifaceted nature of the proverb as well as the problems—especially in regard to definition, content, and structure—that are encountered in the study of proverb use. Taylor explains that the proverb was an invention of an individual which was applied to a particular situation, often referenced by “signposts” such as “As the Bible, Plato, Shakespeare, etc. says,” which authenticate the proverb or proverbial expression. Ruth Finnegan mentions in her contribution, “Proverbs in Africa,” the problem of assigning an all-encompassing definition to the term “proverb.” Peter Seitel draws on the oblique and allusive nature of proverbial expression to build a heuristic model of proverb use, bringing out the metaphorical relationship between the imaginary situation which the proverb presents and the social situation to which it refers.

One may disagree or share the opinions expressed in *The Wisdom of Many*, but one thing seems clear: there is a need for a multiple approach to

the study of proverbs and proverb use, since what constitutes a proverb is culturally-determined. The scholars who wrote the twenty essays demonstrate clearly that there are several facets to the concept of the proverb. Nevertheless, there is still the need to emphasize that the proverb is not a communicative tool to use at all times. It is often counter-productive if not used by the right person, at the right time, with the right listener.

It is not for nothing that the book ends with an essay by Wolfgang Mieder. Incidentally, this is in keeping with the Akan proverb “yεε a yεbehunu nti na yεkykyere boa a, yede ano siata” (It is for easy identification that the end of a knot to a bundle is made prominent). Mieder’s essay, at the tail-end, serves as the prominent end of the ‘knot’ to *The Wisdom of Many*.