Efua Theodora Sutherland

The Marriage of Anansewa

United Kingdom (1975)

TAGS: African Traditions



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General information	
Title of the work	The Marriage of Anansewa
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Ghana, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1975
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Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



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Efua Theodora Sutherland , 1924 - 1996
(Author)

Efua Theodora Sutherland (27 June 1924 – 21 January 1996) was a prolific Ghanaian playwright, poet, educationalist and cultural activist, who was made known in the international scene by her works as *Foriwa* (1962), *Edufa* (1967), and *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975). Through her works and contribution in the theatre industry in Ghana, drama was introduced in different universities in Ghana. Her role in the building of an educational curricular, theatre, literature and on children's literature is remarkable. Lastly, her pan-Africanist stands and contributions to the development of slow relationships between Africa and its diaspora, as revealed in her relations with popular figures like Ama Ata Aidoo, Martin Luther King, Es'kia Mphahlele, Maya Angelou, Chinua Achebe and made her popular.

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com and Chester Mbangchia, University of Yaoundé 1, mbangchia25@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

The Marriage of Anansewa, a reworking of Ghanaian folk-theatre presented through story-telling, brings into limelight the story of Anansewa, a beautiful Akan girl, whose father, Kwaku Ananse, intends to give her away to different suitors for his personal gain. Set in Ananse's house, the four-act play begins with Ananse who writes letters to his daughter's suitors. These letters are addressed to Chief Sapaase, Chief Akata (Togbe Klu IV), Chief of the Mines and Chief-who-is-chief. The content of Chief-who-is-chief's letter is emotionally charged, owing to the numerous gifts that he has offered. Shortly after the writing scene, the actions are intercepted by a short musical interlude, performed for Akwesi's and Akousa's marriage. The message of the musical performance reinforces the Akan's custom that a man must offer many gifts to the bride's family before marriage. The play proceeds with village women bringing gifts from different suitors to Ananse. Ananse receives three of them with equal showering of praises. However, he praises Chief-who-is-chief more and insists that he adds his gifts because he is a better suitor. Chief-who-is-chief sends his gifts and Ananse sells them and uses the money to build a new house, buy expensive clothes and live a luxurious life.

Anansewa's outdooring feast to pass her from girlhood to womanhood arrives but her mother is unhappy about the delay. During the ceremony, Miss Christiana Yamoah is asked to dress Anansewa while Anansewa's age mates sing a ritual initiation song. Later, the occasion is interrupted by telegrams from suitors expressing their joy about their Anansewa's initiation ceremony. Ananse feels uneasy with the messages because all her suitors want to pay his daughter's head-drink* at the same moment. To avoid any clash, Ananse induces his daughter to feign death. He explains that the pretence will bring more income as suitors will obviously come with condolence gifts. Upon hatching his plans, different suitors start sending messages of condolence and gifts, expressing their shock at Anansewa's death. Interestingly, Ananse shows much concern about Chief-who-is-chief's message, which affirms his wish to take full responsibility over Anansewa's burial. When the other three suitors leave in dismay, Ananse pretentiously invokes the spirit of the gods to restore his daughter to marry Chief-who-is-chief. The play ends with songs sung to the gods, while Anansewa wakes up.

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* Introductory part of a bride price.

Analysis

The Marriage of Anansewa represents the Akan myth of Ananse, an ageless cunning and tricky mythic hero who vacillates between animal and man. In the play, Ananse is unappreciative and cunning in his exchanges and negotiations with the different suitors.

The scene where Ananse encourages her daughter to feign death, to trick her numerous suitors, may appear immoral at first sight, especially to a non-African reader. However, this is part of the trickster culture of the African/Ghanaian society, where in the realm of folklore, and literature, and even in real life, a character/person has to survive the odds. Kwaku Ananse is probably a poor man, but he has a beautiful daughter, Anansewa, whom he sees as a source of income. Payment of a dowry (bride price) is an important source of income for those who have female children in most traditional African societies. Kwaku Ananse figures out a trick: how to get money from his daughter's suitors. It may sound odd to a Western reader, but it is current practice in Africa. On the other hand, the story should be seen as a test of intelligence on the part of the many suitors. In a situation of bargain (i.e. many suitors are interested in one girl), one must exercise caution and wisdom, otherwise they lose.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Traditions

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Intellect Love Tricksters Truth and lies

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Further Reading

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