

# CHAPTER 1 Drama

## THE MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA – EFUA T. SUTHERLAND

### Biography of the Author

Efua Theodora Sutherland was a Ghanaian playwright who lived between 1924 and 1996. She was born Efua Theodora Morgue in Cape Coast, Ghana. She began her educational career in Cape Coast where she studied at St. Monica Training College. After this, she proceeded to England where she attended Homerton College, Cambridge University and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

She returned to Ghana after her education, and got married to an African –American William Sutherland in 1954. Efua T. Sutherland was a successful wife and career woman. She assisted her husband establish a school and was quite instrumental in the training of her three children. She founded the Ghana Drama Studio, the Ghana Society of Writers, and was a very prominent figure in the founding of the modern Ghanaian theatre. Apart from *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), she also wrote *Foriwa* (1962) and *Edufa* (1967).

### Introduction

*The Marriage of Anansewa* is a play that draws from AnansesEm or Ananse which is an art of story telling common with the people of Akan in Ghana. Ordinarily, story telling is more related to prose but in the Akan culture we have those narratives that have graduated to the level of performance called Anansegoro. Stories in AnansesEm and Anansegoro are always woven round a character called Ananse. Ananse in the Akan language is a spider notorious for the kind of craftiness and treachery associated with folktale characters like the Tortoise or Sungura. The allegories in the use of these characters in stories of folktales are often used to expose the social vices in the society.

### The Plot

Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* centres on Ananse and his twenty-year old daughter Anansewa. In the four-act play, the protagonist, Ananse finds himself in a very difficult situation of trying to maintain himself and his only daughter. He is living in a poor accommodation and finds it difficult to cater for the financial demands of Anansewa who is enrolled in the secretarial school. Ananse has struggled to pay the first instalment of the fees but Anansewa's prospect of completing her studies is under threat of termination because the money to complete her fees is unavailable.

Troubled by these conditions, Ananse resolves to explore the possibility of using the beauty of Anansewa to an advantage. He lures Anansewa to a photograph house where he takes different postures of her image. After doing this, he makes successful personal attempts to circulate the pictures to four wealthy chiefs or kings from the north, west, south and east of his kingdom. The names of these chiefs are: The Chief of Mines, The Chief of Sapaase, Togbe Klu 1V of Akate and The Chief-Who-Is Chief. All these chiefs become suitors of Anansewa but they are unaware of the intrigue of rivalry put in place by Ananse.

Not long after this expedition to the courts of those chiefs, the fortunes of Ananse begin to improve. He improves on his bad accommodation, offsets the outstanding fees of Anansewa at the secretarial school and sets up a cocoa

farm in his home base at Nanka. All the chiefs appreciate the beauty of Anansewa and each of them wants her as his wife. To show seriousness of their commitment, they start sending money and gifts to Ananse. Ananse himself writes letters requesting his prospective sons-in-law to send money or gifts to cater for Anansewa whom he refers to as “the object of *their* interest”.

Anansewa’s knowledge of the plans of her father creates a rift that is resolved. Although Anansewa frowns at her father’s ploy that seeks to turn her into a commodity on sale in a market, she soon agrees with her father on the expediency of the plan. It becomes clear afterwards that both father and daughter, out of all the other suitors, favour Chief-Who-Is-Chief to emerge as Anansewa’s husband. However, the daunting task remains how to sort out the other suitors so that the one that truly loves Anansewa would emerge. The playwright introduces a short dialogue between Akwasi and Akousa to show the traditional requirement that shows the completion of a marriage proposal. Like the other suitors of Anansewa, Akwasi has been paying gratifications to Akousa’s parents but has no legitimate right over her until “the head drink has been placed”. The implication of this is that none of the suitors of Anansewa has the traditional right over her until “the head drink” has been placed.

Ananse becomes torn between getting the best husband for his daughter and the tragedy that awaits him if his plans boomerang. He devises other tricks; he knows that the obstacles to his plans would be his mother (Aya) and Aunt (Ekuwa), so he told them of an arson that ravages his cocoa farm back in the village, Nanka. With the help of Christy, his newly found lover, friend and accomplice, he hurries his mother and sister to the village. The Chief of Mines and Togbe Klu 1V have signified intention to come and place the “head drink” and crisis becomes imminent for Ananse. Anansewa feigns death and message is sent to all her suitors announcing her demise.

As her suitors come in succession, their real intention of seeking Anansewa is revealed. Apart from The-Chief-Who-Is-Chief, the three others have primordial interest. The play ends happily for Ananse and Anansewa; the former becomes a rich man while the latter gets married to the suitor of her choice.

## **Subject Matter**

The subject matter of *The Marriage of Anansewa* is love. The playwright stresses the importance of love to the foundation of the home and sees love as the panacea to solving societal problems. The intricacy of love, however, is shown by the playwright in the question of intention. Gratifications given by suitors do not always match genuine intention as we have seen in the bid for Anansewa by the four suitors. For the playwright, love thrives on the principles of intimacy and reciprocity; therefore, it must be tested before approval.

The playwright intricately ties this subject matter to the issue of marriage. The foundation of a successful marriage is true love, but all obligations must be fulfilled. This is where the playwright brings in the importance of the African tradition, with the modern trends notwithstanding. The playwright insists that the traditional obligations in marriage contract must be fulfilled before marriage is consummated.

## **Themes**

- (a) **Materialistic Society:** The playwright exposes the vices of a materialistic society in the play. The society of Ananse does not reckon with the poor as only the rich in the society are given unfettered privilege to operate. Unfortunately, this evil has crept into the religious circle; in the church, recognition is given to worshippers based on their financial status. Ananse is born on a Sunday but on account of the

embarrassing demands of priests in the church, he has not been attending church regularly. The poor man is oppressed in all facets of life, even in the religious circle that ought to provide him some relief/protection.

- (b) **Complex/Unjust World:** This play presents the idea that the world we live in is not only complex but unjust. Though the playwright has no explanation to this, she explores the possibility of getting the best out of that negative condition. Everything seems to be working against Ananse in the beginning of the play as he is a victim of afflictions from nature and the world systems. He is jobless and has a very poor accommodation; nature compounds his woes by beating him and etching into his house. Apart from these, there is the challenge of sending Anansewa to school; he has no helper but himself. Nothing is said about Anansewa's mother, and this suggests that Ananse must have lost her somehow, leaving the enormous parental responsibilities to Ananse alone. The playwright's use of the spider motif in the play is quite instructive to this theme; however, not all is lost. Ananse's capacity to manoeuvre through the complex situation in the play conveys the message that the human intellect has the capacity of transforming negative conditions.
- (c) **Theme of Naivety and Knowledge:** The playwright espouses the benefits of knowledge and its capacity to solving the problems of life. This is closely linked with the experiences of adulthood and childhood depicted by Ananse and Anansewa respectively. From the play, we see that knowledge has many advantages that far outweigh the risks that its application carries. One of the ways of knowledge acquisition is through education. Anansewa's knowledge of secretarial duties makes her more attractive to her suitors, especially Togbe Klu 1V who is already planning of floating a business venture for her to oversee. However, knowledge acquisition is not cheap; it calls for resources and the use of the intellect. *Ananse is not schooled but launches into the archives of memory to generate native intelligence that upstaged even the rich class of his society.* The knowledge of what to do in the instances of poverty made Ananse to contrive a plan. The plan causes him a lot of nightmare but in the end he gets the best for himself and for his daughter.
- (d) **The Theme of Culture and Modernity:** *The Marriage of Anansewa* is set in the urban area but the presence of cultural motifs is quite overbearing. The threats posed by the modern trends to the traditional institutions that exist are exhibited through the playwright's exploration of the marriage procedure of the Akan people in a way that exposes the cherished customs and traditions of a people. Anansewa's cynicism over her father's ploy to 'sell' her represents the playwright's lack of support for those debasing aspects of tradition. Overall, the playwright uses those *elements of modernity* in the play in the positive light, just as she does the same for the traditional contents in the play. The implication of this is that the playwright seeks for a society that integrates the positive cultural values and the good imported cultures in a way that will present a true face of the progressive contemporary African society.
- (e) **Time:** This play emphasizes the importance of time to the issues of life. Ananse deploys his strategies with the consciousness of time. Many times in the play he scolds other characters for being unmindful of the passage of time. He manages time in such a way that it never becomes an impediment to the achievement of his goals.

## Characterization

The play has only two major characters: George Kwesi Ananse and his daughter Anansewa. The other characters are minor in the sense that they complement the roles of the two characters above, and their appearances are minimal. Some of the characters do not even appear and are only mentioned or represented by others in the play. A good example is the four suitors of Anansewa who do not appear in the play but whose attributes we can only deduce from the statements of their *emissaries* or from Ananse who visits their palaces to present the picture of his daughter. Character roles in the play are quite *fluid* with the storyteller and the property man taking part in the acting. In other dramatic productions, the role of the storyteller is always reduced to that of a narrator, and the property man remains off stage taking care of, perhaps, costume issues. But in this play, these two are actors whose roles determine the success of the play.

### **Ananse**

His full name is George Kwesi Ananse. He is the protagonist of the play, he recognizes the disadvantaged position he has found himself and uses the power of his intellect to solve the problem. Ananse is a realist; he never denies his status in the society and never shies away from responsibility. With Anansewa's mother not available he summons courage to give the best to his daughter. He is a master strategist and a meticulous planner who is quite familiar with the rules and demands of his society. He has full insight into the psychology of all the characters that relate with him in the play. His eloquence gives him the benefits to exploit their weaknesses to his advantage. Ananse is quite a loving father, and his relationship with Christy reveals that he is a loving and homely husband to Anansewa's mother. However, he is full of pretences and treachery; though in the play, he uses these negative attributes to profit himself. The materialistic tendencies of his society have rubbed off on him, and he uses his ingenuity to get wealth but his disposition after his fortunes start improving, which shows that sooner than later he will use his status negatively.

### **Anansewa**

Anansewa is the only asset of Ananse. A beautiful girl of about twenty years, she makes herself available to her father's whims. Initially, she is unaware of her father's plans but as the plot progresses she has no choice than to be immersed in the deceitful scheme of Ananse. As a young girl, her naivety and gullibility aid her father's ploy that sees her enrolment for a secretarial course and marriage to the husband of her choice. As a daughter to a master trickster, she naturally becomes an apprentice in the art of deceit. The events that see her pretence of death to sort out her suitors convey the impression that, like her father, she has become a master in the art.

### **The Minor Characters**

We can arrange the minor characters in pairs.

#### **Aya and Ekuwa**

Aya is the mother of Ananse while Ekuwa is his aunt. These two have a very cordial relationship with Ananse, though they have their differences that often conflict. Aya is an old woman who insists on the process of tradition but Ekuwa is quite indifferent. The relationship between Ananse and Christy is still very fragile but we see Aya more of a skeptic and Ekuwa ready to accommodate the friendship or possibility of marriage between Ananse and Christy. Events in the play show that the two are quite gullible and unassuming; they are close relatives of Ananse but not close enough to know that he is full of intrigue. Sadly, they have no clues to the relevant questions that could reveal Ananse's deceit that hurriedly sends them to Nanka village.

#### **Akwasi and Akousa**

They are introduced as young couple in the cast list but their dialogue in their single appearance in the play reveals that their marriage contract is just almost sealed. There is no doubt that the two are fond of each other but, strictly, they cannot be referred to as a couple because Akwasi is yet to fulfil the ultimate obligation of presenting the “head drink”.

**Anansewa's Suitors:** The Chief of Mines, Chief of Sapaase, Togbe Klu 1V and Chief- Who Is-Chief. These four suitors of Anansewa do not appear in person in the play but we have access to their characters through their emissaries and the attributes given to them by the playwright through Ananse. We see a sincerity of purpose only in Chief-Who-Is-Chief who is ready to go the extra mile for Anansewa even in “death”. Like Chief-Who-Is-Chief, they show their generosity but they lose out in the contest for Anansewa on account of *primordial intentions*. They are all easily deceived and The Chief -Who –Is- Chief would also have lose out if not for the fact that he is preferred by Ananse and Anansewa to others.

### **Christy Yamoah**

She is a beautician who becomes lover, friend and accomplice to Ananse. We see her display some sense of maturity in her handling of Aya who does not like her association with her son. Besides, she also displays the same attribute in her relationship with Ananse who will not reveal his plans to her until he becomes very sure of her reliability. Christy works her way into Ananse’s life gradually, and she soon becomes the only person to take charge of Ananse’s visitors who come to commiserate with him on the death of his daughter. Her ambition is to be intimate with Ananse, and she achieves that before the end of the play.

### **Style and Techniques**

**Mixture of Genres:** *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a synergy of genres. Though it is seen as a dramatic text, it has contents that link with other genres of literature. The storyteller in the play sustains the narrative background to the play which is the AnasesEm. The place of poetry in the play consists in the songs that fill the play.

**The Use of Allegory:** *The Marriage of Anansewa* is an allegorical play that centres on Ananse a spider replication in the Akan culture. Naturally, the spider weaves its web to trap unsuspecting insects. In the Akan tradition, Ananse is the spider that weaves the web to trap unsuspecting victims, sometimes he gets entangled in his web as well. Efua T. Sutherland uses this allegory in dimensions that reflect the complexity of life, and that complex situations always call for complex responses.

**Satire:** *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a satirical play. The playwright isolates the vices of materialism in the society and makes a case for an egalitarian society where the rights of the poor and the rich are respected. Again, the playwright also looks at the issue of love as an underlining factor that influences success of relationship. The playwright identifies with the lack of love and uses the developments in the play to assert that for any society to move forward, love is a paramount factor.

**Comedy of Romance:** The play can also be described as a comedy of romance despite its overbearing satiric inclinations. The playwright presents a love story in a way that also rubs off on serious issues of the society.

**Use of Songs:** The play is inundated with songs; the performance of those songs is rendered by the Mboguo. The functions of the songs are quite multi –dimensional. Apart from their entertainment values, the songs are used to diffuse the tensions created by anxiety in the play. Some of the songs give important information that move the

plot of the play, and through the songs we get accustomed to the rich customs, the sociology and cosmic beliefs of the Akan people.

**Use of Pairs of Characters:** We can arrange the characters in pairs; Ananse and Anansewa; Ananse and Christy Yamoah; Aya and Ekuwa; Akwasi and Ekuwa; Anansewa and her suitors. This arrangement helps the playwright to explore the possibilities of contrast in terms of attitudes and disposition to the themes of the play.

**Panegyric:** The letters of Ananse to the suitors of Anansewa are written in panegyric tones with the poetry aspect of each letter asserting the traditional totem of the Chiefs. In the traditional context, totems are infused into panegyric renditions to inspire or cajole the listener into action. Like other forms in the same category, panegyric poems always contain epithets, totems, hyperbole, similes, metaphors and other figurative modes. Ananse's compositions, no doubt, are infused with the right words that amplify the status of Ananse's suitors in a way that makes them see the necessity of response to his letter requesting that they send gifts or money to keep Anansewa, the "object of their request", intact.

**Use of Motifs:** The playwright deploys three major motifs of Marriage, correspondence or letter writing, the spider and its web in the play. The motif of marriage is fundamental to the subject matter of the play, but for Sutherland's positive uses of a modern means of information dissemination, Ananse's intrigues would not have succeeded. The use of the spider and its web in the play shows the intricacy of life.

**Suspense and Diffusion of Suspense:** The play is full of suspense. The playwright's deliberate application of suspense creates an anxiety that keeps the audience in touch with all the events in the play. At every point, the tensions are interspersed with comic reliefs and songs but still continue to build up until the end of the play when Ananse succeeds in "invoking" the spirit of Anansewa from the land of the dead.

**Language:** The language of the play is fluid and simple. The playwright keeps faith with the Ghanaian background of the play; she uses a lot of Akan words or expressions that are translated in the footnotes to make the play accessible to African and non- Africans.

**Use of Acts in the Play:** Unlike the conventional pattern of plays, *The Marriage of Anansewa* has only four acts with no scene. The fluidity of the play derives strength from this structure that abolishes the typical format of scene in drama; the only explanation that gives credence to this is the narrative context that gives birth to the play. The duties of the Property man, the Postman and the Storyteller aid the movements of actions in the play in a manner that overshadows the usefulness of scene.

## Revision Questions

### Essay Questions

1. Discuss the satire in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
2. Examine the importance of the theme of love in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
3. Explore the use of motifs in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
4. Describe the aspects of African tradition in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

5. What are the elements of style in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*?
6. Discuss the contemporary relevance of Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
7. Discuss the theme of Love in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
8. Analyse the character of Ananse in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
9. Discuss the importance of songs in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
10. Identify the elements of literary genres in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
11. Examine the characters of Aya and Ekuwa in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
12. Critically examine the use of proxy characters by Efua T. Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
13. Examine the allegorical implications of Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
14. Discuss the dramatic techniques in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
15. What is the importance of The Storyteller and The Property man in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
16. "The Spider and its web". How does this describe Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
17. Discuss Efua T. Sutherland's use of language in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
18. Discuss the peculiar style of Efua T. Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.
19. Write short notes on these characters in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*:  
(i) Christie (ii) Akousa (iii) Akwasi
20. What are the didactic values of Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

### **Objective Questions**

1. The first suitor to give gift item to Ananse was \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) The Chief-Who-Is-Chief (b) Togbe Klu IV (c) Chief of Sapaase (d) The Chief of Mines
2. The Ghanaian way of story telling deployed in the play is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Mboguo (b) Anansegoro (c) AnasesEm (d) Sungura
3. Anansewa is \_\_\_\_\_ years old.  
(a) 16 (b) 18 (c) 20 (d) 25
4. Anansewa is attending a \_\_\_\_\_ School.

(a) Beauty (b) Secretarial (c) Fashion (d) Dancing

5. \_\_\_\_\_ is opposed to the relationship of Ananse and Christie.

(a) Aya (b) Akousa (c) Ekuwa (d) Anansewa

6. The third messengers to arrive after Anansewa's "death" came from

(a) Chief of Sapaase (b) Chief of Mines (c) Togbe Klu IV (d) Chief- Who -Is- Chief

7. The hometown of Ananse is \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Akan (b) Ghana (c) Nsona (d) Nanka

8. Ananse also means \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Scorpion (b) Spade (c) Spider (d) Snake

9. The most important marriage requirement in the play is \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Dowry (b) The Head drink (c) gifts from parents of the groom (d) rituals of marriage

10. The subject matter of the play is \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Marriage (b) Complex world (c) Wisdom (d) Love