

Cross/Cultures 98

Nkyin-Kyin

Essays on the Ghanaian Theatre



James Gibbs

Nkyin-Kyin

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James Gibbs



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2009

The meaning of the Nkyinkyin Adinkra symbol on the cover is 'changing one's self and playing many roles'. The icon represents fertility, growth and development as well as the promotion of a sense of health, safety and security.

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Preface

THIS COLLECTION brings together essays written over a thirty-five-year period. They reflect my position *vis-à-vis* the Ghanaian theatre as sometimes a remote onlooker, sometimes a participant observer. The writing repeatedly tries to come to terms with issues of perception and influence in a society moving through colonialism to nationalism, independence and beyond.

Since the essays were composed for different publications, the registers vary from the academic to the popular. The first item, entitled “Theatre in Ghana: An Introduction,” was written for *A History of Africa Theatre*, edited by Martin Banham. It covers a wide range of concerns in a short space, and, in its original context, picked up on ideas and employed terms that had already been examined in the volume. Here it stands at the beginning of a book, and beyond it are ranged essays that work up some of the issues it touches on; some, but not by any means all. For example, readers will look in vain here for detailed treatment of the important tradition of popular Ghanaian theatre, Concert Party, and for consideration of work by the pioneering playwright Mabel Dove.

The main body of the book is divided into four parts. In the first, “Outsiders and Activists,” I look at the work of Alec Dickson, who made a distinctive impact through his use of drama for community development during the late 1940s. He introduced ideas from many other parts of the world into a mass-communications project that fell foul of a jittery colonial administration. This is followed by an essay on Ken Pickering, who also worked during the colonial period, and who had experience of drama’s sister art, film or, more generally, the moving picture. The third essay in this section was written to mark the passing of a remarkable Haitian poet and playwright, Félix Morisseau-Leroy, who was brought to Ghana by a variety of postcolonial political developments and who worked with the Workers Brigade Concert Party. Leroy sought to create a socialist

theatre that embodied Nkrumah’s ideas of African Personality. He also directed an English translation of his adaptation of *Antigone*, and, because of this, he forms a link to Part Two, “Intercultural Encounters.” This consists of two essays, the first of which looks at ways in which the classic drama by Sophocles has been used by producers and writers in Ghana. Several of these men, such as Charles Kingsley Williams and Edward (now Kamau) Brathwaite, were, like Leroy, outsiders. But, more recently, the Ghanaian writers Evans Oma Hunter and Victor Yankah have adapted a play that continues to have relevance, and provide an area of exploration for intercultural encounter. However, having no access to their scripts, I have concluded the essay with an analysis of a published text, *Tegonni*, by the Nigerian Femi Osofisan. That play continues my examination of input, influence, and adaptation by showing how effectively a radical West African writer can engage with an ancient text. My essay, which was originally presented at a conference on the classics in the postcolonial world, still carries marks of its oral origins, and includes comment on the work of Kobina Sekyi, Ghana’s first published playwright. Sekyi was a member of the same pioneering generation as F.K. Fiawoo, whose *Fifth Landing-Stage* provides the focus for the second essay in the second section. But whereas *The Blinkards* by the precocious Sekyi was put on in 1917, *The Fifth Landing-Stage* was not published until 1937. Fiawoo was a well-educated man of the cloth as well as a leader of his community, and in his play he engaged with the task of presenting Anlo–Ewe ideas, family relations, social control mechanisms, aesthetic ideas and so on in a dialogue drama. By following through the action of the play, and drawing on the research of the anthropologist and linguist Diedrich Westermann, I have tried to point out issues of interpretation and ‘reading’ across cultures while engaging with a somewhat neglected major play.

Part Three, “Plays and Playwrights,” looks at a more recent group of authors. It begins with a profile of Efua Sutherland, and moves on to an examination of the influences at work on *The Marriage of Anansewa*. In these essays, I draw attention to the way in which Sutherland operates with oral traditions and the creative community that surrounded her. My attempt to reconstruct the process by which her best-known play was brought together, my examination of conventions borrowed at a remove or two from the Chinese theatre, and my documentation of the extensive process of collaboration which preceded the publication of the final text – all this may fuel controversy. It should be recognized that my intention is

to establish the precise nature of Sutherland's genius. In the process, as throughout the collection, I uncover issues of documentation and achievement that draw attention to the need for investment in organizing resources for writing Ghana's theatre history.

The third essay in this section uses Brigid Sackey's research on the vocation to the priesthood in parts of Southern Ghana to unravel themes present in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*. Like many of the other essays in this collection, it raises issues of intercultural understanding, and shows how particular information may affect a reading of a play. The final essay in the section looks at the work of Joe de Graft, taking issue with the way he was presented by a fellow Ghanaian, Kofi Agovi, in an influential reference book. My approach ensures that issues of perspective and interpretation, analysis, and appreciation are placed in the foreground. I am aware that this essay, originally delivered at the University of Ghana (1994), represents an intervention by an outsider in a discussion that some may consider is essentially a matter between Ghanaians. If I didn't think I was restoring a balance to a very public, international discussion, I would not have ventured into the area, or would not have ventured so boldly.

The volume draws to a close with two essays that reflect my position as a participant observer. The first looks at productions mounted and tours undertaken in a twenty-one-month period during the late 1960s when I was an instructor in the English Department of the University of Ghana, Legon. Since there are hostages to fortune here, I offer the account with some trepidation. I am bolstered by the approval given by West African scholar-activists to my decision to emphasize the work of Bertolt Brecht in my play selection with the Legon 7. The second essay picks up serious issues raised by participation, when a Visiting Scholar at Legon in 1994, in a British-financed and -directed film. I am convinced there are points of general interest, particularly given the growth of the video industry – more moving pictures – which has drawn heavily on skills developed in Ghana's live theatre. From this last account, written in a more personal and sometimes more popular style than the other essays, the conditions under which the performing arts in Ghana are asserting themselves becomes apparent.

While this volume makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the Ghanaian theatre, I trust it will convey some of my enthusiasm for the subject.

JAMES GIBBS
Bristol, January 2008

Acknowledgements

The names of some of those to whom I wish to express my gratitude have already appeared; others crop up in the text. Some of those who have helped me have already passed on.

As I write out the following, I am fully aware that there were also others who helped ‘back stage’ or ‘front of house’, who gave time, answered questions, or took part in productions. My thanks to them and to Cecilia Abdallah, Saka Acquaye, Kofi Agovi, Kofi Anyidoho, Sandy Arkhurst, Yaw Asare, Awo Asiedu, Mohammed Ben–Abdallah, Martin Banham, Muriel Bentley, Gordon Collier, John Collins, Geoff Davis, Mona Dickson, Chris Dunton, Robert Fraser, Joe de Graft, Kweku de Graft, Evans Oma Hunter, Ime Ikiddeh, Abiola Irele, Biodun Jeyifo, Francis and Charlotte Koranteng, Sophia Lokko, J.H. Kwabena Nketia, Stephanie Newell, Femi Osofisan, Martin Owusu, Ken Pickering, Walter Pople, Adrian Sherwood, Efua Sutherland, Esi Sutherland–Addy, Victor Yankah, Asiedu Yirenkyi.

Groups and communities that have been particularly supportive include the people of Atwia Ekumfi, and of Abiriw, and the staff at the Balme Library.

As always, I remain indebted to my wife, Patience Ansa Addo, to whom this book is dedicated.

Earlier versions of some of the essays in this volume have been published elsewhere and appear here with acknowledgement:

“Theatre in Ghana: An Introduction,” in *A History of Theatre in Africa*, ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004): 159–70.

“Alec Dickson: Propaganda and Mass Communication,” in *African Theatre in Development*, ed. Martin Banham, James Gibbs & Femi Osofisan (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

“Félix Morisseau–Leroy: ‘Where people are free they will remember me’,” *Glendora* (Lagos).

“Efua Sutherland: The ‘Mother’ of the National Theatre Movement,” in *African Writers*, ed. C. Brian Cox (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1997).

“Antigone and After Antigone: Some issues raised by Femi Osofisan’s dramaturgy in Tegonni,” in *Portraits for an Eagle: Essays in honour of Femi Osofisan*, ed. Sola Adeyemi (Bayreuth: African Studies Series, 2006).

“Antigone and Her African Sisters: West African Versions of a Greek Original,” in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. Lorna Hardwick & Carol Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007): 54–71.

The Legon Seven (Llangynidr: Nolisment, new ed. 2005).

“Efua Theodora Sutherland: A Bibliography of Primary Materials, with a Checklist of Secondary Sources,” in *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film*, ed. Kofi Anyidoho & James Gibbs (Matatu 21–22; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2000): 117–23, and in *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland*, ed. Anne V. Adams & Esi Sutherland–Addy (Oxford: Ayebia, 2007): 150–58.

The essays on Dickson, Pickering and *The Dying of the Light* previously appeared in *West Africa*.

Introduction

Theatre in Ghana

J. H. KWABENA NKETIA and A.A. Opoku have produced authoritative accounts of festivals and rituals which provide a guide to Ghana's theatrical, pre-theatrical and proto-theatrical conventions.¹ The ceremonies they describe, together with other cultural practices, such as rites of passage and children's games, incorporate impersonation and performance elements which ensure that they should be considered in any survey of dramatic traditions. More specialized studies, such as those by J.K.E. Agovi and Sophia Lokko,² have shown how annual community gatherings incorporate specific elements of drama. The work of such scholars, together with the contributions of archaeologists, historians, and linguists, has begun to produce authoritative accounts of theatrical traditions in what is now Ghana.

Annual festivals, which bear the freight of the past while reflecting contemporary influences, provide a focus for enquiry. Nowadays, such occasions are recorded in detail by returning indigenes and by visitors, but, as a result of this desire to record and in a fascinating interplay between impulses to preserve and alter, changes have been made. For example, the Aboakyer Deer-Catching Festival celebrated by the Efutu of Winneba now begins only after the sun has risen, so that there is enough light for those with cameras. Visitors wishing to take photographs during

¹ J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ghana: Music, Dance and Drama* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, Legon, 1965), and A.A. Opoku, *Festivals of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1970).

² J.K.E. Agovi, "Kundum Festival Drama Among the Ahanta-Nzema of South-West Ghana" (doctoral dissertation, Institute of African Studies, Legon, 1979), and Sophia Lokko, "Theatre Space: A Historical Overview of the Theatre Movement in Ghana," *Modern Drama* 23 (1980): 309-19.

the Odwira Festival of the Akuapem are put under intense pressure to purchase ‘press cards’ and, once they have them, become privileged recorders of events. In addition to intense pressure from photographers, the influence of government policies and the manoeuvring of commercial forces have also affected the way festivals are celebrated. For example, during the closing years of the twentieth century, the National Commission on Culture began promoting festivals as part of its policy of fostering a “festival culture.” This worked at various levels, from local and district to regional, national, and international. At around the same time, breweries aligned their advertising strategies with the same celebratory occasions. As a result, the décor for festivals has come to include bunting bearing brewers’ logos, and the proceedings now incorporate presentations, at key moments in the proceedings, of crates of beer. From these instances, it can be seen that festivals provide an ever-changing link with the past through performance, spectatorship, and procedure.

The examples given in the previous paragraph were all from the south, reflecting a bias that is impossible to shake off, given the present state of scholarly analysis of Ghanaian culture. Readers should be aware that there is a tendency among those who survey the situation in Ghana to concentrate on the most widely spoken languages and on the most populous or most easily accessible ethnic groups. The south and Asante receive a disproportionate amount of attention. For a succinct account of the diversity of language groups embraced by the arbitrarily drawn borders of Ghana, the reader is directed to James Anquandah’s comments on the “two main language groups” in the country. He writes about “the Kwa group of southern and middle Ghana, and the Gur group of northern Ghana,” which contain numerous mutually unintelligible languages. In 1980, he estimated that forty-five percent of the population of Ghana were Akans; he put the Mole–Dagbani at sixteen percent, the Ewe at thirteen percent and the Ga–Dangame at nine percent.³ This leaves a substantial seventeen percent who are speakers of other languages and creates the impression, misleading given the impact of urbanization, population movements, and the extent of intermarriage, that linguistic–ethnic affiliation is unambiguous and unchanging. In Ghana, as in other countries, migrant groups cultivate their distinct identities by meeting to sing, tell stories, and dance in the

³ James Anquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana’s Past* (Accra: Sedeco & Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1982): 38–39.

manner of their ‘home towns’. Such performances are, in some ways, more open and in other ways more closed to innovation than the convention ‘back home’.

The (ever-changing) elements that have contributed to the development of a distinctive theatre tradition in Ghana include dances, rhetorical forms, symbols, and symbolic acts. But perhaps most important, and certainly easiest to identify, has been the impact of the cycle of tales linked with the trickster-figure of Ananse the spider. Primarily associated with the Akan language group, Ananse stories have long attracted folklorists, who have reduced them to writing. ‘Reduced’ is an appropriate term, since the process often involved stripping them of the gestures and musical elements that flesh out the performance. Dramatists have reversed this process.



Ananse has inspired several local dramatists, both Akan and non-Akan, who have transformed the tales (*anansesem*) into plays (*anansegro*) that have become part of a national tradition of narrative theatre. In this national tradition of narrative drama can be found the work of Efua Sutherland (1927–96), who was passionately concerned about the traditions and conventions of the nation-state, Ghana, that came into being as she turned thirty (1957). Her privileged upbringing and education, initially in Cape Coast, had led her away from the villagers who, in her words, had “minded the culture.” Having recognized her distance from her people’s roots, she sought to create a theatrical tradition that combined elements of distinctive local conventions with experiences of world theatre that included, for example, Greek tragedy, Irish dramatists, Bertolt Brecht, and *Lady Precious Stream*. Her thinking found expression in a series of texts and two important buildings: the Drama Studio (Accra) and the *Kodzidan* (or Story [Telling] House, Atwia Ekumfi, Central Region).

The reference to Greek tragedy prompts the recognition that some of the energy driving developments in theatre came from the interaction of West Africa with the wider world. While there were trade routes across the Sahara, and while important Islamic influences were felt, the growth points were along the coast where Africa made contact most directly with Europe. The Spanish name given to the first fort the Portuguese established on the coast, El Mina (‘the mine’), indicates the source of the riches that attracted the seafarers to what became known as the ‘Gold Coast’. The European forts and castles near the shore draw attention to the nature

of the early contact, and the presence of dungeons where captured Africans were held until the slave traders' ships dropped anchor indicates another reason for interaction. With the traders came Christianity and eventually missionaries, some of whom established schools as well as churches. Once again, the complexity of the situation should be appreciated and the following dates are worth noting: **1683**, arrival of French Catholic missionaries (Axim); **1828**, arrival of missionaries from Basle (Christiansborg); **1835**, arrival of Wesleyan Methodists (Cape Coast); **1847**, arrival of missionaries from Bremen (Transvolta). Over the decades, churches, both those representing 'mainstream' denominations and those set up by local separatist groups, have established their own traditions of performance and their own annual festivals. With the establishment of a European community, churches, and schools, the circumstances that would eventually lead to a theatre tradition involving scheduled performances, paying audiences, playscripts, and other elements of 'European theatre' had been put in place.

Secondary schools, such as Mfantsipim (1876) and Achimota (1927), came to play an important role in the broadening of theatrical experience in the country. In October 1916, the Gold Coast *Leader* recorded that a performance of *The Blinkards*, written by one of the former pupils at Mfantsipim, Kobina Sekyi, had been staged. Episodic in form and composed in a mixture of English and Fanti, the play communicates Sekyi's scorn for those of his countrymen and women who uncritically aped English manners. His lively satire is of a piece with his own determined Ethiopianism, a position that found expression in *Ethiopia Unbound* by his fellow countryman Joseph Casley–Hayford. Sekyi's demanding play was put on by a group, the Cosmopolitan Club of Cape Coast, that itself came in for a healthy dose of Sekyi's satire. The text of *The Blinkards* lay, largely forgotten, in an archive until 1974, but since then it has been produced a number of times both in Ghana and beyond.

Within the sometimes Shavian satire of *The Blinkards*, a robust, free-wheeling, local humour can occasionally be glimpsed. Although a graduate of London University, playwright Sekyi was sufficiently in touch with his own community to sound notes that subsequently burst forth in the popular syncretistic tradition of the Concert Party. This hybrid emerged, possibly in Sekondi–Takoradi, out of a fusion of local and imported traditions including trickster stories (Ananse again), Empire Day entertainments, church cantatas, American blackface minstrelsy, the silent

cinema, and expatriate entertainments. A short, tightly focused examination of origins of the Concert Party by Sutherland (1970) has been followed by studies written by K.N. Bame, John Collins and Catherine Cole which sometimes revisit issues raised by Sutherland.⁴ They provide accounts of the economic and artistic foundations for the professional and semi-professional ‘trios’ that flourished, mostly along the coast, but who toured inland, arranging their itineraries to coincide with the payment of labourers. Patterns of Concert Party performance have varied, but shows frequently include a musical prelude, a series of comic turns, the main ‘concert’ or moralizing musical drama, and a concluding music session.

Over the past seventy years, the ‘Concert Party’ has been synonymous with ‘theatre’ for hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians. Inevitably, and appropriately, the form has responded to changing economic and political circumstances. For example, shortly after Ghana became independent, the Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah, encouraged the Haitian-born man of the theatre Félix Morisseau–Leroy to bring together the best concert-party actors, and to work with gifted women – the actors had hitherto all been male. Training was rigorous, and linked to the policy of retaining existing styles while preparing performers to use scripts written by Morisseau–Leroy, and ‘ghanaianized’ by the veteran ‘partymen’ Bob Johnson and Bob Thompson. Within a short time, it was claimed, a fully professional company “run on socialist theory” was ready to perform – and did so hundreds of times; a striking, if short-lived, example of linking political ideology with a popular theatrical convention. One lasting effect of this work was the establishment of women in the Ghanaian acting professions. The careers of Araba Stamp and Adeline Ama Buabeng show the transforming impact of Nkrumah’s initiative.

John Collins, writing from first-hand experience with the Jaguar Jokers Concert Party, has described the trials experienced by touring performers, the variety of venues they performed in, and the demanding audiences they encountered. Collins has also drawn attention to the themes to which

⁴ Efua Sutherland, *The Original Bob: The Story of Bob Johnson, Ghana’s Ace Comedian* (Accra: Anowuo, 1979); Kwabena N. Bame, *Come to Laugh: African Traditional Theatre in Ghana* (New York: Lillian Barber, 1985); Catherine M. Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001); John Collins, “Ghanaian Concert Party: African Popular Entertainment at the Cross Roads” (doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1994), and *Highlife Time* (Accra: Anansesem, 1994).

concert parties return, in such productions as *Orphan Do Not Glance*, and the extraordinary variety of music that enriches the performances. Recent developments that are shaping audiences' expectations include the accommodation of concert parties in television slots and in the weekend matinee programmes at the National Theatre in Accra known as "Key Soap Concert Party." These influences are, it should be noted, only the most recent of a succession of factors that have affected the concert-party tradition.

As a general rule, concert parties work from ideas generated within the company and shaped by group improvisation and performance. Only at the behest of researchers were the performances recorded and transcribed. However, the 'Sekyi Tradition' of playwriting has run parallel with this 'improvised convention' for many years. In tracing the development of the literary drama in Ghana, three texts from the 1930s deserve to be noticed: *A Woman in Jade* by Mabel Dove (newspaper publ. 1934), *The Third Woman* by J.B. Danquah (perf. 1939), and *The Fifth Landing-Stage* (perf. 1937) by F.K. Fiawoo. Dove's play is an assured and engaged examination of relations between the races and sexes in colonial Gold Coast, presented in conventional theatrical terms. *The Third Woman* draws on a story found in R.S. Rattray's *Akan-Ashanti Folk Tales* entitled "In a tribe there is no person wholly devoid of sense" and on *Prehistoric Man in Genesis* by the Revd F. de P. Castells. Philosophical and not without entertainment value, the play was published in 1943, but, perhaps because of the tortuous, imitative, and obscure manner in which it is written, has only rarely been produced.

The Fifth Landing-Stage has fared better in performance, particularly in Ewe. Its author, F.K. Fiawoo, born in Wusutu, near Kpandu, in 1891, did not have the opportunity to begin higher education until he reached the USA in 1928, but during the next five years he obtained three degrees and an educational qualification. Through his writing, he engaged in a vigorous cultural debate, and his play *Toko Atolia*, translated under the title *The Fifth Landing-Stage* (published 1943), was part of this exchange. The title is a reference to the place of execution for malefactors among the Anlo-Ewe, and directs attention to the fact that justice and compassion were known in Africa before Europeans arrived. The villain of the piece, Agbe-bada, seems invincible but is finally exposed and condemned to be buried up to his neck in the mud below the high-tide mark. However, Kumasi, the embodiment of social virtues who has cause to want him dead, rescues him. From beginning to end, the episodic drama engages in a dialogue

with Europe, specifically with the condescension of missionaries towards African society, but also with Aristotelian or neoclassicist and Shakespearean ideas of the theatre. According to Kofi Awoonor, the original text catches the “cadences of spoken Ewe” and sticks “very faithfully to the speech patterns of an older language.”⁵ A landmark in Ewe literature, *The Fifth Landing-Stage* has been fairly regularly produced in Ewe in eastern Ghana, and has occasionally been performed in English elsewhere.

The postwar period, particularly the 1950s, saw the theatre in Ghana caught up in the Cold War and the struggle for independence. The expansion of the British Council, and its promotion of theatre in English, dates from this period, and, as one might expect, prompted a nationalist response. Nkrumah’s influence on concert party has already been referred to, his brand of centralized government, passionate pan-Africanism, and support for ‘African Personality’ all came to have great significance for the Ghana National Theatre Movement. He encouraged Efua Sutherland, who became both principal historian of, and leading light in, the first phase of the Ghana National Theatre Movement. She set up the pioneering Ghana Drama Studio Players (1958), and, by the following year, the Ghana Experimental Theatre Players were ready to put on an *anansegoro*, or ‘spider play’, in Akropong. The performance, for which a text was meticulously rehearsed and a set constructed, incorporated formalized exchanges between a storyteller and the (paying) ‘audience’, and songs (*mboguo*) which were performed by the cast and by members of the audience. The experiment showed Sutherland beginning to realize her dream of bringing together indigenous traditions, particularly those linked with Ananse stories, and relevant imported conventions.

From the late 1950s until her death in 1996, Sutherland was an influential, sometimes a dominating, figure in the Ghanaian theatre. The experiments already referred to led eventually to *The Marriage of Anansewa* (extract published 1975), which has become a classic of African theatre. She also wrote a play that brought together ideas of festival drama with theatre for community development (*Foriwa*, premiered 1962) and another that explored the parallels between Ghanaian and classical drama (*Edufa*, premiered 1962; first publ., rev., 1967). Her short biography of

⁵ Kofi Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth* (Garden City NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1975): 136.

Bob Johnson referred to above constitutes a succinct, but now challenged, account of the origins of concert party (1979). Sutherland also stimulated the development of a writers' group, encouraged local publishing, created a literary journal, helped establish the study of African performance traditions at university level, and was the moving force behind a professional theatre group (Kusum Agoromba) that performed in English and Akan. Furthermore, she was the impetus behind the construction of the Drama Studio. Financed partly by the CIA (though Sutherland probably didn't know the precise source), the shape of the Drama Studio was inspired by the courtyards or compounds that are focal points for much creative activity in Ghana. It was built, Sutherland later wrote, "as a cultural symbol of our people's awakening to the necessity to endeavour determinedly to assert our cultural rights in all respects."⁶ Revealingly, it incorporated a modest proscenium-arched stage on one side; also significantly, it was demolished in the early 1990s.

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In her work at the Drama Studio and at the University of Ghana, Legon, Sutherland was supported by Joe de Graft, who had initially contributed to the development of drama in the country through school productions of Shakespeare, of his own work, and of plays by James Ene Henshaw. Remarkable progress was made during the years following Independence, and in 1962 the theatre in Ghana could be said to be flourishing. In that year, there were numerous concert-party groups touring the country, the Workers Brigade Concert Party had begun to work with socialist themes, the Drama Studio was open, and productions there included two plays by Nigerians (one by Henshaw, one by Wole Soyinka), two by de Graft (*Sons and Daughters* and *Visitor from the Past*, later retitled *Through a Glass Darkly*) and two by Sutherland (*Foruwa*, more often spelt *Foriwa*, and *Edufa*). Performances encouraged by the Arts Council of Ghana for the same year included *Antigone in Haiti* and *Dogucimi* by Félix Morisseau-Leroy, and preparations were being made for production of *The Fifth Landing-Stage*.

⁶ Efua Sutherland, "Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the PNDC on the subject of future action for the development of Ghana's potential in dramatic art" (unpublished, 21 March 1987): 1.

To sketch in other parts of the picture, one should note that there were drama groups based in communities, such as the Osu Youngsters' Society, and churches, including The Good Samaritan Society. Ga 'folk opera' companies, concentrated in Accra, such as the Dumas Choir that was later involved in putting on Saka Acquaye's *The Lost Fisherman*, had developed a fairly distinctive style, and there were also productions by educational institutions, such as Winneba Secondary School's, which received government support for its production of *The King and I*. At the University, a short-lived Students' Theatre scored a remarkable success with *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, written by a student who then called herself "Christina Ata Aidoo." In it can be recognized the subtlety of stagecraft, stringency of comment, and strength of dialogue that have made Ata Aidoo such a significant Ghanaian dramatist. At this time, there was also considerable encouragement given to puppet theatre, where European patterns were in evidence but local musical and dance styles dominated the presentation.

In the mid-1960s, however, circumstances altered as financial constraints were felt and as the personality cult surrounding the head of state became stifling. After Nkrumah was overthrown by a *coup d'état* on 24 February 1966, some, such as the Workers' Brigade Concert Party, found themselves somewhat isolated, while others, the versatile and gifted Acquaye among them, felt released from ideological pressures. In the remaining years of the decade, Acquaye's *The Lost Fisherman* was regularly revived and the Freelance Players, many of whom were graduates of drama courses at the University of Ghana, Legon, established themselves as a significant group. At this time, Soyinka's influence was strongly felt through productions, some by George Andoh-Wilson, of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *Kongi's Harvest* that drew attention to the ritual dimension that the Nigerian brought to thinking about African theatre.

Seeds that Sutherland had sown began to bear fruit in the 1970s as Martin Owusu (born in Agona Kwaman, 1943) and Mohammed Ben-Abdallah (born in Kumasi, 1944), both of whom had studied at Legon, had work performed.⁷ While building on conventions of narrative drama

⁷ See Martin Owusu, *The Story Ananse Told* (London: Heinemann, 1970), and *The Sudden Return and Other Plays* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, *The Trial of Mallam Ilya and Other Plays* (Accra: Woeli, 1987), *The Fall of*

and acutely aware of the importance of writing for children, both turned to historical topics – Ben-Abdallah in particular, as can be seen from plays such as *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, incorporated masks, puppets, and dance in his adventurous dramaturgy.

After the young flight-lieutenant J.J. Rawlings seized power on 4 June 1979, and after his ‘Second Coming’ following the coup of 31 December 1981, politics and the arts became entwined once more. Playwrights Asiedu Yirenkyi (born in 1946, Akropong), Ama Ata Aidoo (no longer “Christina”) and Ben-Abdallah all held high office, often in Information, Education or Culture. This period saw the promotion of festivals, at various levels, leading up to Panafest, and the construction of the National Theatre. Panafest and the National Theatre take the ‘story’ of Ghanaian drama into the 1990s and beyond, showing the interaction of a younger generation with ideas Sutherland had espoused.

Under the terms of an agreement, partly negotiated by Ben-Abdallah, signed with the Government of China in 1985, the Drama Studio was razed and ‘rebuilt’ on the campus at Legon. On the cleared site near the centre of Accra, Chinese engineers constructed a massive, some would say monstrous, National Theatre: the foundation stone was laid in June 1990, and the building opened in January 1993. The facilities are dominated by a vast proscenium stage with a huge auditorium in which capacious seats mean that many members of the audience are a great distance from the stage. The design of the whole building requires huge expenditure on air-conditioning – a cost that has made the hiring the hall prohibitively expensive for many groups. The symbolism of the sequence should not be missed, nor should the force of the lines from one of Aidoo’s poems in which she writes to a friend: “But the Drama Studio is gone, Robert, / razed to the ground: / to make way for someone’s notion of/ the kind of theatre / I / should / want.”⁸ In the years that remained to her, Sutherland never visited either the new National Theatre or the “Efua Sutherland Drama Studio,” the ‘rebuilt’ studio, at Legon.

The National Theatre is now a fact of theatrical life in Ghana. It was opened with a production that brought together the National Dance Ensemble, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the performance company

Kumbi and Other Plays (Accra: Woeli, 1989), and *The Land of a Million Magicians* (Accra: Woeli, 1993).

⁸ Ama Ata Aidoo, *An Angry Letter in January* (Coventry: Dangaroo): 19.

Abibigromma. Over the years, directors, scenic artists, and lighting designers have taken on the challenge represented by the building. For example, during 1994, Anton Phillips (director) and Larry Coker (lighting) were flown in by the British Council to work on *Old Story Time* by Trevor Rhone. In the same year, Femi Osofisan mounted his own script, *Nkrumah Ni ... Africa Ni!*, and Steven Gerald (University of Texas, Austin) directed Mustapha Matura's *The Playboy of the West Indies*. However, only the National Dance Ensemble, choreographed by Nii Yartey, has managed to come to terms with the wide-open spaces of the stage and the scale of the auditorium.

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While steering away from the template provided by Sutherland regarding theatre buildings, the Rawlings years saw the celebration of the “First Festival of Historical Drama” in Cape Coast, which, promoters were at pains to point out, had its origin in a proposal Sutherland had made in 1980. The first international or Panafrican Festival was held in December 1992, and since then a wide variety of performing groups from Africa and the African Diaspora have been brought together in the name of “PANAFEST.” There have been fruitful meetings and exchanges, but all too often there have been organizational disasters. Audiences have been pitifully small for the artistic events, though a football match between Ghana and Jamaica (1996) attracted great interest. The match, justified in the press on the grounds that soccer was introduced in colonial: i.e. historical times, showed how far the Festival had moved from that envisaged by Sutherland.

During the 1990s there was increasing use of drama for community development. There had been precedents for this – for example, in the Mass Education and Social Welfare programmes of the 1930s – but a new impetus was given to the work by contact with the international movement for Theatre for Development, and by donor agency support. Sandy Arkhurst, who has served the Ghanaian theatre faithfully in many capacities in the course of a distinguished career, has run relevant courses at Legon, and animators from outside have conducted practical sessions. One of these was Chuck Mike, best known for his work with the Performance Studio Workshop (Nigeria). Performers based at the National Theatre have also been involved, and some influence has been felt from Augusto Boal and other innovators.

The end of the millennium saw warnings, based on poor attendances at the National Theatre, that “the theatre in Ghana is dying.” However, during September 2000, there were signs of health, with revivals of classic Ghanaian texts and productions of new work by younger writers, including Yaw Asare, born in Nkonya–Tayi, Volta Region (1953). Groups such as Audience Awareness, GIPAS (the Ghana International Performing Arts Society), Living Echoes, Pacesetters, and Theatre Mirrors soldiered on, sometimes, as with Joris Wartenberg’s *King Lion’s Law*, undertaking very ambitious productions. Students at educational institutions, particularly the School of Performing Arts, Legon, and professionals attached to the School and the National Theatre have continued to defy the prophets of doom. Non-Governmental Organisations have used a variety of theatrical means to raise awareness and stimulate discussion.⁹ In open-air cinemas, compounds, and cocoa storage sheds, as well as at the National Theatre in weekend Key Soap Concert Party slots, the remaining concert parties continued to perform. The reference to Key Soap points to the disturbing extent to which Ghanaian theatre had become dependent on sponsorship of one sort or another. Productions of James Baldwin’s *The Amen Corner* and Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*, supported by American dollars, adaptations of Molière, with French assistance, and the continued involvement of the British Arts Council (*Yaa Asantewa* was ‘shipped’ from the UK to Ghana in 2001) provided further evidence of this dimension.

At the beginning of 2001, to mark the fifth anniversary of Sutherland’s passing, productions of her plays were put on, and a double issue of *Matatu*, entitled *FonTomFrom*, dedicated to her appeared. Subtitled “Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film,” *FonTomFrom* brought together academic articles, interviews with practising playwrights, reviews of plays, and an attempt to chronicle the emergence of the video industry. Appropriately, the volume included a previously unpublished Sutherland play, “Children of the Man-Made Lake,” and her important essay “The Second Phase of the National Theatre Movement in Ghana.” Although the Accra Drama Studio had been demolished at the beginning

⁹ Sandy Arkhurst, “The Community Theatre Project: A Rethink,” *SPA Newsletter* (Legon) 2 (April–June 1994): 4–6, and Esi Dogbe, “Visibility, Eloquence and Silence: Women and theatre for development in Ghana,” in *African Theatre Women*, ed. Jane Plastow (Oxford: James Currey, 2002): 83–99.

of the 1990s, and although she died in 1996, Sutherland continues to exert a powerful influence over the theatre in Ghana. The national tradition of narrative drama to which she contributed has been maintained, most obviously in the work of younger playwrights such as Yaw Asare, whose *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* makes explicit reference to her. Her influence can also be seen in a fascinating interview conducted by Esi Sutherland Addy with Adelaide Buabeng, one of those who has lived and worked in the Ghanaian theatre for the last forty years.¹⁰

A distressing footnote to this introduction is provided by the fact that Yaw Asare “left for his village” on 1 August 2002 at the age of only forty-eight.¹¹ It has been left to others, some mentioned in brief introduction, others still quietly making early steps in the Ghanaian theatre, to carry forward the movement to which he contributed.

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¹⁰ Esi Sutherland-Addy, “Drama in her life: Interview with Adeline Ama Buabeng,” in *African Theatre Women*, ed. Jane Plastow (Oxford: James Currey, 2002): 66–82.

¹¹ James Gibbs, “Obituary: Yaw Asare,” in *African Theatre: Southern Africa*, ed. David Kerr (Oxford: James Currey, 2004): ix–x.

OUTSIDERS AND ACTIVISTS



1 Propaganda and Mass Education

Alec Dickson and Drama for Development
in the Gold Coast

Introduction

ALEC DICKSON, best known in the United Kingdom for his role in establishing Voluntary Service Overseas and Community Service Volunteers and in the USA for his contribution to the foundation of the Peace Corps, worked in the Gold Coast briefly during the late 1940s. He was concerned with mass education, social welfare, and community development programmes. Although he was not interested in drama *per se*, his determination to use all available methods in order to challenge those he was working with, to clarify issues, communicate information, and recommend solutions, encouraged him to experiment in the area that is now known, broadly, as ‘theatre for development’.

For the Gold Coast, Dickson’s gospel, and I use the word advisedly in view of the prophetic fervour with which he argued his case and the recklessness with which he aroused opposition, was that of mass education in a very broad sense. He had the temerity to aspire “to change the social atmosphere.” The account that follows, using publications and documents from among Dickson’s own papers as well as published sources, gives an indication of his approach, the controversy it embroiled him in, and the legacy it left. Although fascinated by the light cast on the operation of colonial administration, my particular interest is in the use of drama (impersonation, before an audience, of a structured sequence). I suggest that Dickson should be regarded as a pioneer in the use of drama within the

context of a national community development programme on the West African coast.

Dickson appreciated the fact that drama, coupled with discussion and demonstration, could have an important role to play in focusing community effort, but he did not approach the issue with clearly articulated ideas about how precisely plays should be put together or how groups should be gathered to perform them. While he was open to suggestions from those around him, his cultural background influenced him: he was most comfortable with familiar European conventions, with carefully plotted moral and didactic pieces. His influence on work in drama for community development continued after he left Ghana, in projects undertaken by, for example, the Social Welfare and Community Development Department, by the Extra-Mural Studies Department, and by the Workers' Brigade Drama Group. His impact may also throw light on a play by Efua Sutherland that addresses development issues, *Foriwa*.

Background

In *A Chance to Serve*, the principal introduction to Dickson's life and a source I shall draw on repeatedly, Mora Dickson, his widow, edited his writings to create a picture that is partly a self-portrait. The effect is curiously like a brass rubbing: the labour of the intermediary makes the underlying original appear on paper.

Born in 1911, Alexander Graeme (Alec) Dickson's important early experiences included public-school life and a privileged university education – Rugby and Oxford. Scouting, patriotism, awareness of the links established between Oxbridge and deprived communities in London – all contributed to the matrix within which his early ideas developed. He also visited Germany during the period when fascism was beginning to make an impact.

Always articulate and anxious to communicate, he became a journalist on graduation, working on the *Yorkshire Post* and *Daily Telegraph*. Even at the start of his career, he managed to combine writing with organizing activities for disadvantaged young men. The war gave his life a new direction and brought military service with the Cameron Highlanders and the 1st King's African Rifles. By 1940 he was in command of a platoon in the Abyssinian Campaign.

As was the case with some others, the army provided opportunities to experiment and to move into new areas of activity. In the final months of the Second World War, Dickson led the East African Command Mobile Propaganda Unit. This project grew out of his recognition of the advantages of using servicemen as agents for influencing the communities in which they had grown up. He argued that military training and experiences under arms had equipped the soldiers with a perspective that was of benefit to their ‘home towns’.

In an article on “The Returned Askari” published in *The Times* (1945), Dickson pointed out that the East African Command Mobile Propaganda Unit could be used to

convey by display, demonstration and discussion – to illiterate farmers, herdsmen, plantation workers, copper miners and schools – what the war was about, why it had been won, and how they could contribute to victory.

There is no specific mention of drama in this telescoped account, nor is there in “Tell Africa: An Experiment in Mass Education,” which appeared in *Geographical Magazine* in March 1946. It is apparent, however, that in addition to the methods mentioned above, “display, demonstration and discussion,” he made use of games, music and “Janes’ techniques.” Many of the ingredients of drama were, thus, present.

A Chance to Serve includes an account of the Unit putting on a “potted, mobile edition of the Aldershot tattoo but containing as high an educational content as possible.”¹ The ‘show’ was performed widely in East and Central Africa by a contingent of men from different language groups and with varied backgrounds. Dickson was able to write: “Our unit has left every village in Nyasaland and N. Rhodesia singing our songs and emulating our PT.”²

His awareness of the purposes of education – or propaganda – was broad, for, while his views had partly been formed in England, and while East Africa had made a distinctive contribution, American and continental influences were also important. He had been impressed by the ideas about mass education developed by Dr Frank Laubach (1884–1970), and known as “The Laubach Method.” This put emphasis on literacy, starts from the

¹ Alec Dickson, *A Chance to Serve*, ed. Mora Dickson (London: Dobson, 1976): 28.

² Dickson, *A Chance to Serve*, 31.

known, and uses learning by association rather than by rote. Dickson was also well aware of the achievements of the US Civilian Conservation Corps, and, as an example of what large-scale planning could achieve for the transformation of life in a vast area, the Tennessee Valley Authority provided inspiration.

Dickson’s ideas about character formation, already fairly clear from his experience at Rugby, were influenced by the writings of Kurt Hahn and by the examples provided by the Outward Bound movement. As far as drama was concerned, there were the pioneering ventures of the Village Theatre Movement in the United Kingdom, and of the way Moral Re-Armament (now “Initiatives of Change”) used productions of plays, such as *The Forgotten Factor*, *The Boss*, and *Freedom*, to stress the importance of individual commitment to an ideal.

These influences were all apparent in the ideas about mass education programmes that Dickson developed. He worked on the principle that the goal was to “change the social atmosphere”; in order to do this, he was convinced, people should be equipped with skills. Throughout his work and writing, the concern to mobilize groups for specific purposes was combined with a recognition that this implied creating opportunities for individuals to become involved and transformed. He quoted with approval Lord Elton’s comment in *St. George and the Dragon* – “It was not so much the Crusaders who made the Crusade, as the Crusade which made the Crusaders.” (A remark which may reflect a glamorized view of the Crusades.)

In attempting to “change the social atmosphere,” Dickson adopted a step-by-step approach. There were, as he saw it, various stages by which a community could be led to a point at which development could take place. Literacy was of primary importance, and this was linked with physical training, courses on civics, discussion groups, and debates. In the broad context provided by this approach, projects involving music and drama had a role to play.

Gold Coast Experience

Dickson’s work in East Africa impressed Henry Gurney, who was the Acting Governor-General in the Gold Coast for substantial periods during 1945 and 1946, and led to an invitation to take up a post in Mass Communication in Accra. However, on assuming his duties, Dickson found a

colonial administration that was unhappy with any reference to “mass communication.” Gurney had been moved on and the colonial service – partly accommodated in Christiansborg Castle – was (in 1948) initially complacent and then, when faced by a boycott of European goods and rioting in the major towns, jittery. In this political climate, there were doubts about the whole idea of ‘mass movements’, and Dickson, the apostle of mass communication, soon found himself stripped of his designation “Mass Education Officer” and dubbed “Social Welfare Development Officer.” Given this inauspicious start, it was not surprising that his influence was more or less limited to a few projects in Trans-Volta and the production of a handbook.

The *Mass Education Handbook* described activities for clubs and women’s groups. From the sections on common ailments and domestic hygiene in that volume, it is clear that health and health education were of prime importance. The teaching techniques recommended included the use of visual aids – it was the age of the flannel-graph and ‘transparencies’ – and a section on the use of Keroscope projectors. There was nothing in the book on drama as such. Only in the paragraphs on the importance of demonstration when teaching first aid was pretence and acting mentioned. For an insight into Dickson’s views of drama, it is necessary to examine the Trans-Volta projects in some detail.

Dickson’s account of his work in Trans-Volta, now the Volta Region, “an experiment in mass education,” appeared in *African Affairs* and *Oversea Education*. In the latter version, “Condensed by W.E.F. Ward, from a longer report,” and presented under the title “Training Community Leaders in the Gold Coast,” Dickson was, clumsily, described as “formerly Social Development Officer.” The longer document can be found in the Dickson Papers and a substantial part is reproduced in *A Chance to Serve*. The account is of fundamental importance for the investigation of Dickson’s approach – it gives an idea of the context in which he operated, contains clues to the influences on his thinking, and provides information about his working methods – including his use of drama.

The title of Dickson’s paper as it appeared in *Oversea Education* does not indicate the extent to which it reflects what happened on four courses he organized in the Trans-Volta area of the Gold Coast. And it does not tell the story behind that “formerly” – nor does it give the reason why Dickson moved on shortly after the courses finished. In fact, he had lasted only about eighteen months in the country. The Castle, as indicated above, was

unhappy with what Dickson stood for – and he had limited sympathy with the Castle. For example, while tactfully recognizing the value of the year-long training courses offered in Accra for welfare assistants, he was anxious to proceed in an altogether more populist direction. The courses he organized were held well away from Accra, and during them a large number of people were exposed to experiences which, he hoped, would result in radically changed attitudes. The following extract illustrates his ‘gospel’ – and it takes little imagination to picture the expressions on the faces of the conservative elements in the colonial administration when it was read out:

[The] need to create a social climate of venturesome initiative, in the words of the Cambridge Report, is – in the writer’s view – the vital, fundamental role of mass education. Providing the emotional outlet needed in a society fast losing its traditional forms of self-expression: creating a people’s movement for social betterment; evoking the new mental and moral qualities called for by the new order that the educated African wants; developing a social tolerance and cohesion; emphasising the obligation of service to the community by the educated elite; recognising the strong element of enjoyment, without which community development cannot succeed: these were the objects of the campaign, and not the formation of a model P.W.D. gang or a glorified sanitary squad.

The reference to the “Cambridge Report” was to a Colonial Office document produced after a conference held in the university town during 1948. As can be appreciated, it provided a number of statements that Dickson could use to justify the programmes he wanted to implement. However, aware that nationalist politicians were attracting large crowds, the Castle was terrified of “venturesome initiative.” Reports from Cambridge could be waved around, but they did not impress those who sat in Christiansbourg Castle, ‘the men on the ground’.

Under Dickson’s leadership, courses lasting roughly a fortnight were held at Peki, Anfoega Akukome, Kpedze Awlime, and Abor. The reasons Dickson gave for concentrating on those towns included the following:

The Ewe people form a homogeneous tribal block, of a size and vigour that make them suitable for a mass education campaign. They are interested in their own language, and attempts have recently been made to produce a mass literacy primer. They are increasingly conscious of their own nationhood. They have a tradition of craftsmanship and a

really outstanding aptitude for choral music. And they themselves expressed a desire for mass education to be started among them.³

It was also, in all probability, convenient for both parties that Dickson should be a long way from Accra. For Dickson, it was invaluable that involvement in the courses was encouraged by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, which had a devoted following in the area. The seeds of his secular gospel fell on soil that others had prepared.

Predictably, the programme centred on a literacy drive, but attention was also given to first aid, hygiene, physical recreation, discussions, civics, music, cinema, drama, hobbies, and women's crafts. The report, which Ward condensed for publication in *Oversea Education*, indicates how uncertain Dickson was about the precise means by which progress could best be made. He was, with a modesty rarely encountered among, say, foreign aid workers, World Bank Officials, and lecturers in Theatre Arts, feeling his way, prepared to acknowledge that he did not know all the answers. For example, with regard to health education, he was uncertain whether priority should be given to treating emergencies or to basic hygiene. And he wondered aloud what should be treated under 'civics'. It is apparent that under this heading he spoke about Kurt Hahn's life and career, and that George Padmore, whose very name must have given some of those in the Castle apoplexy, was afforded the opportunity to speak. Apparently Padmore delivered what Dickson described as "some highly tendentious effusion [...] on Imperialism." Since Padmore's left-wing credentials were well-established, the line he took is easy to reconstruct from Dickson's comment.

There was, it seems, a brief discussion about what drama should be used for and how it should be organized. This did not, however, constitute anything like the full debate on "Aesthetic Considerations to Maximise Communication in Theatre for Development" that was necessary. Reporting on what seems to have been a fairly dilatory discussion, Dickson wrote:

We toyed with the idea at first of presenting little plays featuring Ananse the Spider of West African folklore. We were not, however, a touring concert-party out to entertain native audiences – but a training

³ Alec Dickson, "Training Community Leaders in the Gold Coast," *Overseas Education* (London) 22.1 (October 1950): 3.

team endeavouring to instruct voluntary leaders in how they themselves might organise village drama. We had, therefore, to show first how to take a social problem and dramatise it; then, how to present it.

In view of the importance of Ananse stories to Ghanaian dramatists and the use that has been made of concert parties to teach and preach, this is a paragraph full of missed opportunities. Neither playwrights nor concert-party men, Dickson and his group were happier in the role of missionaries with a secular gospel. They built on familiarity with a heritage they shared with many of the local participants – and made use of New-Testament parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. Since members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church were supporting the courses in force, this was very familiar territory indeed to many of those involved. Relevant secular lessons were tagged onto or tugged out of Biblical narratives. Various modern-dress versions of the Good Samaritan were performed and the prodigal son or daughter lived riotously in Kumasi and Accra before returning to his or her village.

There was, however, room for a larger measure of local inspiration. Dickson continued:

Other more secular themes treated were the sick father turning from the rapacious futilities of the witch-doctor to the gratuitous benevolence of a Government dispenser (this was not meant in the satirical sense that it might appear); the responsibilities of parents in juvenile delinquency; and the scorned wife who enrolled on a literacy course so as to find out what was in the notes being passed between her husband and the Other Woman, and who eventually regained his respect and affection.⁴

Course members, it appears, actually put on their own plays. Wisely, in view of their lack of knowledge about local conventions, leaders did not suggest “how drama could be organised.” Dickson wrote, quite frankly, “we had not ourselves thought out the matter (nor is it easy to).”

With characteristic modesty, Dickson saw that it was too much to hope that “those attending our courses of only a fortnight would go away and start a village theatre movement.” There is, it should be noted, a certain ambiguity in all this, since, despite a reluctance to “suggest,” there had been “leadership by example”; thanks to the status that inevitably accom-

⁴ Dickson, “Training Community Leaders in the Gold Coast,” 9.

panied him, Dickson established a particular pattern: the simple moral narrative emerged, or was reinforced, as the dominant pattern for the drama.

The situation was further complicated because, while providing leadership from the outside, Dickson expressed his conviction that local leadership was an essential part of the success of community development. He noted the contributions to the courses of the Rev. C.G. Baeta, A. Kotei (an illustrator), “Kumasi” Kassena (an ex-serviceman who led the physical-training sessions), Lucy Alar (a senior nurse), William Tsitsiwu (a singing teacher), and “Police Bandsman Adzaku.” Dickson was not the first, nor was he the last, to find himself providing an influence while recognizing his own inadequacies, and lauding the talents of those with whom he was collaborating. Given the fact that he had been in the country only a short time, he was probably only vaguely aware of the significance of what he was doing in working with Baeta and the others. The impact of Christian missions on the Guinea Coast had been accompanied by the introduction of European conventions of art, music, military training, health education, and singing. He was, in fact, working with men and women who had grown up in and contributed to syncretized traditions.

Operating in Trans-Volta had certain advantages – not least that it was beyond the immediate supervision of the Castle. However, being so close to the (‘artificial’) border with French-ruled Togo meant that there were opportunities for international contact and embarrassment. Dickson was, in any case, dangerously impressed by French patterns. It was his opinion, for example, that the French were more aware of the potential for drama in community development than the British: he worked with Gabriel Johnson from Togo – who, he considered, possessed a fine sense of humour and brought imaginative insights to theatrical situations. Dickson referred positively to “Le petit théâtre au village,” which, apparently, was covered in a course given at L’Institut Français d’Afrique Noir, in Dakar. As if praising a ‘rival’ imperial power were not enough, Dickson entertained His Excellency M. Cédille, who travelled from Lomé and spent a day and two nights at the course. Cédille clearly took a great interest in

what was being done, but the encounter was not without repercussions. Indeed, it seems to have occasioned a minor international incident.⁵

As can be appreciated from this brief description of the course and Dickson's 'general attitude', the format for mass education he encouraged could be seen as presenting a challenge to the entrenched position of colonial administrators in Accra. The involvement of 'international Communists' such as George Padmore was particularly provocative, and the collaboration with the French was clearly unpopular with those at Christiansbourg. An account of the forces perceived to be at work is provided in *A Chance to Serve*, where Mora Dickson writes:

The Colonial Service were paranoically obsessed that [Alec Dickson] was seeking to introduce some totalitarian form of organisation, equating with the Hitler Jugend his every proposal for utilising the potential energies and idealism of young people for constructive tasks.

In vain Alec Dickson cited his favourite passage from *Faith for Living*, written by Lewis Mumford [...]: "But the young will care for their regional home if they have a part in creating it [...]. They should help clear the slums as well as studying housing, they should help plant the forests as well as study conservation". It should not need another war to effect this purposeful mobilisation of youth.⁶

Faith for Living (1940) was one of a stream of publications in which Mumford (1895–1990) argued his case for "organic human progress." It was part of a humanist tradition that was at odds with colonial thinking, and that appealed to many.

While mass education and an emphasis on human values were viewed with suspicion from the Castle, they were, predictably, championed elsewhere. For example, the emphasis on literacy found favour with some of "the educated natives" to whom Dickson referred in a passage quoted earlier. In reporting one "of the only two wise-cracks that were ever made at our expense by the African press" (a remark that, after ten days on the literacy course, participants would be able to "spell 'Convention'"), Dickson was hinting at the support he received from the nationalists – particularly from members of the *Convention* People's Party, the Party

⁵ Alec Dickson, "Mass Education in Togoland," *African Affairs* (London) 49.195 (April 1950): 150; see also Peter du Sautoy, *Community Development in Ghana* (London: Oxford UP, 1958).

⁶ Dickson, *A Chance to Serve*, 45.

with the slogan “Self-Government Now” that would in time sweep Kwame Nkrumah into power.

During the months that followed the Trans-Volta initiatives, the local nationalist press took up Dickson’s cause and case. The flow of events can be glimpsed from the reports in the newspapers. Part of the issue was brought into the open in “Mr Dickson and Mass Education,” which appeared in the *Accra Evening News* on Christmas Eve 1948. There, an anonymous contributor drew attention to the “confusion” surrounding Dickson’s appointment: it was stated that Dickson “[had] been denied his true professional chances [in order] to figure merely as a Social Development Officer.”

After Christmas, battle was continued with “This team teaches people community life” (*Ashanti Times*, 29 December 1948), where it was reported that Dickson was leaving for Trans-Volta, and it was noted that he had been, with David Kimble of Extra-Mural Studies, to “French Sudan.” This was followed by “The Man Dickson” in the *Gold Coast Express* (19 February 1949) and, the following month, by a contribution signed by Kofi Baako. In an article with a title calculated to frighten many colonial servants, “Mass Education and Self-Government,” Baako summed up much that had gone before and found someone to blame. He wrote that Dickson “came and was pushed to one side,” and he named the person he blamed for this marginalization – Tom Barton of the colonial Education Department.

From his arrival, Dickson’s work had been viewed with suspicion by many colonial officers in the Gold Coast. When it was championed in the columns of the nationalist press, and when Dickson’s hobby-horse, mass education, was linked with the nationalists’ slogan “Self-Government,” his demise was assured. He left having spent only eighteen months in the country. However, the kind of work that he had been doing could not be “pushed to one side.” Publications indicate that it continued, and that drama was part of it.

In a *Report on Community Development* sent from the Governor-General of the Gold Coast to the Secretary of State for Colonies, London, on 27 August 1949, it was noted that “Drama instruction is given in the techniques of dramatizing local themes of social importance.” This was put in context by the following statement:

The intention has been to instruct educated young people in the technique of such things as the organisation of mass literacy, the improve-

ment of choirs and village bands, the encouragement of physical training and games, the fostering of hygiene and first aid lessons, and the presentation of short open-air plays.

Owen Barton, one of Dickson’s colleagues in the Social Welfare Department and not to be confused with Tom Barton of the Education Department, gave a broadcast talk on mass education that was printed in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* in November 1949. Under the heading “Village Drama,” he referred to “amusing sketches which have a theme of social significance.” The examples of topics treated included juvenile delinquency, agricultural techniques, and modern medical practice. Owen Barton sounded a rare note when he commented on the “aesthetic elements” in the performances: he observed that it was “difficult to correct the tendency to produce long dramas,” and pointed out that dialogue drama was used with music, singing, and discussion groups.

Drama continued to occupy a significant place in the work of what became the Gold Coast Social Welfare and Community Development Department. When the Colonial Secretary visited the country early in 1950, the *Bulletin* reported:

[He] watched a short comedy in four acts by members of the [Mass Education] team. The play, which carried a moral aimed at discouraging the drift from the country into the large towns, showed the misfortunes which befell a farmer’s son who was persuaded by a visitor, a hooligan from Kumasi, to leave his village ‘to find work’ in the larger town.⁷

By this time, Dickson was about to go to the British Cameroons. There he embarked on a very fruitful period at Man O’War Bay, developing his concern with leadership training by using challenging situations, or ‘happenings’, to involve the participants in problem solving exercises.

Drama for community development in the Gold Coast flourished in a Social Welfare and Community Development Department led by the influential Peter du Sautoy, where drama work was undertaken by Ken Pickering, J. Riby Williams, J.G. Wartemburg, and others. And it formed part of the brief of the Workers’ Brigade Concert Party that Nkrumah later

⁷ Anon., “Mass Education: Colonial Secretary sees display,” *Gold Coast Bulletin* (22 February 1950): 7.

setup involving Bob Johnson, Bob Thompson, Bob Cole, and the Haitian dramatist and director Félix Morisseau-Leroy.

Return to Ghana

In 1958, after the Gold Coast had been Ghana for some eighteen months, Dickson, who had spent 1956–58 in Iraq, returned to West Africa. He was ‘wearing a different hat’, having been invited to contribute to a training project in work-camp methods. With Hans Peter Muller and Andrew Rutter, he spoke to work-camp leaders from West Africa, and on the 30th of August he was one of the MCs at a dance

Naturally, he was interested to see what was going on in terms of development work in Nkrumah’s Ghana, and was particularly anxious to learn about the Workers’ Brigade that had been formed. On 3 September, Ken Pickering took him to see the Brigade in action, and to meet Brigadier Turner. Much had changed since Dickson’s time in the Gold Coast, and much was to continue to change – not least the Workers’ Brigade.

Conclusion

When I was teaching in Ghana in 1994, I found that few among the younger generation of activists involved in Ghana’s vigorous theatre for extension communication programmes were aware of the pioneering part taken by Dickson in encouraging the use of drama in community development. But a legacy remains in the impact of mass-education projects in Eweland, and in the drama work carried forward by the Social Welfare Department. However, there is also a well-known text that is of significance for the history of extension work in Ghana, and an account of it provides a fitting coda to this essay.

Efua Sutherland, whose husband helped set up a school in Trans-Volta in the early 1950s, told me she had been aware that activists had made an impression on communities there: she particularly mentioned those involved with reforestation.⁸ One of her plays, *Foriwa*, is specifically concerned with community development and grew out of a short story revealingly entitled “New Life in Kyerefaso.” It shows the way youth can work with age, and the importance of women in community life, but the catalyst for much of the action is a freelance community development

⁸ Efua Sutherland, personal communication, 27 March 1995.

worker, a ‘stranger’, Labaran, who shows that he is prepared to get his hands dirty cleaning up the village. His plans for the community involve greater access to written material and improved methods of agriculture.

Sutherland uses characterization and dialogue, and incorporates festival theatre in a fairly conventionally presented scripted drama with a plot involving a marriage. The vision of the piece is articulated by Labaran, who can be linked with many. His dreams have been shared by a generation or more, but some of his lines are worth quoting in the present context to show that, though Dickson was sometimes isolated, he was also part of a chorus. After the Queen Mother has issued a call to the community to end divisive bickering and to bring new life to the village, and after her daughter, Foriwa, has committed herself to “stay and place [her] efforts here,” Labaran is exhilarated. He decides that he, too, will remain in a village:

I will strike camp and build some permanence here, where the dawn for which I was waiting is now beginning [...]. I was seeking meaningful employment for my reserves of mind, drive, and sensitivity. (*Earnestly*) Postmaster, a university degree is a devil of a thing if all it gives a man, is the passport to a life of vague respectability. I couldn’t permit myself to get caught in that [...]. So, I’ve been wandering in search of a way of applying myself. And now I see my feet on hopeful, solid ground, am I not the one to give all the thanks.⁹

Clearly, more remains to be achieved, but, within the world of the play, a decisive battle has been won; there has been what Dickson would have called “a change in the social atmosphere.” Labaran, the advocate of community development, the man who puts words into deeds, has found a focus for his ambitions.

Foriwa was first produced in the spring of 1962, when Alec Dickson, having founded Voluntary Service Overseas, “faced,” in the words of *A Chance to Serve*, “the hard prospect of once again creating a new vehicle for his ideas.” Had he been at the Drama Studio in Accra during the run of *Foriwa*, he would, I am sure, have felt that some of the ideas that were closest to his heart had found expression.

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⁹ Sutherland, *Foriwa* (Accra–Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971): 53.

2 Ken Pickering: Who Is Kofi Basake? 'Village Drama' in Ghana¹

LITERATURE ON THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT contains tantalizing asides to the effect that drama was used to promote development in Ghana during the colonial period. However, precise and extended references have been at a premium and likely documents beyond the reach of many researchers. With the help of Moira Dickson, some cobwebs have been brushed aside and some idea has been provided of the pioneering work undertaken by Alec Dickson in the Gold Coast during the late 1940s. A meeting of the Royal African Society in Bristol put me in touch with one of Dickson's successors, Ken Pickering, who had been a Community Development Officer in the Gold Coast and stayed on when it became Ghana. When I kept an appointment with him, he was able to let me see important documents and he shared the sort of oral history that curious students delight in.

Although my purpose was to find out about drama in Ghana, some parts of his background emerged that are worth putting down here. As a boy in the 1930s, Ken Pickering attended Bristol Grammar School, without, he insists, distinguishing himself in any direction except "possibly on the games" field. After leaving school, he worked in a bank, and he was there when the Second World War broke out. After the War – time was limited and what he did during the War is just one of many areas of his life that I did not find out about – Pickering had an opportunity that had been denied him as a school-leaver and took up a place at Bristol University. He elected to read "the subject that gave [him] most time to play

¹ This was first published when Ken Pickering was still alive, and the tenses used then have been retained.

cricket” – history. He achieved the distinction of playing for Gloucester 2nd Eleven, and he won the confidence of his fellow undergraduates, who elected him President of the Students’ Union. He spoke of this election modestly, but it indicated his leadership qualities and commitment to the undergraduate community.

On graduation, Pickering initially accepted the offer of a teaching post at King’s College, Lagos, but then found another avenue, one suggested by the University of Bristol’s Vice-Chancellor, opening up for him, and instead joined the colonial service as a Community Development Officer. He went out to what was then the Gold Coast in 1950, remaining there for eight years before moving on to Sierra Leone.

In both Sierra Leone and present-day Ghana he has many friends, particularly in Social Welfare Departments and cricketing circles. He continued his sporting activities in both countries, achieving the rare, possibly unique, distinction of captaining two national cricket teams. He also made a contribution to the organization of cricket along the coast: for many years, cricket in the ‘four Guineas’ involved the Gold Coast playing Nigeria, and Sierra Leone playing the Gambia – thanks to Pickering’s influence, the ‘parish boundaries’ were broken down.

This background may seem of marginal interest in the present context – and I certainly haven’t got very far in answering the question with which I headed this piece. But it is important because the sporting achievements prepare for the energy and qualities of leadership that Pickering clearly brought to his work. Pickering was able to give me copies of publications from the 1950s which indicated the activities in which the Social Welfare and Community Development Department was involved. As older Ghanaians will remember, during the 1940s and 1950s cinema vans sponsored by the Department visited communities with a selection of films which included those designed to make people more health-conscious. At least three of these were produced by Walt Disney: *Hookworm*, *The Winged Scourge*, and *The Way Disease Spreads*. Pickering showed these in the Western Province, where he was based, and with W.L. Shirer wrote an account of the experience for a UNESCO publication, *Fundamental and Adult Education*.

The account indicates the target groups: those training to become mass-education assistants, those attending a rural training centre at Akim, and villagers at Tereku Bokaso. The authors monitored and assessed the responses of members of the audiences thoroughly and revealingly. The

option of influencing or altering the films, or of producing films locally, did not exist in the early 1950s, and the task was to find out whether the Disney films could advantageously be shown to West African audiences and, if so, how. A series of suggestions was made.

Those working in theatre for development today may be interested to note that the recommendations of Pickering and his colleague included the following:

- the sequence in which issues are tackled is of the utmost importance;
- the health education message should not be put across in a programme which includes films shown simply for entertainment;
- mass education workers should liaise with medical authorities;
- small audiences of influential citizens should be attracted in the first instance;
- a commentary in the local language should be carefully worked out;
- any unfamiliar processes – such as magnification – used by the film directors should be demonstrated to the audience before the films are shown;
- the screening should be followed by a discussion in which ‘the leader’ is encouraged to elicit questions, and personal experiences. Members of the audience should be drawn into discussion about the lessons of the film;
- the film should be shown twice to the same group – the second screening being some two weeks after the first.

A particularly contemporary note is struck by the final recommendation:

- ... where women’s work in mass education has got under way preference in the use of films [should] be given to women.

Pickering was well aware that film had to be used in conjunction with other means of mass education, and made this point forcefully in a 1954 article published in *Colonial Cinema*. There he emphasized the importance of the Disney Health Films in breaking down firmly rooted, but erroneous, ideas about how diseases spread, and itemized ways in which the films could be misinterpreted.

Some of the problems associated with the imported films were overcome in work shot by the Gold Coast Ministry of Information. Pickering told me about the popularity of one such film, *Amenu’s Child*, which,

through narrative and in dramatic terms, tackled topics in health education. Specifically, it addressed the problem of encouraging acceptance of health clinics and challenging the hold exercised by what were then referred to as ‘witch doctors’. This term is quite misleading, and I will use it in inverted commas to draw attention to its inadequacies and remind readers of the linguistic context in which the film was made.

The story told in the film was boldly didactic. Amenu, pregnant, has to decide whether to have her child in a health centre or in her village. The ‘witch doctor’, as part of a campaign he has been waging against those he sees as his enemies at the centre, terrifies Amenu. However, with the help of the scriptwriter, cameraman, and director, a victory for ‘reason’, hygiene, and the health centre is contrived.

Even while describing the structure of the film, its impact, and the ‘demonizing’ of the ‘witch doctor’, Pickering showed he was well aware that some of those who worked in traditional roles had much to offer in the field of public health. Traditional midwives, he had realized, played a key role in any strategy to reduce infant mortality. He told me about a course for them run with Dr Charles Easmon at Anomabu Castle – and the fury of the outraged Director of Medical Services after certificates had been presented to those who had attended. The Director sent for Pickering (“the pigeons went out”), and when he arrived the Director was “frothing at the mouth.” In the event, Pickering received support from his superior officer who prepared a memorandum that so impressed Sir John Maud that he included it in his 1951 report on the Health Service in the Gold Coast.

Moving from the use of film – and in the vigorous idioms that I have reproduced above in inverted commas – Pickering then told me about his work using drama. The term then used to describe plays presented to rural communities as a way of dramatizing issues related to their well-being was ‘village drama’. It was, in another idiom of the time, one of the methods used to form an “entering wedge.” The jargon of a few decades ago presents a fairly clear image of what was also described as “a technique for stimulating initiative.”

The quotations are taken from a Colonial Office booklet entitled *Community Development* prepared by those attending a study conference held at Hartwell House, Aylesbury, during September of 1957. Pickering was one of the twenty or so present, and contributed to the booklet with a piece on the use of village drama. There we read that, together with games

and other forms of entertainment, drama “had been found useful in Ghana literacy campaigns.” The volume was effectively illustrated by Moira Dickson.

Pickering drew my attention to the fact that the journal published by the Social Welfare Department provided coverage of the use of drama in the country, and regretted that he had misplaced some of his volumes. He drew my attention to his article, entitled “The Play’s the Thing,” which had appeared in *UNESCO Features* in January 1958; here he looked back to the beginning of mass education in Ghana in 1948, and summarized the role that village drama had played over the years.

The context he provides for the use of drama was a combination of a “nation-wide aptitude and liking for the theatre” and financial stringency: village drama was cheap. It was also durable and ‘on a roll’ – it had grown despite the challenges of films and filmstrips. He describes the plots as having been borrowed from “old mystery plays, from short stories, fables and local legends”; the ‘stages’ were clearings in crowds and, sometimes, spaces lit by kerosene lamps. He reports that by 1951 there were “three mass education teams [...] operating and village drama was a widely established and popular favourite.” Lessons learnt along the way included the need to limit the playing time (in most cases to thirty minutes), the desirability of incorporating humour and proverbs, and the extent to which practical demonstration on stage “commanded keen attention.”

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One of the first and most popular plays, “Unity in Strength,” made use of that most mundane of domestic articles, a broom, to show the strength that is achieved from coming together. In his article, Pickering observes that the plot offered opportunities for buffoonery, for the wisdom of experience to be manifest, and for a moral to be drawn.

To optimize the use of limited resources, Community Development in the 1950s adopted a ‘campaign’ approach to rural socio-economic problems. Early attention to illiteracy, home economics, and rural water supplies was followed by concerted drives on subjects as diverse as implementing new local government legislation and combating diseases affecting the cocoa crop. In some campaigns, drama came to assume a central role, though Pickering emphasizes that it never constituted a teaching method in itself. Its value, he thought, was in “setting an ambience, in

creating new acceptance of an unfamiliar – or popularly misrepresented – topic and an atmosphere in which discussion could fruitfully take place.”

Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the (understandably) initially unpopular “Pay Your Rates” campaign of 1952. In each village, proceedings began with a play that followed a (by then) familiar pattern: an obstreperous individual attracts the audience’s attention by criticizing and complaining. During the course of the drama, he undergoes an experience that ‘converts’ him, so that he ends up advocating collaboration and cooperation. In this instance, the protagonist is “one Kofi Basake, a forthright man,” who is visited by the rate collector. In the act of driving the collector from his home, Kofi Basake falls into a drain and gashes his leg. Frightened at the sight of his blood, he “suffers his friends to bear him to the clinic.” There, after being attended to efficiently by a nurse, he begins to ask questions. When he learns that the clinic has been provided by the local authority, and that the same body not only pays the nurse’s salary but also provides her with equipment, Kofi Basake recognizes the desirability of paying rates.

Pickering reported that in the opinion of those working in mass education and others, the play “turned the scales” by creating “a new atmosphere [...] towards the whole question of local government.” He underlined the importance of having a central character with whom members of the audience could identify, and drew attention to the freedom to speak openly, to condemn and correct, provided by the theatrical convention. A similar approach had, it seemed, been employed in agricultural education programmes, and Kofi Basake and other cantankerous fellows like him had taught by learning lessons. In talking about this and other projects, it was clear that Pickering had worked with and through the Ghanaian Social Welfare and Community Development team. As all who have been involved in development drama in any way appreciate, the enthusiasm, skills, and awareness of those who perform constitute vast resources which it is a privilege to tap.

Ken Pickering went on from Ghana to a post in Sierra Leone, then taught at Birmingham University and Harvard, and worked for the United Nations in Pakistan. At the time of the interview, he was still busy and, as one might expect, involved in the community.

I hope I have answered the question in my title, and begun to answer related questions, such as “Who is Ken Pickering?” It may be of some interest to know that ‘village drama’, now often referred to as Drama for

Development (DfD) or Theatre for Extension Communication (TEC), is stronger than ever – innumerable projects, schemes, and NGOs are anxious to use the skills of young animateurs. And Kofi Basake? Well, I saw a direct descendant of him in a theatre for extension communication drama about road safety presented at the Achimota taxi-rank during 1994, where he was the ‘corner-cutting’ driver of a *tro-tro*, as cantankerous and as in need of education as ever.

3

Félix Morisseau—Leroy

‘Where people were free – they’ll remember me’

GHANA SHARED Félix Morisseau–Leroy (“Morrisseau–Leroy,” “Morisseau–Leroi,” “Morriseau–LeRoy,” “Moriso Lewa”) with many other parts of the world. The distinguished Haitian poet–playwright joined the ancestors on 5 September 1998 after complications following a stroke. He left many friends, and made his mark on Ghanaian theatre, particularly through his work with the Workers’ Brigade Concert Party.

Morisseau–Leroy was born in Grand-Gosier, Haiti, on 13 March 1912, and was educated first at Jacmel and then in Port-au-Prince. In 1933, he earned a B.Litt. degree from the University of Haiti, and ten years later an M.A. from the University of Columbia, New York. In Haiti he worked as a journalist, becoming editor of *Le Matin*, and in the Ministry of Education, in which government department he became Principal Secretary. Subsequently, he was Secretary to the Council of the University of Haiti, director of the Ministry of Public Information, and Director General of National Education. For a time, he was Haiti’s permanent delegate to UNESCO and the UN.

However, in addition to being a high-flying civil servant, he was also a poet, establishing his reputation with *Plénitudes* (1940), *Natif-natal* (1948), and *Diacoute/Dyakout* (1953). And he wrote plays, initially for the Théâtre d’Haiti, in French and Creole/Kreole/Haitian, intended, according to Brian Stevens, to “critique” the Duvalier regime.¹ Morisseau–

¹ Brian Stevens, “Works of Haitian Creole author live on after death,” *Haitian Times* (25–31 July 2001).

Leroy’s Haitian version of *Antigone*, performed in Port-au-Prince (1953) and at the Théâtre des Nations (Paris, 1959), made a significant contribution to the Haitian Renaissance and earned him a reputation as a playwright of international stature. In 1959, during “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s reign of terror, Morisseau–Leroy went into exile, and subsequently lived in France, Senegal, Jamaica, and, most importantly for our present concern, in Ghana, where he was “National Organiser of Drama and Literature.” Many will be able to fill in more fully than I can details of Morisseau–Leroy’s life in Accra during the heady days of the early 1960s, but a couple of written sources reveal insights into his work and of the vision that informed it. From them I want to suggest something of the contribution he made to the evolving national theatre movement.

One of his first actions was to produce his play *Antigone in Haiti* (1963) in an English version by Mary Dorkonou.² This protest against tyranny was a revealing choice for a newly arrived political exile. One can only assume that he put it on to establish his credentials and that he was entirely confident that Nkrumah could never become a tyrant.

In October 1964, an anonymous article entitled “Story Behind the Brigade Concert Party” appeared in *The Ghanaian*. It provided an account of the formation of the Brigade Drama Group which had begun two years before with, it seems, significant input from Morisseau–Leroy. In order to establish the new group, the best actors had been gathered, and – a very significant move – a dozen women had been recruited. Training, which had begun on 15 May at the Drama Studio and at the “Old British Council,” was rigorous, and linked to the Brigade’s policy of retaining existing styles while preparing performers to use scripts written by Morisseau–Leroy. These texts reflected his passionate political commitment and were ‘ghanianized’ by Bob Johnson and Bob Thompson. It appears that, by August 1962, a fully professional company “run on socialist theory” had been ready to perform.



In 1965, Morisseau–Leroy laid out his ambitions for theatre development in an article entitled “The Ghana Theatre Movement” that was published in the first issue of the *Ghana Cultural Review*. There the poet–playwright asserted that “the playwrights, actors and producers of Ghana are agreed

² For more details, see ch. 4 below, “Antigone and Her African Sisters.”

that traditional forms of drama should constitute the basis of a Ghanaian National Theatre.” He referred to Ananse tales as “more than a genre... what the French would call a *cycle*,” a living ‘cycle’, the stories inseparable from “the Ghanaian tradition of dramatisation.” He maintained that “the socialist countries and all sensible men of the Theatre today are concerned with bringing the Theatre to the people and bringing people to the Theatre.” He added: “Here in Ghana, our concern is for the maintenance of the functional character of our People’s Theatre.”

He helpfully provided examples of this popular, purposeful theatre. He listed work by others (*Oforiwa* [*Foriwa*], *Ananse and the Glue Man*, *The Lost Fishermen*) and indicated that he had written *Awo ye*, *Ama* and *Afram*. He wrote, of the Workers’ Brigade Group, that the company consisted of twenty-nine men and eight women, and that it had spent eight months in rehearsal and training before going before the public. Once on tour, the productions had been frequently staged. For example, *Awo ye* had been performed 400 times, and *Afahye* 200 times.

The final paragraph of the article drew attention to the “great inspiration” that the theatre workers took from the keen interest “Osagefo” (Kwame Nkrumah) showed in the theatre. Morisseau-Leroy concluded:

His launching of the Osagefo Playhouse is evidence concrete enough to prove that our President’s aim is directed towards the manifold development of the peoples of Ghana and an all round development involving not only material advantages but also spiritual gains.

The short life of the ill-fated Osagefo Playhouse or, more correctly, “Players,” provides a comment on this, one that, I like to think, Morisseau-Leroy would have enjoyed. Frankly, the Osagefo Players were not productive.

In a later number of the *Ghana Cultural Review* (1966), Morisseau-Leroy described in detail the kind of theatre work he favoured in writing at some length about his play *Akosombo*. The production was, he claimed, based on “Ghanaian traditional drama” and was “intended for the glorification of the Ghanaian worker.” No curtains were used, pamphlets were distributed to the audience, actors played a variety of roles, and there was no representation of the head of state. It may be noted that it was an indication of the extent to which stage curtains had come to be synonymous with theatre that Morisseau-Leroy found it worth mentioning their absence.

As editor of *Okyeame*, “Ghana’s Literary Magazine,” Efua Sutherland provided space in the December 1968 issue so that the Haitian writer could share his ideas about an African National Theatre. It was a grandiose vision that united themes espoused by Nkrumah and Sutherland, and expressed them with a Negritudist/French rhetorical flair. Indeed, the statement would have sounded better in French. Morisseau-Leroy opened his article with a statement that fell foul of a false friend and stumbled somewhat: “The delicate work of converting the traditional fete into a form of theatre valid for the new societies will not be achieved automatically.” In this statement, the writer hoped that the English word ‘fete’ (or fête) carried the meaning of ‘festival’; it doesn’t. He continued, along a characteristically romantic and radical line, by advocating the creation of a theatre that “took the part of Africa,” eschewed ‘art for art’s sake’, and embraced the “intellectual and sentimental adhesion to popular wisdom and ecstasy.” He went on with almost Nietzschean brio:

It is necessary to let oneself be possessed by rhythm and to abandon oneself to the infallibility of the dance; it is necessary to reconcile oneself with all one did and all one knew and to rid oneself of all learnt notions; it is necessary to identify oneself with the crowd in a collective trance and to forget all to remember all. It is in this state of grace that the poet exercises all his liberty of creation which is not without limit.

Similar notes are sounded throughout the four-page statement, which includes descriptions, definitions, and prescriptions. For example, one can pick out the following:

Enthusiasm seizes each member of the team and transforms him into a poet of the African revolution; [...] African drama is born of the burst of the gods in each man. [...] The poet-artist can give confidence to the genius of symbolization of his public and the symphony requires all the power of loud-speakers and marvels of lighting.

In these, the passionate visionary tangles with the English language, and one can be excused for thinking that there would have been insuperable barriers to giving substance to the man’s dreams.

However, approaching earth, Morisseau-Leroy enumerates the means by which “progressive governments” use theatre “to achieve cultural decolonization.” The methods include employing the theatre to provide civic education, promoting “unity in diversity,” avoiding “debauched commer-

cialization,” and promoting the adaptation “of modern techniques to the essential objectives of the national movement.”

He exposed the cultural policies of neocolonialists, who, he knew, were aware of the power of “this audio-visual weapon” and who were “all the more dangerous [because ...] not always aware of (their) shameful mission.” He wrote with unbounded enthusiasm about the need to draw on popular sources to make a theatre for the people that united the “dramatic, lyric and choreographic forms” and that broke down barriers.

Eventually, Morisseau-Leroy left Ghana, and the Workers’ Brigade Concert Party he had guided had only a fitful existence in the post-Nkrumah period. However, he had made changes which meant that the country’s theatre tradition would never be the same again. While his attempt to politicize the concert-party form left few traces, his work with the female actors in the Workers’ Brigade Concert Party established women in the ranks of the concert-party performers, and they have since gone from strength to strength.

In *Highlife Time*, John Collins lists Margaret Quainoo, Comfort Akua Dampo and Adeline Buabeng as the “most important” Workers’ Brigade actresses. They have been joined on stage and screen by those who Collins terms “top TV concert actresses,” including Grace Omaboe, Esi Kom, Beatrice Kissi, Joyce Agyeman, Florence Mensah, Mary Adjei, and Cecelia Adjei. A fragment of an interview with Buabeng conducted by Esi Sutherland Addy is of relevance here and adds the name of Araba Stamp to the list of Workers’ Brigade Concert Party actresses. Stamp became well-known through her performance in “a play directed by Morisseau,” *Awo ye (It Is Good to Have a Child)*. Buabeng indicates that she started off as a part-time member of the group, dancing Atsiaghekor, Adowa, and Takai, but made the transition to acting.³

During the 1970s, the publication of Morisseau-Leroy’s creative writing, more or less on hold since the early 1950s, resumed with titles appearing from publishers in Canada, Senegal, France, and the USA. There was also a Kraus reprint that brought together a substantial body of work (1970). In due course, after the departure of Duvalier’s son Jean-Claude (“Baby Doc”), Morisseau-Leroy made a triumphal return to Haiti and was carried through the airport shoulder-high.

³ Esi Sutherland-Addy, “Drama in her life: Interview with Adeline Ama Buabeng,” in *African Theatre Women*, ed. Jane Plastow (Oxford: James Currey, 2002): 70.



In his old age, he was celebrated as a senior figure in the Haitian literary renaissance and publishers were once again interested in his writing. For example, the Canadian journal *Étincelles* chose him as Writer of the Year, and a selection of his poems, translated into English by Jeffrey Knapp under the title *Haitian & Oddities*, was published in Miami, where Morisseau-Leroy made a base, during 1991. His eightieth birthday was marked by a tribute in the 13 March 1992 issue of *Finesse* (New York), and at their 7th Annual Haitian Studies Association Conference, held in Milwaukee, Morisseau-Leroy was a guest of honour. More in keeping with the values that were dear to him, “Sosyete Koukouy” revived his *Antigone* in Miami with considerable success.

In 1998, Félix Morisseau-Leroy’s ashes were scattered on the sea at Jacmel, but, as fellow Haitian poet Paul Lraak (Laraque) remarked, his spirit “remains with all writers in Haiti as well as abroad, who are using the Creole language [and by extension Pidgin and all ‘vernaculars’ JG] in poetry, the theatre, films, novels, historical studies, newspapers and all other forms that serve the education of the Haitian (and, again by extension, all) people.”

The concluding verses of Morisseau-Leroy’s “Testament” strike a suitably death-defying note that will be welcomed by Ghanaians who knew him and by all who welcome the use of accessible, popular forms of language. He wrote, as translated by Jack Hirschman and Boadiba:

When I die, everyone should really get it on
 Laugh, sing, dance, tell jokes
 Don’t be sappy, yell into my ear

I won’t be altogether done when I’m dead;
 All the places where there were great bashes,
 Where people were free – they’ll remember me.



INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

4

Antigone and Her African Sisters

West African Versions of a Greek Original

IN *THE BLINKARDS*, a play written by Kobina Sekyi and produced in Cape Coast in 1915, we encounter members of the Cosmopolitan Club. We see them responding to an invitation to “a nuptial ceremony.” It is announced that “the jollification and refreshments [...] will be of Lucullian magnificence.” The groom at the forthcoming event is called “Alexander Archibald Octavius Okadu” and his bride’s father, from whom the invitation has been received, glories in the name Aldiborontiphosphorino Chrononhonthologos Tsiba.¹ In this scene, Sekyi, who had a degree in philosophy from London University and had been called to the bar, invites his audience to laugh at the presumptuous, ridiculous, miseducated, misguided, alienated creatures he parades before them.

The sad situation has prompted academic analysis as well as satire. “The Tragic Influence of Shakespeare and the Greeks” was the title of a conference paper delivered at the University of Ife in 1975 by Ime Ikiddeh. It has been quoted from with approval, notably by Kofi Agovi in his substantial account of theatre in Ghana (1990). Ikiddeh is called in to support Agovi’s perception of how the British employed the theatre, including the plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare, during the colonial period. This approach, Agovi argues, was part of an “organised policy of

¹ Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards: a play in four acts* (1915; London: Rex Collings, 1974), 94. See Asiedu Yirenkyi, “Kobina Sekyi and J.B. Danquah: The Founding Fathers of the Ghanaian Theatre” (paper presented at the First Ibadan Conference on African Literature, July 1976): 30, who offers ‘brainless’ as a free translation of “Tsiba.”

cultural dissemination,” its purpose being to subvert and divert genuine cultural-nationalist movements. The reference to the “tragic influence” summed up the perception.

Ikiddeh brings Shakespeare into the firing line (“he has come to constitute a real danger”) and, the title suggests, he takes pot-shots at the Greeks too. This paper has not, as far as I know, been published, but I suspect it reflects a body of opinion. As I speak, it will be apparent that I do not support Ikiddeh’s thesis, or Agovi’s perception. I am interested in the way Ghanaians and Nigerians, with outside help on occasion, have used one particular text, *Antigone*, to provide a means of communication, self-examination, and positive self-expression. The final part of the essay is devoted to a reaction to Femi Osofisan’s *Tegonni*. There, I suggest that references to the Greek play are employed by a writer who is far more radical and progressive than Agovi or Ikiddeh. The influence of the Greeks may have been negative, even tragic, for the brainless Mr Tsiba, lumbering him with a name beyond naming. But *Tegonni* finds her encounter with *Antigone* positive, and sustaining in her progressive undertaking. Like others before her, she draws strength from being at the confluence of ways of life, delights in being aware of various traditions, finds creative inspiration in the interaction of different cultures.

This essay falls into two parts: the first surveys the position of the classics and of drama in West Africa and then looks at the fortunes of *Antigone* in Gold Coast/Ghana over a seventy-year period from 1933. The second considers a Nigerian *Antigone*, *Tegonni* by Femi Osofisan. Broadly, the first part, *Antigone* in Ghana, is concerned with cultural interaction. From it emerges an awareness of the role played by expatriates in using the classic text in translation as a point of contact and a bridge, a way of engaging with local cultural traditions and allowing creative interaction.²

² At this point, really as a footnote, I would say that the extent of the impact made by returnee classicists and a person of the theatre was a revelation as I prepared this essay. I think one should be aware of the impact of Caribbean teachers of the classics in the academies planted by the colonial power. Lloyd Thompson, who taught in Ibadan for many years and whose research interests included Roman attitudes to race, provides an example of one dimension of this. In the theatre and world of creative writing, the list is longer and includes Dexter Lyndersay (Ibadan and Calabar), Neville Dawes (Legon and Kumasi), Carroll Dawes (Ile-Ife and Calabar), Roy Watts (Accra), and the two men considered here. Among the African-American returnees, who, I suspect, showed significantly less interest in using the classics as a bridge to Africa,

There are also indications that the bridge has been crossed in other directions: Ghanaian adapters have burdened the basic Sophoclean text with the freight of their concerns. The second part focuses on political and dramaturgical debates unlocked by Femi Osofisan's encounter with the play. In studying the pattern that emerges, it is helpful to bear in mind the three phases of imitation, adaptation, and confident manipulation identified by Frantz Fanon. The implications are that *Antigone* has played a significant role in the cultural, theatrical, and political dialogue between Europe and Africa. Had she known what was to happen to her play, she might have asked:

How many ages hence shall this our lofty scene be acted over in states
unborn and accents yet unknown!

General Setting: The Classics and Drama in West Africa

The kinship between Greece and West Africa has long been remarked. Long before the demonic child, Leo Frobenius, searched for Greek heads in Ife, looked into the eyes of, and perhaps managed to smuggle out, the Ori Olokun, and began talking about the 'Lost Atlantis', many have explored areas of overlap between Greece and West Africa.³ In the Gold Coast, from at least the early 1930s, the cultural coincidences prompted schoolteachers and university lecturers, usually outsiders, sometimes from the African diaspora, to reach for classical texts when selecting plays for performance.

The ephemeral nature of drama means that theatre history is often characterized by conjecture and surmise. In looking at the production history of *Antigone* by Sophocles and of plays based on that drama in Ghana, it will be apparent that only the flimsiest of narratives can be extracted. As an introduction, and aware of the charge levelled by Ikiddeh and supported by Agovi, it is useful to sketch forms in which the European theatrical tradition arrived in West Africa. I want to suggest a general theatrical context in which to consider the way in which Greek drama was approached and used.

the following would require comment: Scott Kennedy (Legon), Sylvia (Esi) Kinney (Legon, Ibadan), Chuck Mike (Ile-Ife, and Lagos).

³ Janheinz Jahn, *Leo Frobenius: The Demonic Child* (Austin TX: African and Afro-American Studies and Research Centre, 1974): 11.

The background is the varied, complex, and continuing tradition of indigenous performance traditions, often linked with annual festivals, rituals, folk stories and rites of passage. In them, song and dance play a major role, and continue to dominate in some commercial, syncretic conventions, notably that known as ‘concert party’. Of the imported theatrical traditions of Europe, some have been easily absorbed and amended; others have proved resistant to incorporation, syncretic fusion, adaptation or relocation. During the 1930s, when Ghanaian concert-party ‘trios’ were emerging, there were many imported forms vying for attention: cantatas or oratorios, pantomimes (*Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*), morality plays (*Everyman*), Biblical dramas (*Esther the Beautiful*, *The Good Samaritan*), dramatized extracts from novels (Dickens: *The Trial of Mr Pickwick*; Hugo: *The Bishop’s Candlesticks*), farce (*Charley’s Aunt*), Shakespeare (*Macbeth*), Empire Day parades with pageants (*The Armada*; *Britannia’s Court*), the classics (*Antigone*, *Alcestis*), smokers and mess-room entertainments, and comic operettas (*The King of Sherwood*). In subsequent decades, influences came from the detective play and courtroom drama (*Witness for the Prosecution*), French popular theatre (through Molière: *Scapin*), English melodrama (*Yorkshire Tragedy*), the Chinese theatre (*Lady Precious Stream*), the Absurd (Ionesco’s *The Leader*), and the radical, anti-illusionist theatre of Bertolt Brecht (*The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*).

By the 1930s, local playwrights had begun to emerge, and it is intriguing to see what imported material was used. A quick survey is in order. In Kobina Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1915), there are elements of Shavian wit and of a flexible structure that seems to be local in origin. Mabel Dove’s *Woman in Jade* (1934) makes concessions to local subject-matter and characters, but the conventions are those of the drawing-room comedy. From the preface to *The Fifth Landing-Stage* (1943), first published in Ewe, it is clear that the author, F.K. Fiawoo, had waded through prescriptive neoclassical essays about the classical unities and was acutely conscious of academic expectations. Fortunately, he did not allow himself to be constrained by these prescriptions, and he robustly confronted European assumptions about Africa, Africans, and African performance traditions on a variety of levels. J.B. Danquah’s *The Third Woman* (1943) made use of local folk material while engaging in a debate with European historians and philosophers.

From this whirlwind tour of the earliest available texts, it can be seen that responses were characterized by variety, and that many writers were concerned with fusing indigenous with imported elements. There were some unproductive engagements, some blind alleys, some dead ends, and some *culs de sac*. Oh yes, some seeds fell by the wayside and some among tares, some sprang up too soon, and some were devoured by birds of the air, but, in certain cases, the imported was grafted on to a thriving local shoot. This didn't happen with classic traditions in the 1930s, but it has since. *Antigone* had much to offer, because of the power of the text with its wonderful range and variety of conflicts, and its stylized and adaptable conventions.

Part 1: *Antigone* and Variations, Adaptations in Ghana

The earliest reference to a production of a Greek play (*Antigone*) in the Gold Coast/Ghana that I have found is 1931.⁴ This relatively early appearance is not surprising, given the colonial experience of the country, and a number of suggestions can be offered for why *Antigone* should have been performed. The first is that *Antigone* was recommended by the position it occupies as a classic text. Playing in the background to all discussion about the importation of *Antigone* in the Gold Coast/Ghana is a sonorous organ insisting on the position of the classics in the history of world drama. At the risk of traversing very familiar ground, a brief account of the position of the classics in West Africa is offered.

Respect for Latin and Greek, and reverence for the books originally written in those languages, was imported along with British ideas about education. These ideas are widely found among West Africans educated during the colonial period. Many indications of the position of the classics and classical languages in Ghana can be adduced. For the present, I will simply point to the fact that Latin and Greek are listed as being on the syllabus for Mfantsipim Secondary School when it opened in 1876. Two years later, the records show that all twenty-eight pupils at the school took Greek and twelve took Latin.⁵ Given that Mfantsipim was created by a coming-together of missionary enterprise with Fante nationalism, and had

⁴ J.K.E. Agovi, "The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1957," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* (Legon) 6.1 (1990): 11.

⁵ A. Adu Boahen, *Mfantsipim and the Making of Ghana: A Centenary History, 1876–1976* (Accra: Sankofa, 1996): 30–31.

nailed its nationalist colours to its mast by adopting a motto in Fanti, *Dwin hwe kan*, the evidence of emphasis on Latin and Greek is somewhat surprising, as is the evidence that Greek was studied by more pupils than was Latin. The emphasis on Latin continued during the nineteenth century, so that, when, in 1881, John Mensah Sarbah went, at the age of sixteen, from the school to what became Queen's College, Taunton, it was recorded in the Register there that he had done "Caesar Books 1 and 2."

The classics provided a basis for Western-style education. Knowledge of Caesar opened the doors for Sarbah to matriculate and do a degree in law at the University of London; it was part of the course he had to follow to equip him to return to West Africa and take on the colonialists with their own weapons. The same is true for the younger Kobina Sekyi, whose play *The Blinkards* I have just mentioned. As a pupil at Mfantsipim, Sekyi was known for his love of all things English: in a school photograph at Mfantsipim, he is immortalized wearing a woollen suit. However, experiences in London and his degree in philosophy led him to espouse an Ethiopianism that put things in their place: woollen suits in cold climes, Greek names in Greece. His satire in *The Blinkards* is well-directed. There is no doubt that some youthful scholars, African Hellenists, often possessing only a smattering of Latin or Greek, made themselves ridiculous. A nationalist, an intellectual, and a playwright, Sekyi exposed such shallow posturing. Fortunately, his targets were prepared to laugh at themselves, since the play that satirized the affectations of the Cosmopolitan Club of Cape Coast was put on by that very organization.

Despite the satirical shafts launched by the prophet of Ethiopianism in 1915, classical studies were still at the heart of the education provided in West Africa in the middle of the last century. When the University College of the Gold Coast (UCGC) was established (1948), with, incidentally, Sekyi as a member of Council,⁶ the Department of Classics was given an important place. Its teaching was magnificently supported by the holdings in what became the Balme Library, and John Leaning, who taught in the Department from 1971 to 1991, considered that these must, at one time, have been better than those of London University itself.⁷ Perhaps predictably, classically trained academics filled many leadership

⁶ Francis Agbodeka, *A History of the University of Ghana* (Accra: Woeli, 1998): 311.

⁷ Leaning, in conversation, London 20 November 1995; quoted in Agbodeka, *A History of the University of Ghana*, 82.

roles in the University (College) and in the country's intellectual life. This distinguished company included David Balme, the first Principal of the University College, and L.H. Ofosu-Appiah, who took on the Encyclopedia Africana project.

A role for Latin was preserved even when political and cultural pressures were leading to changes. In 1963, when the UCGC became the independent University of Ghana, it was considered appropriate to design a crest that drew on local conventions and to replace the inherited motto, *Vigil Evocat Auroram* ('the watchful bird calls forth the dawn'). In his design, Manwere Opoku incorporated three ferns that traditionally indicated straightness, truthfulness, and integrity, and an Adinkra design of locked rams' horns, a symbol of strength and growth (*Guanini mmen toa so*). It was, however, considered appropriate to retain Latin for the motto, and Alex Kwapong, soon to become the first Ghanaian Vice-Chancellor of the University, offered *Integri Procedamus*, 'progressing or moving forward with integrity'.⁸

Antigone

A rehearsed reading of the Reverend Kingsley Williams's verse translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* was given by the Accra Dramatic Society in about 1930. J.M. Winterbottom provides an account of the success he and his wife had with such readings and of the financial success of the performance of *Antigone*. It was presented as part of a double bill with a dramatization of "Wandering Willie's Tale" from Sir Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*; the gate receipts amounted to £18.⁹ The idea of producing *Antigone* with undergraduates at Achimota College was close to the heart of Kingsley Williams, who had firm ideas about how the Chorus could use dance movements. In a report he gave to a conference on 'native drama' in Africa (1932), he wrote:

I am anxiously considering whether I could manage to train students to do a version of Sophocles' *Antigone*. My hope is that for the choruses it may be possible to incorporate some of the rhythm movements of genuine Gold Coast community dancing – an activity which I should

⁸ Agbodeka, *A History of the University of Ghana*, 373–74.

⁹ J.A. Winterbottom, "Experimental Drama in the Gold Coast," *Oversea Education* (London) 5.3 (April 1934): 114.

have included among those bearing on this question; it is very much alive still in the country and can be more impressively beautiful than any description can suggest.¹⁰

Williams was aware of ways in which the play lent itself to intercultural exploration, and was decades ahead of his time in his enthusiasm for local ‘community dancing’.

I have found no evidence that Williams managed to get the production staged. This is a pity, since it sounds as if it would have been a creative amalgam of traditions under a sympathetic guiding spirit. The institution that managed to put the play on the boards around this time was St Nicholas Grammar School (now Adisadel), Cape Coast. Information about the precise date of the production is contradictory, and I have followed *Reminiscences of Adisadel* by G. McLean Amissah rather than the editor of *Oversea Education* or Kofi Agovi.¹¹ Amissah notes that Stephen Richard Seaton Nicholas returned to the school after earning M.A. and D.Th. degrees while a student at Fourah Bay College, affiliated to the University of Durham. He became headmaster in 1924 and introduced the teaching of Greek. Amissah writes: “The first *Antigone*, staged in 1934–1935, was intended to mark the School’s Silver Jubilee.”¹² The production, directed by Nicholas, was “well received by the public”:

By public request, there was a repeat performance before a full house at Cape Coast. It was later staged at Sekondi, and then moved to Kumasi. The theatrical scenery as well as the costume of the cast as well as their histrionics contributed much to its success.¹³

After recording that “the *Agamemnon*” was put on in 1936 and *Alcestis* in 1944–1945, Amissah adds: “It is interesting to note that in those plays, the narratives were in English but the choruses were rendered in the original Greek.”¹⁴

¹⁰ C. Kingsley Williams, “Achimota College,” in Anon., “Native African Drama,” *Oversea Education* (London, 1933): 27.

¹¹ G. McLean Amissah, *Reminiscences of Adisadel* (Accra: Afram, 1980); ‘Ed.’ (Editor). “Notes,” *Oversea Education* (London) 5.3 (1934): 116; Kofi Agovi, “The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1957,” *Institute of African Studies Research Review* (Legon) 6.1 (1990): 1–23.

¹² Amissah, *Reminiscences of Adisadel*, 8.

¹³ *Reminiscences of Adisadel*, 9.

¹⁴ *Reminiscences of Adisadel*, 9.

The pioneering production of *Antigone* is to be seen in the context of a teacher with a passion for the Greeks who was determined to expose pupils studying the classics to appropriate major works from the Western canon on stage. Apart from the information that the production attracted a large audience, it is difficult to know what the audiences made of the production. “Musing Light’s” column in the *Gold Coast Spectator* for 19 August 1933 included a warm response to the plans for production:

... The Greeks were great players and were very fond of the drama. The school’s production is important, because it gives us an opportunity – I believe for the first time – to see a Greek play

The production adds to the cultural advancement of the country, and sets up a milestone. It will go down to history, and my annual review will emphasise it.¹⁵

An editorial note, in *Oversea Education*, that perhaps misleadingly refers to several productions at the school in question, reads in part:

We [...] were impressed by the response of actors and audience to the dramatic situations based on the conflict between tribal law and individual conscience. Their bearing on the problems of African tribal life was obviously appreciated.¹⁶

The Adisadel performance tradition provided a vital encounter for a sensitive and alert young woman, Efua Morgue, who later, as Efua Sutherland, explored the overlap between one of the plays she saw at St Nicholas, *Alcestis*, and Ghanaian culture in composing *Edufa*. (It would have been convenient for my study if she or a Ghanaian of her originality had reworked and published *Antigone*, but I have found no such text.) The inclusion of text in Greek suggests that this was a production characterized by respect for the original, and was influenced, perhaps, by a director more narrow-minded than Williams and anxious to make good the claim that Cape Coast was “The Athens of West Africa.”

By 1956, when *Antigone* was produced at Mfantsipim School, also in Cape Coast, the tendency represented by Kingsley Williams and the strength of cultural nationalism had grown. As political independence ap-

¹⁵ Anon., “Musing Light” (review of *Antigone* at St Nicholas’ Grammar School, Cape Coast), *Gold Coast Spectator* (19 August 1933): 1123, quoted in Agovi, “The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1957,” 15.

¹⁶ Editorial, “Notes,” *Oversea Education* (London) 5.3 (1934): 116.

proached (1957 in the case of Ghana), leading schools were raiding the Western canon for plays that they could adapt, so that the relevance was unmistakable. The enthusiasm for adaptation, and the (modest) extent to which the original was altered, is reflected in reports of productions in the magazine produced at Achimota School, where Shakespeare, much more difficult to adapt than Sophocles, provided staple fare for the drama society. In 1952, Muriel Bentley directed *Macbeth* with African drums, and with royal rank indicated by ceremonial umbrellas. In 1954, *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream* was put on, with the Mechanicals wearing African dress.¹⁷ I have read no reviews of the Mfantsipim production, but I note that Joe de Graft had been doing a degree at Achimota College when Bentley had been gently 'domesticating' Shakespeare at the nearby secondary school, and that he proved himself a major adapter of *Hamlet* (*Hamile*) and *Macbeth* (*Mambo*). He was soon to lead the school into the next phase – the production of plays by West Africans (James Ene Henshaw and Wole Soyinka). From there, he took the next logical step, producing locally written plays, including his own *Sons and Daughters*. Shakespeare, it will be recalled, was handcuffed to the Greeks in Ikideh's indictment, but I am convinced that de Graft did more powerful work when adapting Shakespeare than when composing from scratch. Research leads remain to be followed up, but I suspect that there may have been elements of adaptation in his *Antigone*.

1956 also saw a production of *Antigone* at Kumasi College of Technology, later the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.¹⁸ The fact that there were two productions in one year may, given the limited data available, suggest that the play had become established in the local repertoire. It is relevant to note that while students at the technical university were doing *Antigone*, theatrical activity at the University College of the Gold Coast, where the Departments of Classics and English were based, took a different direction. Students at Legon got to Greece only by way of Jean Giraudoux's *Tiger at the Gates* (directed by Kojo Senanu in 1962). Expatriates, with one or two locals, were working their way through Shakespeare in a conventional manner, putting on *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Winter's Tale*, and relying on the college

¹⁷ As K.A. Ofose–Amaah noted in a "Review" for *The Achimotan* (1955): 28.

¹⁸ N.A. Dawes, "Notes of the Production of Antigone, November 1956 – by K C T Students' Dramatic Society" (cyclostyled).

library for books about Tudor and Elizabethan costume. However, committed theatre people on the staff, including de Graft and Bekoe Mfodwo, were more purposefully involved, being engaged in the Drama Studio Players production (December 1962) of *Edufa*, Sutherland's radical re-working of *Alcestis* already referred to.

The earliest adapted text of *Antigone* available to me was prepared by a history teacher and poet from Barbados, Edward (now Kamau) Brathwaite. In 1962, Brathwaite was approaching the end of a seven- or eight-year sojourn in Ghana as an education officer, during which he had come to an awareness "of community, of cultural wholeness."¹⁹ When his adaptation, entitled *Odale's Choice*, was premiered (June 1962), he was working at a Ghana Education Trust institution set up by Kwame Nkrumah in Saltpond – Mfantisman Secondary School. While retaining central elements from Sophocles, Brathwaite cut out what might be regarded as the romantic dimension (sometimes seen as resisting easy transplantation) and skilfully exploited opportunities to incorporate local performance traditions in the production.

A "Production Note" by "P.L.R." printed in the Evans schools edition of *Odale's Choice* resolutely combats tendencies to elaborate staging, to the drawing of curtains, and the use of scenery. This warning was necessary because such trappings had, under the pervasive influence of naturalism in the European tradition, come to be regarded as essential to the theatre experience. Greek drama travelled light; it could leave behind buskins and masks, and this was part of the reason it was so acceptable. It was also recommended, as noted in a quotation above, because the central issue, the "conflict between tribal law and individual conscience," was clear. The opening paragraph of the Note draws attention to the way in which the title emphasizes the decision Odale makes and the origin of the piece. We read:

The story and tone of the play is that of *Antigone* [...] here it is modernised (though to an indefinite period) and made to apply to an African country, but no country in particular. The theme is timeless: the defiance of tyranny, a situation full of conflict and natural drama. (3)

¹⁹ Quoted in *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, ed. E.A. Markham (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1989): 118.

Despite the excellent advice on staging, P.L.R. moves, rather, on the surface in these sentences. *Odale's Choice* carefully offers opportunities for establishing mood through performance elements that the pupils at Saltpond would be familiar with. Scene 1 opens with a festival in progress, and with Odale in the midst of dancers. Brathwaite does not offer detailed stage directions and does not specify a precise cultural context. He simply indicates that Odale is “*carried away by the chanting and the drumming.*” These words hint at an atmosphere that the pupils, perhaps with help from Ghanaian members of staff, would be adept at creating from their own observation and experience. Significantly, as if condensing a view of the development of drama, the ‘dithyramb’ is interrupted and the ‘first actor’, Odale, extracted from the mass. Later, when Odale tells Creon that she has responded to a higher law than his in burying her brother and he proclaims that she “*must die,*” the chorus of women are summoned as mourners. They enter in what Brathwaite describes as “*a phalanx of supplication,*” their costumes instantly recognizable as mourning cloths. They quickly establish an appropriate mood and thereafter register the emotional shifts for the rest of the play. Thus, when Creon responds positively to their request for forgiveness, their “*wailing turns to a shout of joy,*” and they dance to drums and gongs (30). However, when Odale remains determined to defy her uncle and he orders his soldiers to kill her, “*the women ... begin a funeral dirge*” (32). From these very general stage directions, it is clear that Brathwaite requires the chorus to use familiar conventions of voice and movement, specific instruments, and locally determined costumes. He uses the chorus to provide context and emotional colouring through the use of what has been called “*African total theatre.*” His elimination of the romantic interest from the inherited Greek material (Haemon does not appear) shifts the emphasis of the play, but the festival goes some way towards providing new interest, and certainly roots the play in a West African context.

This is not to say that the adaptation is entirely convincing. P.L.R.’s suggestion that no particular country is evoked is challenged by the names Brathwaite has used and by other elements. “*Odale*” is a Ga name, and she is also “*Akwele,*” which would indicate to Ga-speakers that she was a twin. Appropriately, her twin sister, Leicho, is sometimes called “*Akwuokor.*” The language of the soldiers may support P.L.R.’s contention about “*no country,*” since it shifts from one kind of pidgin, or perhaps ‘*nation language*’, to another. For example, we encounter “*to chop he,*” when we

might expect a West African to say ‘to chop am’, and we meet a distinctive Caribbean strain in “he cahn come back.” This sits particularly oddly with the Ghanaian ejaculation “Cha!” that I take to be a rendition of ‘Twea!’ Presumably Brathwaite cultivated the confusion of different popular usages in order to work against too precise a location. If this is the case, the pidgin becomes an honest reflection of the play’s destination and origin: it is for Ghana, and about Ghana, but also part of the process by which a Caribbean poet found his voice.

While acknowledging Brathwaite’s considerable achievement in this play, I think he underestimated the problems of adaptation that came in this case as a result of issues raised by taking a play from a patrilineal society into a country where there are both patrilineal and matrilineal communities. There are several references to Creon as Odale’s “uncle,” yet no suggestion that to some members of his audience this title would mean a very close relationship. Those familiar with, or brought up in, matrilineal societies would regard their uncles, their mothers’ brothers, as the men who looked after them, who paid their school fees, and who might provide an inheritance.

The publication of Brathwaite’s text by Evans Brothers in its Plays for African Schools series meant that an inexpensive acting and reading adaptation was available in Ghana. I suspect that productions of the play were given in schools, but fear that the present state of theatre history studies in Ghana does not allow me to establish an accurate picture.

I consider Brathwaite’s Caribbean origin and his radical position on major issues to be hugely important. The fact that he chose to make contact with ‘the motherland’ through what had become part of a shared heritage shows how fruitful classical adaptations can be. The impact of Caribbean interpreters of *Antigone* in Ghana continued when the Haitian playwright Félix Morisseau-Leroy directed his version of *Antigone* (1963). *Antigone in Haiti*, as it was known in Ghana, had been previously performed in Port-au-Prince (1953) and at the Théâtre of Nations (Paris, 1959). It had earned Leroy, who was already known as a poet, lawyer, civil servant, and teacher in his homeland, a reputation as a playwright of international stature. At odds with the repressive regime of “Papa Doc” Duvalier in Haiti, Leroy was recruited as National Organiser of Drama and Literature for Ghana, and made a significant contribution to the evolving national theatre movement.

The decision to put on *Antigone in Haiti* may have been somewhat at odds with the focus of his work on nation-building and the promotion of the state. Indeed, Leroy's major contribution to Ghanaian theatre was through the Workers' Brigade Drama Group. I have located little on the production of *Antigone in Haiti*, and what I have found intrigues rather than illuminates.²⁰ It seems, however, that the translation was by Mary Dorkonou and that the example Leroy set was followed. Evans Oma Hunter, whose work on the play is referred to below, wrote: "by the encouragement of Leroy, and others, the play has been adapted to a greater extent."²¹

I have unearthed little about productions of *Antigone* during the rest of the 1960s. However, I do know of one production, in 1970, by Nungua Secondary School. When lecturing at the University of Cape Coast, Robert Fraser saw a local production of the Sophocles version and he subsequently directed pupils from Wesley Girls High School in the Anouilh adaptation.²²

In 1968, a Twi version of the play, prepared by A.A.Y. Kyerematen, was presented at the Seventh Annual Festival of Arts at the Cultural Centre in Kumasi, where it was seen and reviewed favourably by J. Scott–Kennedy.²³ It seems, from the tantalizing glimpse afforded by Kennedy's account, that the courtly elements were stressed and that music, mime, and dance were incorporated. During the early 1990s, Victor Yankah prepared a version that he entitled *Dear Blood* and that the London-based producer Yvonne Brewster showed an interest in. Her plans for a rehearsed reading of the text came to nothing, but a full production, directed by Efo Mawugbe, was scheduled for early in the new millennium in the University of Cape Coast, where Yankah was then teaching. It seems that a power cut affected the second and last night of that run in the university's auditorium.

There were Accra productions of *Antigone* in 1986 and in 1994, both of which involved Oma Hunter and the group Audience Awareness. In 2001, Hunter's adaptation, entitled *Little Princess Korkor*, was put on.

²⁰ 'Theatre Scribe', "Antigone in Haiti," *The Ghanaian* (January 1965): 23, 30.

²¹ Hunter, e-mail, 17 April 2004.

²² Robert Fraser, personal communication, May 2004.

²³ J. Scott–Kennedy, *In Search of African Theatre* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973): 156–57.

Unfortunately, the text is not available, but, according to John Djisenu, it was set in “a patriarchal Ga indigenous society where concerns are raised about gender issues.” The final performance at the National Theatre, Accra, was recorded and subsequently transmitted by Ghana Television.²⁴ The Alliance Française then supported a tour of the production to their centres in the country.²⁵

I am sure further research will uncover accounts of more productions, but I think that a useful underlying pattern has already emerged. In Ghana, initial contacts with the classics came within the British-style educational system, and good performances in Latin and Greek examinations were important for progress through the educational system. In putting classical plays on the colonial stage, there were initial attempts²⁶ at fidelity to the original that extended to having parts of the production delivered in Greek. But at the same time, there was a movement towards adaptation, and this grew stronger as the decades passed. Work on classical texts was initially done by sympathetic, sometimes progressive, outsiders who recognized that the classical form permitted effective communication with local traditions. In two instances, important contributions were made by radical artists who had been born in the African diaspora in the Caribbean. From the text by Brathwaite, it is clear that the playwright recognized the possibility of reshaping the original to exploit the elements of music and dance, and the contexts of festival and funeral, that were part of the local performance traditions. While Sutherland’s reworking of *Alcestis* in *Edufa* indicates what can be done by a confident author in an independent country, the final phases in the case of *Antigone* for Ghana may be the as yet unpublished *Dear Blood* and *Little Princess Korkor*. For a more extensive analysis of what *Antigone* can offer, I want to glance at Nigeria.

Part II: *Antigone* in Nigeria

I have neither the space nor expertise to tell the full story of *Antigone* in Nigeria. But I suggest that, broadly, the attitude to the classics during the colonial period was similar to the situation obtaining in Ghana and that

²⁴ John Djisenu, “Cross-Cultural Bonds Between ancient Greece and Africa: Implications for contemporary staging practices” (unpublished paper, tabled Birmingham Conference on Classics in the Post-Colonial World, May 2004): 6 and fn 13.

²⁵ Hunter, e-mail, 17 April 2004.

²⁶ At St Nicholas, renamed Adisadel, 1934.

Antigone was carried into educational institutions. It remains only to remark that at University College, Ibadan, during the 1950s, an ambitious expatriate producer, Geoffrey Axworthy, opened out the debate about what *Antigone* might mean in independent Nigeria by putting on a double-bill made up of two *Antigones* (in English translation), Sophocles' original play and the adaptation by Jean Anouilh. Pursuing this a little, it can be said that Axworthy, as both director and teacher, and his colleague John Ferguson as a Professor of Classics and performer, contributed to the atmosphere in which an Ibadan undergraduate, John Pepper Clark, gave his early play the title *Song of a Goat*. Clark, now known as "Clark Beke-deremo," was one of several Nigerian writers who have showed familiarity with the classics. Others who went further and opted for adaptation include Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, and Femi Osofisan. Their work has been referred to or included in theses that have followed the Leo Frobenius line by pursuing the links implied in the description of Southern Nigeria as "The Lost Atlantis" or have recognized why Jean-Paul Sartre wrote on "Black Orpheus." Two theses, on the use of classical texts by African playwrights, those by Martin Owusu and Kevin Wetmore, have been published.

Tegonni

Wetmore included an analysis of Osofisan's *Tegonni* in his study, working from the version used for the premiere in Atlanta (1994). I have only had access to the script that was used for the Ibadan production of some four years later (November 1998), which was published by Opon Ifa in 1999. It is not clear how greatly the texts differ, but the optional Prologue would seem to have been an addition, prompted by the scarcity of white actors in Nigeria and written for the Ibadan production. The playwright incorporates *Antigone* parallels in his complex dramaturgy with confidence and authority. He creates a situation characterized by "approximate duplicates," which allows him to present a wide-ranging discussion about tyranny and the relative merits of laws. *Antigone* becomes the twin revolutionary sister of *Tegonni*, united across continents and ages in defiance of tyranny and one in a Shelleyan confidence that oppression will be overthrown.

Osofisan's "complex dramaturgy" involves a witty, confusing historical context designed to prompt thought about when the play is set. The

colonialists toast Queen Victoria,²⁷ so, using that evidence and reading the play as a conventional drama, the play must be set during her reign, 1837 to 1901. However, we also gather that the action takes place some after the punitive campaign against Benin: i.e. after 1897. This reference is found in the central exchange between the Governor and Tegonni, the former saying: “You’re young, but I’m sure you’ve heard about what happened to the great Benin City” (116). Put this way, it must, on the surface, be taken to suggest that the punitive campaign happened several years before. Yet there is no time for this in Victoria’s reign. To complicate matters further, we learn that Governor Carter–Ross had earned the nickname “Slap-My-Face” in the railway construction camps (86). If this refers to construction camps for the Lagos–Ibadan line, then it can only be dated to the very end of Victoria’s reign, between 1898 and 1901. These and other points of historical reference set the brain racing to no avail, except to expose the unsatisfactory nature of this plodding investigation. Osofisan, it becomes evident, is merely evoking history. He scatters references in order to disconcert; he subverts expectations in order to generate discussion. He is not a chronicler of his nation, nor is he writing a history play in a narrow sense.

In other ways, too, including the names of the some of the characters and their conduct, and the use of myth and classical references, Osofisan shows that he wants to provoke, to guide towards a conclusion that cannot be reached simply by following a chronicle. An example of the way he unsettles is found in the list of characters, which includes “Lt. Gen. Carter–Ross.” Carter–Ross is described as Governor of the colony of Nigeria, and for those familiar with Western Nigerian colonial history, his double-barrelled name brings together that of Sir Gilbert Carter, Governor of Lagos, and Capt. W.A. Ross, who was posted to Oyo in 1902, and remained there his entire career, rising to be Resident.²⁸ The former was a hard-liner, responsible for despatching the military expedition that defeated the Ijebu (1892). The latter had a reputation for indulging the Alafin of Oyo, arranging for him to buy a Rolls–Royce and supporting his desire to present a pair of elephant tusks to a member of the British royal

²⁷ Femi Osofisan, *Recent Outings: Two plays comprising Tegonni and Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* (Ibadan: Opon Ifa Readers, 1999): 62. Further references are in the main text.

²⁸ J.A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman, 1973).

family. The name Carter–Ross thus suggests the Janus-faced image of the British imperialist. It sends out deliberately confusing signals that Osofisan expects us to think about.

The life story and conduct of the Reverend Bayo Campbell are also complex and deliberately disturbing. Campbell is described as having been sold to slave traders and transported to America (107) where he came under the influence of the Southern American Baptist Church (61). His name neatly indicates his divided heritage, but his deeds and words keep the reader or member of the audience seeking for consistency. In the search, it is helpful to remember that “Campbell” is an old Lagos family name, and that, as Osofisan pointed out to me when I mentioned the family, it includes Ambrose Campbell, who made a great contribution to music in Nigeria.²⁹

Despite his denominational background, Campbell is prepared to offer a libation (56). Further, he refers to his followers as women “from the parish” (55) – a term associated with established denominations, not Baptists, and he describes himself as “a poor colonial priest” (56). I think one can confidently say that no Baptist *minister* would lightly use the word ‘priest’ of himself or herself.

Like several of Osofisan’s other works, *Tegonni* delights in playful theatricality that nudges and jostles members of the audience, keeping them alert to the complexity of their experience in his theatre. For example, not only do we have the disconcerting Prologue already referred to, but members of Antigone’s retinue perform several roles. The playwright enjoys their versatility, insisting on the obvious doubling or trebling of parts (83). In preparing dialogue for them, Osofisan has not laboured over consistency of language. For example, when they are cast as Fante soldiers (60) it is noticeable that their Pidgin is inflected with Yoruba idioms and words, such as “oyinbo” (72).

Tegonni herself is established as a groundbreaker and glass ceiling smasher. She has embarked on an astonishing career, indicated by realizing her ambition to become a carver and brass-caster, and her willingness to venture into areas regarded as the preserve of men persists throughout the play. For example, in the course of *Tegonni* we see her and her female companions dressed as *Egungun* masquerades. This is consistent with the barrier-breaking marriage that she has contracted with Captain Jones (20).

²⁹ Osofisan, personal communication, Leeds, 16 May 2004.

Through her, various ideas about ‘progress’ and ‘change’ are introduced for consideration. The determination that she shows and the robust positions she adopts as a powerful woman have historical precedents in the fame of the Amazon warriors from Dahomey, and in the role played by Nigerian women in, for example, the Aba Riots (1929) and the tax boycott in Abeokuta (1948–49). The phrase “Women’s power” is used in the play in several contexts (45). The possibility or practicality of the various steps she has taken and takes prompt thought and discussion. This is just what Osofisan wants. The audience is left to wonder whether Tegonni could really have become a brass-carver, could perform as a masquerade, could be the wife of a District Officer, or could defy the Governor of the Colony?

The rich mixture of performance conventions that Osofisan stirs into *Tegonni* is deliberately challenging. After the optional Prologue that addresses production issues, the play ‘proper’ begins with a spectacular and melodious “Opening Number,” the arrival of the Yoruba Water Goddess, Yemoja. This can be seen as paralleling the kind of start to an evening in the theatre familiar from Yoruba travelling groups. In the course of the play, Osofisan introduces a panoply of cultural performances that includes Oriki poetry (23), Ifa divination verses (24), a bridal procession with music, dancing, and more poetry (34–40), a funeral rite with dirges and keening (49–50), and a Pentecostal composition such as, Osofisan tells us disingenuously, is used “nowadays” (63). Other performance elements include the sound of a bull-roarer (108) and the appearance of bronze-faced *Egungun* masquerades (110). The bold, popular appeal of full-blooded confrontations is exploited (67–68), and ‘interludes’ allow the inclusion of “the Story of the Tiger and the Frog” (94–101) and the recitation of Shelley’s “Ozymandias” (128–29). In some ways, these violate the coherence of the text, but a catholic or generous approach would allow them room, on the grounds that they speak both of the exercise of power and of the inevitability of the end of tyranny. In an interview with Jeyifo, Osofisan indicates that he uses Shelley’s poem to establish the “larger sense” of “colonial,” so that “all hegemonies imposed by force of fiat, ruling over people by force or cunning” are embraced.³⁰ The use of “Ozymandias” is

³⁰ Biodun Jeyifo, “Interview with Femi Osofisan,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 43 (1995): 125.

particularly significant in the context of a discussion of classical influences.

The metatheatrical elements that have been noted from time to time often cluster around Antigone. Her first words (suitably disconcerting) are “Greetings. Has the play started?” (25). She soon finds that her story is known: Kunubi identifies her as “From the Greek mythology” (26), and Antigone then accounts for the (conveniently) accomplished manner in which she and her entourage perform in a Yoruba context. She says: “We’ve had long rehearsals about your customs” (27). From time to time throughout the play, we are reminded of the theatrical conventions we have accepted by sitting down in the theatre. For example, Antigone provides members of her retinue with a helpful prop when they have to impersonate soldiers (30). They in turn complain to her that impersonating soldiers is “no fun at all!” (74) and they go on to list the tasks given to them as soldiers. These include carrying corpses, building execution platforms, terrorizing people, burning and plundering houses, and collecting bribes. It is easy to appreciate the recognition this would trigger in Nigerian audiences, since these are all activities that would have been undertaken by marauding soldiers in Nigeria at the time when the play was written and produced. The Arts Theatre audience at Ibadan would have been quick to appreciate why the retinue (of decent men) wanted a change (75).

The introduction of “Ozymandias” is a particularly resonant example of hybridity, and of subtle intertextual wit. The poem is used after Antigone has tested Tegonni by pretending to believe that “Freedom is a myth which human beings invent as a torch to kindle their egos” (126). Once Tegonni has passed the test, the two women stand, hands linked in an isolated spotlight, reciting the poem. Their laughter at Ozymandias’ overweening confidence and their repetition of key ideas provide a powerful, shared commentary. The passage seals their common confidence that “oppression can never last” (127), and stiffens Tegonni’s resolve to undertake the confrontations that remain.

The Epilogue consists of a dumb-show in which the profound sisterhood of Antigone and Tegonni is insisted on. It involves the two women kneeling before Yemoja, being rewarded with gifts, and taking their places among those rowing and singing. The rightness of Tegonni’s action is confirmed by this mime, and the playwright’s approval of her courage

is confirmed through the kinship established with the defiant, proven activist Antigone.

Conclusion

Time and again, it is through Antigone that Osofisan broadens and deepens the debate he has opened up. It is appropriate to note in closing that this journey with Antigone has taken us a long way. When she appeared at Adisadel in 1933, she was all but buskinned and masked, and the anxiety about being faithful to the original included using Greek. Taken up by various adapters, notably Williams, Brathwaite, Leroy, Yankah, and Oma Hunter, Antigone established herself as a medium through which the creative heirs to different traditions were able to release ideas and spark creative performances. Osofisan's confident handling of Antigone shows how effectively the assured postcolonial playwright can raid the storehouse associated with the former colonial power and put it to his own uses. The influence of the Greeks was, despite Ikiddeh and Agovi, far from 'tragic'.

5

The Fifth Landing-Stage

Reading and Re-Reading Across Cultures

F (RANCIS) KWASI FIAWOO dedicated *The Fifth Landing-Stage* “To Ewe Citizens and all who are interested in African Languages and Culture.” Reading this (and the same note is sounded elsewhere in the Sedeco 1983 edition of the play), one expects a cultural manifesto or celebration of ‘tradition’ rather than a drama. Certainly, opportunities are grasped to introduce elements from Ewe ‘high’ culture, and there are occasions when situations are created to set up comparisons between Africa and Europe. The play, whose roots are partly in Ewe traditions of narrative and partly in European theatrical traditions, notably that of Shakespeare, has been successfully presented to the public. While part of a serious argument about values, it deserves to live on the stage.

Information from various sources, including the German linguist Diedrich Westermann, and the position Fiawoo occupied in the Christian community on the West African Coast in the third and fourth decades of the last century provide a context for his creative writing. His play is remarkable for the depravity it explores through Agbebada, for the insights it gives into all aspects of Anlo life, and for the challenges it throws up to exploration. In the examination that follows, an exercise in intercultural examination, I offer, from the position of a distant foreigner, thoughts about how to assess the implications of the text.

Table of Contents and Preface

The “Dedication” is followed by a “Table of Contents” which indicates that Fiawoo has divided his play into five acts and 28 scenes. Since the

script covers some sixty pages, this means that the scenes are generally brief, on average between two and three pages. Fiawoo uses his stage directions to indicate place, and rarely provides clues about location in the text. As a result, a fluid and eloquent stage convention would have to be adopted. For example, in the first three scenes alone we are taken from Gbadago’s house to a path in the woods and to a street or square in Dzita. The remainder of the play is equally restless. Specific stage effects required include fights, and “the fifth landing-stage” of the title, where a convicted evil-doer is buried up to his neck and assailed by crows.

The “Table of Contents” is followed by the author’s “Preface.” This is written in meticulous prose, and contains indications that the work is a contribution to a debate. The “Preface” opens:

This little book comes out as a messenger from our forefathers. It gives a brief sketch of life in their day for the benefit of the present generation in Ewe land, and all who desire to know something about the customs of our ancient people.¹

While noting the vagueness of the date – one wonders precisely which forefathers are presenting “life in their day” – this, and the paragraphs that follow, suggest the playwright’s immediate and more distant constituency. Fiawoo glosses over the passion and emotion that are prompted by the somewhat melodramatic action. I am suggesting that he is not only interested in ‘sketching’ the past; he also engages with strong emotions, is acutely aware of the presence of evil, and recognizes the ease with which it can sway honest men and women. He addresses himself specifically to the manner in which issues of social control and justice are handled in an Anlo–Ewe community and tacks a course through the sea of ideas about religion in that community. He builds his study of good and evil around a true Anlo hero, Kumasi, who, it seems to me, combines qualities admired by the Anlo with Christian virtues, and who insists on the paramount necessity of listening “to the voice of God.” Kumasi is set against Agbe-bada, a lying, cheating knave, and a man whose final speech includes a reference to a traditional deity, Nyigbla. The deity invoked is a “war god” who came to prominence in the 1770s, when the Dzevi, “an outsider

¹ F. Kwasi Fiawoo, Dedication of *The Fifth Landing Stage* (1943; Accra: Sedeco, 1983): 7. All quotations and further page references in the main text are from the Sedeco edition.

ethnic group,” challenged the “right of the Adzovia and Bate clans to serve exclusively as the political and religious leaders of Anlo.”²

In the final scene, to which I have just referred, the author, the Reverend F. Kwasi Fiawoo, B.A., B.D. M.Th. of the American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, introduces elements of forgiveness and the reforming power of kindness. These are well-established in Christian writings, through, for example, the command to ‘turn the other cheek’ and to ‘love thy enemy’, and are qualities that few claim for traditional African religious systems. To try to assess what is happening here and elsewhere, it is desirable to learn as much as possible from those familiar with the Ewe language, and with Ewe history and culture. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the play was originally written in Ewe and is being considered in Fiawoo’s translation.

A valuable context for the cultural and historical background to the play is provided by Diedrich Westermann’s *Study of the Ewe Language* (1935), which includes, for example, a detailed description of punishments and the “chief evils” in Anlo society “some years ago.” The overlap between Westermann’s study and Fiawoo’s play is remarkably close, even given the fact that they were writing about the same community at roughly the same time. Given contact between the two men, it seems likely that they discussed the issues involved in their complementary projects.

For example, according to Westermann, the two (serious) Anlo punishments were “banishment by slavery and [...] the Nyiko custom of execution.” The question of just what is meant by “banishment by slavery” will crop up again and again in this essay. As I seek to address issues of comprehension and interpretation. It would seem that, in addition to transatlantic slavery, there were various categories of slaves in the Gold Coast during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Seeking to suggest the diversity, Fiawoo sometimes uses the word “serf.” Other writers have used ‘pawn’, or have sought to define the category of slaves by using epithets such as ‘plantation slaves’ or ‘court slaves’.³ Those working in the area are aware of how much research remains to be done. The closing

² Sandra M. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002): 17.

³ See Susanne Miers & Richard Roberts, “Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti and the Northern Provinces: A Historical Debate,” in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1988): 75–79.

years of the twentieth century saw expressions of concern about *trokosi*, which was widely presented as a form of slavery in which young girls were used to ‘pay’ family debts to shrines and the priests who ministered at the shrines.

According to Westermann, sentences of death were carried out at Anloga and involved criminals being taken there with “the most astonishing secrecy [, so] that the victim could not suspect the least evil.” Arrangements were made for the squad, along with the condemned, to stay near the site of execution overnight; late at night, on the pretext of conducting an elder to the latrines at the edge of the town, the victim would be woken up and led towards the execution site, “a place called Agbakute [...] (*ne egbea aku*, if you refuse to conform, you die).” The victim, walking behind one man and in front of another, was then exposed when the leading man stepped aside “to attend to his minor needs.” At this point, the executioners stepped forward, and beat the condemned man to death (114). The body was then buried in a grave so shallow that hyenas might be expected to desecrate it, devour the body, scatter the bones. Westermann reported that, should anyone ask the whereabouts of the executed person, they were told “*Eyi toko atolia* (he is gone to the fifth river side [...] which is the euphemism for *wofe nyiko de dezi*, he has been tabooed).” There are points of striking similarity in the account of the procession to the place of death in *The Fifth Landing-Stage*, and the points of divergence in the procedure can be explained.

Westermann lists the following as the “chief evils” as perceived by the Anlo “of those days,” in order of gravity:

- Taking away anyone’s life through witchcraft or the practice of the native black-magic art,
- Stealing
- Meddling with another man’s wife
- Incurring debts
- Disobedience to parents
- Untruthfulness.

The punishment for the first two cases of adultery was the payment of thirty-six shillings, and the third offence (the third ‘strike’) was punished by execution. In looking at Fiawoo’s play, we find that the villain is found guilty of the last four evils. I suggest that we may assume he was also guilty of sorcery (though not murder by sorcery) and theft. This is a con-

tentious statement and will, I hope, lead to observations from those who can respond to the play from a position closer to that of the author than I enjoy.

In its combination of somewhat ponderous statements and translated idioms, the “Preface” illustrates the main point about the language of the English translation of the dialogue. Sometimes lively, brisk, and effective on the stage, the dialogue is on occasions long-winded. There are passages that suggest the work is a ‘chamber play’ – best encountered in the study – but I think judicious cutting could bring out the play’s virtues and ensure its success in the theatre. Indeed, it has been staged several times, most often, I understand, in the original Ewe.

As he warms to his subject in the preface, Fiawoo raises issues related to dramatic form. He feels it necessary to refer to the “three unities,” which he describes as “viewed by Aristotle and his followers as the fundamental principles of dramatic” craftsmanship, before indicating his reasons for retaining only the unity of action. He concludes the paragraph: “It is [...] an Anlo drama pure and simple, taking place on Anlo soil, and originally written in our Ewe language” (8). The claim that it is “an Anlo drama pure and simple” is a rather strange one for a five-act scripted play that sets God (presumably the Christian God) against Nyigbla and other Anlo deities. But it is important to bear in mind that the play was first written in Ewe and to recognize that that version might offer a different perspective. This fact links the play with other experiments with local languages in the Ghanaian theatre, notably Kobina Sekyi’s bilingual drama *The Blinkards*, and Efua Sutherland’s works in Akan that were subsequently translated into English. It is significant that Fiawoo wrote in Ewe and that the Ewe version was published. The fact that it was published in Germany indicates the interest of some German linguists in the language and their cultivation of Fiawoo’s creative abilities. Such attitudes were rare.



There are, as I will show, very many elements which link the play with Ewe cultural traditions. Some of these, such as the inclusion of the songs used in Act I, Scene 1, stand out. The ordeal that identifies liars is a memorable sequence, as is the method of execution (‘more honoured in the breach than the observance’, to judge from the evidence presented). As one looks more closely at the play, it becomes clear that at every level

the audience is confronted by elements of Anlo society that are difficult for outsiders (those not literate in Ewe culture) to interpret. Thus, when we see the family gathered to consider marriage proposals, we can explore this for significance that is “effortlessly present” or implied. For example, for those who have eyes to see, the fact that the gathering is primarily of women, of the matrilineal or the mothers’ relatives, is both apparent and significant. As an outsider, I admit that there are times when I am not sure what I should ‘see’ – rather, how I should understand what I am presented with. However, I will work my way through the play and hope to provoke responses that will lead to deeper understanding.

Fiawoo has presented his work as a play: he has laid it out in a form that has become conventional in the European theatre and in printing houses. He shows, as has been indicated, awareness of the terms of classical and neoclassical dramatic theory such as introduction, complication, climax, unravelling, and restoration. For a cultural nationalist and a self-proclaimed “Ewe writer,” he is curiously anxious to link his work with Western forms; indeed, he does so with skill. I have already mentioned the songs that the playwright has left unspecified, and there is a moment when he leaves a ‘space’ in which actors can arrange precisely which greetings they will exchange. He is closer to Shakespeare than Shaw when it comes to stage directions, leaving it to actor and director to fill in details, and, in my view, creating a play with a few loose ends and plenty of scope for the director to devise an effective solution to staging dilemmas.

Fiawoo ends his “Preface” with a somewhat disarming plea:

his readers [should pay] particular attention to his manner of speech, as he is under strictest obligation to deliver his message in the language of the ancients. For these old folks would never permit him to express it otherwise. If he dares, he will be condemned as a liar.

This somewhat disarms the critic, who, like me, approaches this text as a dramatic work in English: Fiawoo seems to assume he is writing for ‘readers’ using the “language of the [Anlo?] ancients.” It should be pointed out at this stage that the very idea of a writer translating from his mother tongue into a second or third language represents an extraordinary feat: Fiawoo’s English is remarkable. Kofi Awoonor included a translation of a little of the play in *The Breast of the Earth*, and comments valuably on the kind of language the play is written in. Broadly, it seems,

Fiawoo was faithful to spoken Ewe and eschewed the bookish, Biblical manner in which some contemporaries wrote.⁴

Publisher's Note

At this point in the rather unattractively produced but reasonably priced Sedeco edition of 1983, there is a "Publisher's Note," which has been taken over from the earlier English edition. With its references to African interest in drama, and the use of "literary articulation" "to day," and with its allusion to "the New Africa," the publisher places *The Fifth Landing-Stage* in the 1930–40s. There is much in the text that shows the play responding to the need to treat the past respectfully, while incorporating a partly concealed Christian message. There has been, as we shall see, debate about the date at which the play is set.

Introduction

Fiawoo then provides a summary of the story of the play, and a scene-by-scene analysis. These may prove useful, since the play is complex, moves on a fairly large canvas, and, because of the mendacity of the anti-hero, involves a good deal of lying. The broad sweep of the drama involves the development of two characters, Agbebada and Kumasi: the former a liar, trickster, boaster, and adulterer whose name, we are told, means 'evil life', and the latter a brave, determined, and self-sacrificing hero, who has earned the epithet "Death is his prey." Initially, both want to marry Fudzikomele, whose name means 'daughter of sorrow'. The fact that the liar is detected in some of his lies does not prevent him from weaving more spells of deception, and the fact that Kumasi has rescued two girls (Fudzikomele and her sister) from slave traders does not mean that all is well – since one of the young women is subsequently recaptured by the enemy. Yes, Fiawoo has space for "complication" and for "unravelling," and an awareness of expected form.

The image of the *woven* lies is deliberately inserted to suggest a kinship between Agbebada and Ananse. It is fascinating to note that pioneering playwrights from neighbouring peoples, the Ewe and the Akan, have been down to the examination of the unscrupulous and self-seeking. Folk nar-

⁴ Kofi Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth* (Garden City NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1975): 136.

ratives do not flinch from dealing with evil, and the wicked have always had a powerful appeal for dramatists and audiences. Vice attracts in the theatre where piety palls.

Characters

Anticipating the difficulty occasioned by his large cast, Fiawoo includes a list of his characters and sets out the relationships between them. In my experience, reference back to this list is useful in keeping track of the developing drama. It also provides a valuable start to writing out a family tree showing how major characters are related to one another. We go on learning about family links between those in the play right up to the end, encountering new relatives, at Amaglo's house in Act V, Scene 1, and hearing Agbebada call Kumasi his "cousin" in the final scene. Working out precise relationships is a challenge. The task of drawing up a family tree is recommended as an exercise that will help clarify what is happening in the play.

Fiawoo does not always establish names and relationships early in a scene, and a director should expect to have to use the resources available to indicate status and relationship.

Time and Geography

Below his list of *dramatis personae*, Fiawoo writes

The time is the second half of the nineteenth century and the scene is laid on the coast of Togoland and the Gold Coast in West Africa.

Initially, I thought that this range, which offers the possibility of a date between 1850 and 1899, created problems, particularly with reference to the transatlantic slave trade. This was outlawed in British dominions in 1807, and the Royal Navy became involved in its suppression, using Fernando Po as a naval base from 1827. James Walvin reflects a widely held view in arguing that "by the late 1860s, the Atlantic slave trade had been brought to an end."⁵ However, scholarly opinion now seems to be that the British government was very dilatory in its implementation of the anti-slavery policy and that the trade continued into even more recent times,

⁵ James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London: HarperCollins, 1992): 92.

quite possibly up to the end of the nineteenth century. Fiawoo can be read to suggest this. Anloga, in which the play is set, was the base for Baeta, an infamous (Portuguese-speaking) trader up until 1858, and was one of the last sections of the coast in which the trade was stopped.⁶

I have mentioned the use of the term ‘God’, and will have occasion to draw attention to expressions that suggest Christian echoes or ideas that may be associated with that word. In trying to assess the forces at work in the play, it is relevant to note that the Bremen Mission opened its first station at Keta in 1853, and that the first effort to establish Christianity in Anloga took place in 1900.⁷ In the pages that follow, I draw attention to references to various deities and objects of awe. In all this, Fiawoo’s own religious affiliation and education, his Christian vocation, and his position as an author have to be taken into consideration. He was, moreover, a writer using Ewe and aware that the only publisher likely to take his work was a church-affiliated German organization

Having argued as I have about dating, it is salutary to read that Kofi Awoonor, familiar with the Ewe original, suggests that the play is set “during the reign of one of the Anlo paramount chiefs, Zanyido, around 1700 or so.”⁸ While resisting this, I concede that Fiawoo was rather cavalier in his attitude to dates and, despite his note, simply wanted to set the play in what he felt to be the fairly distant past.

The Play

I.i

The opening conversation is concerned to set the mood and establish the theme. It focuses on the case “between Kpogli and his son” which raises issues that reappear in the central plot of *The Fifth Landing-Stage*, viz. lying, the punishment of offenders, and the relationship between the generations. In the community Fiawoo presents, those sentenced to death by the judicial process are buried alive. He is aware that outsiders, for whom the noose or the guillotine is or was the favoured method, regarded this as a barbaric method of execution. In his play, live burial epitomizes the utter

⁶ Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of African History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980): 96–97.

⁷ Sandra M. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter*, xvi.

⁸ Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth*, 134.

barbarity of ‘the dark continent’; inevitably, Fiawoo must have had to think about the custom in a context provided by his study of the Bible, and in the light of his knowledge of European judicial systems. It is significant that both the young men, Kpogli’s son and Agbebada, whose fates we are told about find that “justice is tempered with mercy” – although sentenced to death, they are, in fact, allowed to escape or are rescued. “The fifth landing-stage,” the site of execution, is there, but Fiawoo declines to justify, or demonstrate, its use. As we have seen, Westermann offers the expression as a euphemism rather than as a method of execution.

Fiawoo’s aptitude for evoking an ominous mood is demonstrated by having Gbadago ask “who is that singing ‘We go by night and return by night’?” For those familiar with Ewe culture, or who have made enquiries or read Westermann, the words will signal the proximity of court messengers, possibly executioners, being a translation of the following drum-message, *Miede za, miegbo za; Miede za, miegbo za*, to which the reply from the second drum was, according to Westermann, *Gbewoe nye nye gbe* (‘I concur’).⁹

After the ominous ‘singing’ and brisk dialogue which introduces the case of, Kpegla, his disobedient and mendacious son, a councillor refers to the ancestral tradition of migration from Ketu to Notsie and to the reign of King Agokoli. There is a reference to “our grandfather Sri” (22). In other words, here and elsewhere Fiawoo’s text touches on various “historical markers,” without, I think, offering any very clear date for the play. The sense that we are in “the fairly distant past” is established.

The words ascribed to Sri raise a number of problems about the self-conception and attitudes of the Anlo people in the play. First, it should be noted that they reflect a firm sense of nationhood. It is not certain where this came from or how far it extended. Did it, one wonders, include those who traced their roots to different points of origin, to Tadu rather than Ketu? The reference to “Fatherland” introduces a note that might have been incorporated from German missionaries, who might also have been expected to approve the idea, present in the verses, of the family as the building-block of the nation. The reference to “God’s law” can, I suggest, be taken to be a reference to the Christian God, and the idea that wisdom

⁹ Diedrich Westermann, *A Study of the Ewe Language*, tr. A.L. Bickford-Smith (*Grammatik der Ewe-Sprache*, 1907; London: Oxford UP, 1930): 245.

“increases the joy of life beyond the grave” seems to assume a belief in life after death that is at odds with Ewe ideas of reincarnation.

The stanzas move to a conclusion with lines that sometimes overlap with the Ten Commandments, but the extent to which they echo the evils listed by Westermann is worth noting. We read:

The liar must acknowledge the sovereignty of truth.
 (Debt must be discouraged)
 Theft, adultery and the evil practices of sorcery
 Must never be tolerated in our land of Anlo. (22)

The outsider, like me, may note the particular emphasis on the need to avoid debt and the reference to sorcery – a warning put in, I assume, because of its prevalence. It is tempting to hear the voice of the pulpit behind such injunctions, and to pick up a refrain associated with the Protestant ethic regarding debt. The prominence given to liars is shared with “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” though Fiawoo’s reference to the liar acknowledging the sovereignty of truth introduces a new dimension. Fiawoo provides an emphasis that is well illustrated by the movement of his play, in which truth eventually triumphs over falsehood and in which Agbebada recognizes that “the defenders of justice were watching my every step” (83).

The case referred to in this scene provides points of reference to events later in the play, and it is noteworthy that in each of the families treated in detail the question of the relationship between parents and children is examined. Obedience is constantly stressed – although, as becomes clear, fathers, to whom obedience is due, can be misled, can sometimes act in-advicably or in anger. Fiawoo does not examine all the issues raised when parents act unreasonably – even those whose actions offend the king! As the final scene ends, we hear about Gbadago’s son Agbebada, the Iago / Edmund of the piece, the smiling villain, the liar, braggart, and deceiver who causes trouble for many of those around him and who “lives a charmed life” by thwarting many of those who attempt to expose him. A mendacious adulterer, Agbebada embodies evil and disobedience; his lies cause huge distress; his adultery impoverishes his family (though he never seems ‘short’) and compels them to hand over a daughter into “serfdom” because of a debt. In him, Fiawoo has embodied anti-social tendencies.

I.ii

The second scene brings Agbebada before us in the company of Kumasi, whose virtues will only shine clear later on. We also meet two sisters – Fudzikomele, whom both the young men are courting, and Dzikunya – on the way to collect firewood. Later, Agbebada will cause them to be thrown out of their home and into mortal danger.

The scene opens with a hugely important statement: Kumasi tells Agbebada that “his tongue is evil.” The young women are quickly involved in the conversation in a forthright and eloquent manner. Dzikunya observes that Agbebada giggles “like a woman,” and asks sharply: “Do you laugh to show your white teeth?” When the unabashed Agbebada preens himself, Fudzikomele upbraids him with an apt comparison drawn from nature:

Listen, young man. Brave you may be and well-known and rich, but one all-important thing you lack – wisdom. Money may be a fine thing but often it leads to destruction. Good looks without wisdom are like fruit which looks edible but is really bitter and hurtful. (24)

She then ‘launches’ into a statement about the sea, observing that, though it is destructive, wrecking ships, devouring cargoes and slaying men, it changes and ‘behaves’. It even, she points out, casts up on the shore the bodies of the drowned so that they can be buried. The statement continues with reference to the sea “engulfing whole towns,” which recalls the erosion of the coastline that has plagued the littoral inhabited by the Anlo. The strength of the sea has prompted it to be associated with deities by many communities, and the Anlo share this deification of the natural element. Academic studies such as Emmanuel Akyeampong’s *Between the Sea and the Lagoon*,¹⁰ various construction programmes, and Awoonor’s line that “The sea eats the land at home” draw attention to the seriousness of the problem.

Fudzikomele’s excursus is followed by a speech from Dzikunya, who takes up a topic broached by her elder sister. Some of her points are eloquently made (“A maiden is not like a loaf for sale on the market”), though one wonders whether she is referring to a loaf of bread, and, if she is, where the flour that made it came from. Her insistence that a wife is

¹⁰ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of South-Eastern Ghana* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

not a slave comes through strongly, raising questions about what she understands to be the life of a slave (25). The spirited exchange continues, followed, after the men have left the stage, by Dzikunya's "It is a pity that our parents do not really know Agbebada." The sisters continue to exchange perceptive remarks about the young men before hastening after their female companions.

I.iii

Act I, scene 3 is set in "A square (or street) in Dzita," though this is not established in the text and the action could take place in any public thoroughfare. Here Fiawoo mixes rapid dialogue with violent action: Agbebada tells lies about Fudzikomele's father, Amaglo, about Kumasi, and about Kumasi's father, Dzakpasu. These prompt a sharp exchange which, in turn, provokes the intervention of Fudzikomele's hotheaded brother, Keledome. A brawl ensues, a crowd gathers; Kumasi steps into the fray and disarms Keledome. When the combatants have been separated, Agbebada, who has been felled by Dzakpasu, is left lying on the ground. His mother, Egbo, calls on the "gods of the invisible world" to save her son (29) – an appeal directed, it would seem, to the community of deities recognized by Anlo cosmology. Her daughter, Adenane, makes an emotional appeal to the "people of Anlo," but other women retain a sense of proportion, and Kumasi's mother points out that Agbebada is still alive.

From this scene there emerges a sense of a community in a very volatile state. In these circumstances, an ill-natured fellow such as Agbebada has fertile ground in which to sow discord. Here and elsewhere, Fiawoo shows the power of absolute evil, and it is tempting to use the expression 'motiveless malignity' when trying to account for Agbebada's conduct.

II.i

The text indicates that the setting for II.i is "*In the fetish grove at Batefe*" but there are no words or prescribed actions that indicates this to an audience. Keledome, continuing the aggression of "yesterday," takes up his quarrel with Kumasi, accusing him of belittling him "before the women" and striking him in the face. Kumasi, a model combatant, gives Keledome two knives and a spear to even out the weapons available, and the fight begins. It is partly a skirmish in words, or flying-match, and includes the following:

Keledome: Immunity!
 Kumasi: Onward!
 Keledome: Insensibility!
 Kumasi: We march on!

At this point, Fiawoo helpfully inserts the following explanation:

*Note. – Keledome utters words to make Kumasi’s weapons ineffective.
 Kumasi’s replies are to break the spell.*

We are presented with a convention in which the power of the spoken word is dramatized – sorcery in action. I take it as an indication of Kumasi’s spiritual strength that Keledome soon concedes defeat. Kumasi acknowledges that he “should have cut off [his opponent’s] head,” but, swayed by a plea for mercy and a request in Fudzikomele’s name, he carries his wounded cousin home. This generous deed is part, I suggest, of Fiawoo’s creation of a compassionate hero, a Christian in all but name.

II.ii

The next scene is set in Amaglo’s house, where the members of the family are concerned for Keledome, who, his mother observes, was “sore at heart after” the fight of the previous day. Kumasi bears his injured opponent to the bosom of the family, where Amaglo asks “Evil-string, my son, with whom have you fought?” (32). Keledome is honest about the circumstances of the conflict, but his sister, Fudzikomele, the Juliet of the piece, learning that Kumasi has wounded her Tybalt, speaks harshly to him.

Dzikunya is sent to fetch her “grandfather” Gakpada, who “has skill in healing” (32). It is worth pausing for a moment at this point to note that Gakpada is described in the cast list as Dzakpasu’s “uncle.” I think this should be taken as ‘great-uncle’, and should be noted as indicating the link between the families of Fudzikomele and Kumasi. Fudzikomele helps the severely wounded Kumasi to his home, while Keledome asks his parents to forego revenge if he dies but to ensure that his “sister must not marry Kumasi.” His mother gives a guarded undertaking to that effect. (It is well that she is guarded, for Keledome dies, presumably of wounds inflicted by Kumasi, but Kumasi, in spite of this, marries his sister.)

II.iii

The scene that follows is set at, or near, a well, where we encounter the sisters of Keledome and Agbebada on the day after the fight in the grove. Fudzikomele regrets her harsh words to Kumasi, and implies that Gakpada has attended on both combatants. Adenana, Agbebada's sister, provides a totally distorted version of the fight – malicious, infuriatingly inaccurate, and entirely to Kumasi's disadvantage. In the course of a rather ponderous exchange about masculine brutality and female capacity for causing trouble, she spreads further discord. Fudzikomele draws attention to the record of female treachery and there is a reference to the case discussed in the very first scene. The exchange draws attention to an element that reappears several times in Fiawoo's play: an interest in debate. It is as if he, like many before him, had taken the conflict inherent in a formal discussion and decided that it was highly appropriate for the stage. In these exchanges, the fact that Adenane has an ulterior motive in speaking as she does provides dramatic tension. It is worth noting that, here and elsewhere, Fiawoo relies extensively on female voices to provide comment.

II.iv

The next scene, at Amaglo's house, begins with the entrance of Adedane, whom we have just seen at or near the well. Where some dramatists and filmmakers would have provided a 'cutaway scene' to suggest the passage of time, or an opportunity for the character to walk from the path to the well to the home, Fiawoo encourages us to follow Adenane. One can easily imagine a theatrical device that would indicate economically what has happened – for example, Adenane could have been returning from the well in the previous scene, parted from Fudzikomele, both going in different directions, and pursued her way to Amaglo's house to follow up her plans. The lies she tells Keledome are calculated to foment discord in the family and illustrate the treachery that may come from a woman's tongue. Adenane is accomplished in the way she spreads discord, and leaves with a bland "we mean no harm" (35). (This is the last we see of her, but we hear that she has to be sold into serfdom or slavery to settle one of her brother's debts.)

Adenane's words to Keledome have the desired effect, and there is a family confrontation. It becomes clear that Fudzikomele does not want to rush into marriage with Agbebada, in whom she detects "recklessness."

Her father is not nearly so perceptive, and puts pressure on her to accept the youth who has won his approval by giving gifts. Fudzikomele's mother, Senofe, while obeying the protocols that circumscribe a wife's status, expresses her position firmly. She addresses her husband as "My lord" but advocates delay to see what time will reveal about "the charges which rumour has against Agbebada." She suggests that "certain dark influences seem to control [Agbebada's] own destiny" (36). This suggestion fits into 'traditional' Anlo views to explain the presence of evil. I take it as a hint at Agbebada's traffic with evil spirits, his involvement in sorcery. Fiawoo approaches this topic with extreme caution, leaving it to emerge as members of the audience seek to understand the source of the villain's influence.

When Keledome interjects with "Mother, you have missed the point," he is upbraided by her for speaking inappropriately. Nevertheless, he has his say and comes across as very materialistic. He has clearly been taken in by Adegbeda and regards the gifts the suitor has brought as putting the family under an obligation to him. The point about debt comes in here when he brutally suggests that "If Fudzikomele does not like him she had better sell herself and refund all the young man's gifts" (37). Fudzikomele boldly indicates that she is ready to do this. The exchange invites us to consider the source of Agbebada's gifts, and when the family's poverty comes to light, one is bound to suspect the villain of theft. This is reading beyond the text, to take Fiawoo's avowed intention and observe how circumstances conspire to brand his anti-social creation a villain on all counts.

I will pause at this point to observe that the idea of sale and purchase of human beings is an acutely sensitive issue in discussion of Ewe culture at the dawn of the millennium because the 'sale', 'pawning', 'enslavement' or consignment of girls as 'serfs' to shrines in the course of settling debts – the *trokosi* system – has come under international scrutiny. In this instance, Fudzikomele hesitates, because she dreads to act alone. Her mother withdraws her support and Fudzikomele is pushed to make a decision about Agbebada. When she speaks, she shows strength and determination: "I will hate to be married to a man who is both rogue and adulterer."

This situation is part of Fiawoo's examination of the duties owed by children to parents and vice versa. It is also a reversal of a common folktale pattern. In this case, the father is anxious to marry his daughter to

a “monster,” while the daughter is level-headed and perceptive. Her father’s response to her bold stand is brief and brutal:

So be it. Now get yourself from my house. Henceforth you are outcast and abandoned. Do what you please in the world. I have finished with you.

Fudzikomele beseeches her mother to intervene, but to no avail. Only her sister, Dzikunya, begs for her, and her reward is that she, too, is driven from the house. Their father, Amaglo, brandishes a knife and bawls: “Never set foot inside my house again.” All very sad and melodramatic. The impetuosity of Amaglo is echoed by his wife, Senofe, and, predictably, by their son, Keledome. As the girls set off to seek shelter with an uncle in Odumasi, the audience, once again, must ponder the volatility of the society, and, more seriously, may feel that the lesson about the necessity for obedience has been undermined, since the audience is encouraged to sympathize with the girls when they are victims of parental tyranny. (In the course of the play, Amaglo’s unreasonableness is brought to light: he is later shown to be at fault and will have to pay a fine for his conduct.) The girls’ punishment here is banishment, but the road to Odumasi is perilous and there is the possibility of capture and sale into slavery.

II.ii

After the hectic domestic scene, the focus shifts to the court of King Zanyido, who, Awoonor implies, may be an historical figure.¹¹ There we find a much more considered approach to discipline and law enforcement. Particularly impressive is the sense of Zanyido’s wisdom, which emerges from his comments on the case of Kpogli’s son – the case that set the mood for the play as a whole and which has been established repeatedly as a point of reference. It seems the young man had escaped “down the coast” after the King’s intervention saved him from being sold into slavery or buried alive. Zanyido introduces the idea of mercy tempering justice and anticipates responses to the end of the play, when he says:

Enforce the law, my children, but let mercy go hand in hand with justice. All the crimes in Anlo cannot be ended in a day. Punishments must serve as a warning and a deterrent but they must not be so used

¹¹ Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth*, 134.

as to cause fear and disgust in our country. They fail if they do not lead to reform. (39)

This point of view draws attention to the problems created by having such an extreme sanction as the fifth landing-stage. Those familiar with *The Merchant of Venice* will recall Portia's eloquent contribution to the never-ending discussion about the complex relationship between justice and mercy. I suspect that Fiawoo wanted this connection to become part of the dialogue with a number of Shakespeare's plays that runs through his work.

Zanyido is then asked to comment on the situation that has arisen in Gakpada's extended family – between the nuclear families of Senofe/Amaglo and Ametamenya/Dzakpasu. He rightly perceives that Amaglo's decision regarding his daughters was made in anger, and that he had not maintained the balance between the desirability of children obeying their parents and the need for parents to ensure that the demands they make are reasonable. The king says “parents have no right to endanger the happiness of a daughter”; guidance, not coercion, should be the approach (40). Kpegla, a councillor, indicates that Fudzikome has found it difficult to get reliable witnesses who will testify against Agbebada. This may point to Agbebada's effectiveness in perverting the course of justice as seen in IV.iv: the power that comes from his contact with evil and dark powers makes him a formidable opponent. This has implications, considered in the discussion of IV.iv, for the ability of a sorcerer to control others.

As the scene draws to a close, Zanyido calls upon Gakpada to reconcile the elements in his family. He is an appropriate choice, since Gakpada has already been introduced as a healer of physical wounds. Moreover, he is father to both Amaglo and Dzakpasu, and family structures are essential for eliminating conflict. References in the closing lines to the dangers from robbers in “our land” and to the girls being on the way to Odumase prepare the audience for the next development.

II.vi

From the security of the court, the drama moves to the danger of the road. That something terrible is about to befall the girls is suggested by a dream Fudzikomele has had and the fear that they will be captured by Krobos and sacrificed as part of an annual festival. When they hear robbers calling to one another in the bush, they are terrified. Fudzikomele thinks

she will “go before” her mother into what she calls “the great beyond.” The scene contains plenty of heroics when Fudzikomele draws a dagger and faces the “robbers,” hoping to give her sister time to run away; the latter, however, stands by her. This sisterly loyalty is a virtue that the play approves; it has already been demonstrated and will be again.

The girls are amazingly articulate when confronting the footpads out to collect a (man’s) head to decorate their festival drum. To the robbers, the defenceless girls are a bonus and they consider selling them into slavery. The composed young women deliver extended speeches. Fudzikomele talks about the anonymity that being in a foreign land brings and Dzi-kunya makes an eloquent statement about the links between the Krobo, the Ashanti, the Accra, the Ada, and the Ewe. The robbers are more realistic. One says: “Silence. That’s enough for a runaway.” Another: “Stop the babble! It wearies me.” He follows this with a self-aware line that is likely to raise a laugh when the play is produced in Ghana, playing as it does on a stereotype: “Why are the people of Anlo always so talkative?” (43). However, it is the information that Lawaya (of Odumase) is their uncle that sways the robbers, who are loath to cross him by killing his nieces, and anticipate that he will pay a ransom for the girls. Although Lawaya makes a brief appearance in V.i, the playwright does not follow the line of action he has prepared for; the girls are, in fact, sold to slavers.

II.vii

The next scene, also set on the road, shows Kumasi and Agbebada following the girls’ trail. It opens with some recapitulation of what happened immediately before their departure. Kumasi tells Agbebada:

Only yesterday our parents came together and talked over this bad business. It became clear to all that you alone have caused these quarrels between our families. (44)

Agbebada attempts to divert the blame, with success as far as some are concerned. It will become clear that his capacity to create confusion and ill-will has not been affected by his being exposed. After this discussion, Agbebada and Kumasi go their separate ways: Kumasi remains on the trail of the girls, while Agbebada returns to the safety of home and – when his lies about his deeds are believed – the glory of a hero’s welcome.

II.viii

Back at Amaglo's house, and again without an intervening, or 'cutaway', scene to indicate the passage of time, the audience encounters Agbebada. Once again this 'run-on' need not be a problem, since a resourceful director would have no difficulty in suggesting the young man's movement: indeed, this quick shift might be welcome to maintain the 'fast pace' of the drama.

Nothing is too despicable for Agbebada. Having, as the audience has just seen, abandoned the search for Amaglo's two older daughters, he now proposes to the third. He proceeds to lie about how far he had travelled following the girls, about what he had heard, and about Kumasi. Apparently confident that he can still 'get away with' the most outrageous untruths without fear of being challenged, he says that at Ada–Foa he had been told that the girls "had fallen into the hands of some Fante merchants trading in smoked fish." He claims that "travelling day and night [he had got] to Amedeca in two days" (47).

He mentions to Amaglo that he has proposed to Sefenya. But the formerly well-disposed father has begun to have doubts (perhaps encouraged by consultation with Gakpada) about the plausible young man, and is not convinced by his account of his deeds. Indeed, it is extraordinary that he does not entirely reject the young man's account, since he has had information from "Akaga's sons" that challenges it at several points.

III.i

The first scene of Act III catches up with Kumasi, who has reached Goenu. He delivers a monologue on the difference between man and beast, contrasting the happiness of "the creatures of the forest" with man's tendency to bring unhappiness to his neighbour. He suggests that "nature orders everything according to God's law," adding: "There is no cruelty, no selfishness, no arrogance in their service." Kumasi, while acutely aware of man's inhumanity to man, seems to have arrived at a surprisingly romantic view of nature. His reference to God's law is surely significant and, as I have already indicated, there are grounds for seeing him as a Christian, and Fiawoo as working to create a hero who embodies both Christian and Anlo virtues.

He meditates on the violence of man, and the 'prophetic' qualities of the girls' names: Fudzikomele, 'child of woe', and Dzikunya, 'daughter of sorrow'. This incidentally alerts the reader to the importance of the names

in the play. “Kumasi,” for example, is identified as “The man who brings death” (50). As we shall see, in the next scene (52) and at the end of the drama a turning from evil to virtue is marked by a change of name.

Like a true, venturing Anlo hero, Kumasi sets his face toward the unknown in search of the girls – and is immediately confronted by robbers. Undeterred by being outnumbered, Kumasi delivers a peroration that uses various rhetorical devices to make its appeal. The Second Robber, as before, cuts to the quick by asking: “is this the babbling of fear?” (50). But once again the long arm of coincidence – that servant of melodrama and the picaresque that are so intertwined in this drama – plays an important role: Kumasi is recognized by the leader of the band of robbers, Nokuno. Indeed, it seems Kumasi had rescued Nokuno from the jaws of a crocodile. In a ‘messenger speech’, Nokuno vividly describes the epic struggle in which, with his bare hands, Kumasi had earned his name by “depriving death of his prey” (50).

The group leader helps Kumasi in a most practical way, by lending him five men and giving him food and drink. Reinforced and restored, Kumasi sets off once more to rescue the girls. It initially seems surprising that the footpads are made into heroes. Fiawoo anticipates this objection by suggesting at some length (V.v, 85), that the “robbers” are, in fact, debt-collectors. This may silence a few doubts, although, as will be seen, their methods are abrupt and brutal.

III.ii

There follows the most incredible scene in the whole play. The girls have been taken to Accra as “slaves,” or as captives about to be sold into slavery, and there face the prospect of the Middle Passage. This is surprising, given the circumstances we left them in – namely, about to be taken to their uncle, Lawaya – and Fiawoo offers no explanation for the change of fortune. Philosophical as always and ever ready to insert a meditation, Fiawoo puts into Dzikunya’s mouth a speech which picks up from Kumasi’s thoughts on Nature. It begins: “The sea is not to blame. It is the wickedness of man that brings us here” (51).

This is followed almost immediately by an exchange with the (white) Slaver, identified as “John” in the list of characters and described as “a Portuguese slave-dealer.” Fiawoo provides an (African) interpreter, William, but does not give him many lines, and in production a convention similar to that employed in Peter Shaffer’s *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*

could conveniently be employed. Standing between the conversing parties, the interpreter could, by gestures, indicate that he is conveying the sense from one side to the other.

Astonishingly, John offers to marry Fudzikomele and undertakes to find a suitable husband for Dzikunya. This is an amazing twist, for which there can have been no precedent on the coast. Slave traders did, of course, rape their captives and, sometimes, cohabit with women from among the coastal communities. But they did not marry their cargo. Fiawoo seems to introduce the offer because it allows him the chance to incorporate in his play a discussion about marriage in different cultures. John gets William to explain:

In Europe [...] if a man and a woman love one another, all they need do is to go to a clergyman or to a marriage office. Parents may or may not agree. Their consent is not necessary.

Dzikunya, ever forward, describes this as “a vile custom,” and Fudzikomele adds “These are wicked ways.” Both give reasons for their opinions (52–53). John promises that “when you become civilized in Africa you will agree”: i.e. follow European ways. He then asks, rhetorically: “What have relatives to do with the troubles of a married couple?” This debate about marriage has, of course, been taken up elsewhere by Ghanaian writers and is one about which there is much to be said. It comes at this point in Fiawoo’s play to provide a further perspective on the relationships between cultures and the relative merits of imported and indigenous customs. The arrogance and insensitivity of John’s position is repeatedly exposed by the eloquent young women. Fudzikomele proclaims: “Marriage with a white man is to us degrading since we cannot know his lineage. I will marry no European!” (53). When rape seems to be intended, she draws her knife. The “mad” “bush girls,” having once again earned the admiration of the audience for their eloquence and determination to uphold Anlo values, are taken off under guard.

III.iii

From the desperate straits in which the girls find themselves, the play moves back to Gbadago’s house, where Agbebada has to explain what he intends to do about his “enormous debt.” We have heard much of his generosity, of the presents he has given to the families of those he has wooed, but now we hear of debts. These, it seems, have been because of

“women of doubtful character”; presumably the “adulterer” epithet comes in here, and we can see how adultery has led to the vice of indebtedness, and note that his sister, Adenane, has been “sold into slavery.” Westermann provided the figure of thirty-six shillings as due to wronged husbands, and this figure appears in Fiawoo’s play. We later hear that there have been two accusations of seduction against Agbebada, and may fill in from Westerman an awareness of the peril he is in.

Gbadago then draws attention to “Rumour,” which has challenged Agbebada’s account of his recent rescue attempt, and his mother, Egbo, warns: “if you have lied in this matter to Senofe and her husband, you have committed an unpardonable sin” (54). The parents close in on their wayward son, Egbo employing a proverb (‘It costs more to keep a pig than to buy it’) to good effect (55). Once again, Agbebada’s plausible tongue goes into action, deflecting blame and arguing for a relative notion of morality. He even manages to incorporate religious discourse and a reference to God into his appeal, drawing to a conclusion with “no man should be condemned as worthless. God has a purpose for every creature. For myself I ask nothing better than to be your son” (55).

This flourish (and one can imagine that the stage action that accompanies it might include kneeling in humble submission) impresses his father, who remarks: “Truly your speech shows at times that you learned something from the wisdom of your grandparents.” This prompts the questions: Who were his grandparents? and: What made them so philosophical and, from the evidence of Gbadago’s next speech, so alert to moral imperatives? A name is provided near the end of the play, where Agbebada refers to his grandfather, Gbogla, mentioning his having “served our country well” (81). Fiawoo is anxious to pass on an awareness of lineage, so important in Ewe society, and this is his way of incorporating it in his work.

Gbadago, no less than Adegbad, is adept at debate; he, too, is descended from Gbogla. Aware of the fallacies in the young man’s statement, he says: “According to your arguments no action is to be condemned and all crimes should therefore be condoned.” In the course of a substantial address, he articulates the central concern of the play, which is the Anlo code of justice:

All actions should be judged according to the laws laid down by the society in which a man lives. Though reckless indebtedness, lying, seduction, murder and theft might be permitted by other races, we,

according to our beliefs, consider each of these as a crime, no matter what others think. Therefore the elders of Anlo punish these by banishment, or slavery or death, according to the weight of the offence. (56)

The premise, about what “other races might permit,” is odd, and the similarity of this formulation to that quoted from Westermann above striking. It suggests, at the very least, that the play was a contribution to a debate that was preoccupying educated Anlo and the missionaries working among them in the 1930s. It may conceivably be the fruit of interaction between Fiawoo and Westermann, and the engagement of the two men on complementary projects.

The drama moves forward after Gbadago’s peroration, with a pertinent comment from Egbo, and with the incorrigible Agbebada asking for permission to marry Sefenya. The bare-faced cheek of this request would undoubtedly elicit a vocal response from a Ghanaian audience, whose anger at Agbebada must have been mounting.

III.iv

Back in Accra, things are looking bad for the girls, who, since the sea is calm, are about to be sent out to a waiting boat. Fudzikomele is talkative to the last and Nature is, once again, on her agenda. She concedes the right of man to own man, but elevates into a principle the immorality of the slave trade. She tells John:

By right of capture we are your property, but Nature never meant that man should trade with his fellow man. (57)

John cuts her off with “That’s enough” and orders that the girls be chained together “like the other slaves.” At this point, we encounter the stage-direction “*Enter Kumasi, his party lying in ambush.*” Kumasi initially offers to ransom the women, but John “[draws] his revolver” and a struggle follows. Reinforcements arrive on both sides; the revolver is snatched from John’s hand and tossed aside. The girls are rescued and packed off home. The fighting continues.

The reference to a revolver would fit into any period after 1844 when the first such weapon was patented. However, one wonders how quickly they spread from the United States to West Africa, and whether Fiawoo was well-informed about the kinds of weapons used on the Slave Coast.

III.v

As the situation improves for the virtuous, so it becomes a little more difficult for the vicious. In Act III, scene 5, Agbebada stands accused of seducing a married woman, first identified as “the wife of Amedza,” and later referred to as “Yamenu.” This accusation comes as no surprise, since scene 3 had closed with Gbadago’s statement that Agbebada could not “apply [...] for permission to complete the marriage ceremony with Sefenya” until cleared of the charges against him (57). What is somewhat surprising is the fact that the betrothal to Sefenya seems to stand – Egbo says she has just come from Amaglo’s house, where she “saw Sefenya clothed for marriage” (59). It is not clear whether this means that a final contracting of the two young people was imminent.

At last Gbadago fully acknowledges his son’s immorality, describing his affair as “beyond excuse or pardon.” He sends his wife to tell Amaglo that Agbebada is not worthy of his daughter, Sefenya. At this point, when evil seems to have been exposed, and the irresolute parents have stiffened their resolve, Agbebada enters and presents himself as unreasonably put upon. He protests his innocence with odious eloquence, launching, for instance, into the following:

Foes rage against us like hungry lions. Envy, hatred, greed and calumny foul the name of the best man.

He proclaims his willingness to “go before any court and prove (his) innocence”; this weighs with his parents, who relent to the extent of postponing his marriage rather than breaking off his betrothal. The scene ends with Agbebada’s confident assertion that “one or two questions will silence Amedza’s witnesses” (61).

IV.i

When Act IV opens, we learn in a few hectic lines that Dzikunya has been recaptured by the slavers – evil is not easily evaded! There is some shilly-shallying as Fudzikomele is sent off homewards and the men resume their rescue mission.

IV.ii

In Amaglo’s house, Agbebada is pushing his suit forward with Sefenya, although, of course, this is grossly inappropriate. The young woman has been distressed by a dream in which Fudzikomele had appeared and

which her mother had interpreted as meaning the “marriage [between Agbebada and Sefenya] must never take place” (63). Arguing as arrogantly and insufferably as ever, Agbebada sweeps aside her concern. When she points out that “tears for the dead are not even dry,” he counters that the marriage “is not contrary to our customs” (63).

The scene has a parallel in another melodrama, *Richard III*, and, once again, the heartlessness of the villain must stir the audience. It is instructive to draw attention to the differences between Shakespeare’s treatment and Fiawoo’s work. The latter narrative stresses a family angle, since Sefenya’s mother, Senofe, becomes involved. Senofe is far better disposed towards Agbebada than she was in Act II, scene 2, where, it may be remembered, she spoke of “certain dark influences that [seemed] to control [his] destiny.” At this point she deals harshly with Sefenya, referring towards the end of the scene to Agbebada as her daughter’s “husband” and brushing aside the dream. Sefenya, by contrast, emerges as well-equipped to defend herself verbally. For example, she employs formal advice, such as “Deal first with the sickness in your own house.” When her suitor offers her a handkerchief, she reminds him sharply that he should not spend money on gifts for her, since his first duty is to “redeem” his sister from the serfdom to which his indebtedness has condemned her.

IV.iii

For Act IV, scene 3, the scene shifts to the coastal town of Prampram, where Kumasi is encountered planning an attack on the slavers. He prepares carefully, because, in his words: “To fight a white man is no easy matter and requires cunning. They are clever. When you think you have them beaten you find that they have out-witted you” (65). The attack he coordinates is successful, and Dzikunya, rescued for a second time, calls on the god of war, presumably deemed to have supported the warriors, saying: “May Nyigbla bless and prosper you!” (66).

To Kumasi’s surprise, Fudzikomele arrives on the scene at this point. It seems that her intense loyalty to her sister, and her preference for suicide by drowning in the sea to returning home alone, has persuaded her companion, Gagodo, to allow her to turn back towards Accra. The two girls “sing a song with which women usually welcome their men home from battle” (67). Fiawoo does not supply words or music, a further indication that he is writing for readers and leaving it to a producer, musical director

or cast member literate in Ewe musical culture to supply a suitable text and tune.

Throughout this scene, there is talk of what may be termed ‘rules of engagement’ from which ideas of Anlo honour may be deduced. We learn, for example, that Kumasi has thrown John’s revolver into the sea, that Kumasi’s men were outnumbered, and that they chose to fight with clubs rather than use their daggers. The thinking behind this last choice was that, in Kumasi’s words, “There is no glory in conquering by superior weapons” (66–67).

IV.iv

Act IV, scene 4, set “*At King Zanyido’s Court of Justice, Anloga,*” opens after Amedza, the worthy old “courtier at Atitete,” whose wife Agbebada was accused of seducing, has presented his case. While the councillors “see the little old man,” which I take to be a coded reference to reaching a consensus on the case, Zanyido asks Amedza about the effect of the sea on Atitete. It seems that the sea has come right into the town. As remarked above, erosion and flooding in the coastal areas occupied by the Anlo have long been a problem.

The councillors return from having seen “the little old man,” the title is in italics in Fiawoo’s text, and reveal that the verdict has gone against Amedza. He is ordered to pay Agbebada two sheep and 36 shillings. Amedza is not surprised, remarking: “Even I could see that my witnesses could not withstand Agbebada, so the truth was kept out of sight” (69). In order to appreciate what is happening here, it is helpful to get some background on how judgments can be influenced.

Thwarted by the inability of his witnesses to impress the wronged husband, Amedza changes his line of approach, demanding trial by ordeal before the priest, Anagli. Agbebada puts forward various objections, but when the accused woman, Yamenu, proclaims herself ready to undergo the ordeal, the “stage is set.” The device used is a sort of lie-detector test in which water, which is, of course, essential for life and has great ritual significance, is rubbed in the eyes of those involved in a case. Liars feel that the water is “like pepper.” Although Agbebada is initially defiant and protests his innocence, he is soon exposed through this ordeal. The audience might be expected delight in the long-delayed unmasking of the villain. The episode boldly confirms the opinion expressed earlier in the play that truth will come out, that “Where grass was, grass will be again.”

The action thus reinforces the comfortable assumption of some members of the audience about the efficacy of customary tests.

V.i

Act V opens with a large family meeting in Amaglo's house, where Amaglo's wife, Senofe, her father, Gakpada, her mother, Ewi and her siblings, Lawaya (the uncle of whom we heard in Act III, scene 4), and Fuamo are among those present. These names and relationships are not always communicated in the text, but the conventions of seating and of deference shown by individual to individual in such a formal meeting would convey a sense of the status of each of those present. It would not be difficult for a director to suggest the 'degree' of each character, even to those unfamiliar with West African traditions. However, the significance of the representation of the 'female line' might easily be lost on those unfamiliar with matrilineal traditions.

The matter before the gathering is the fact that the hands of Fudzikomele, Dzikunya, and Sefenya have been sought in marriage. It becomes clear that Amaglo has acknowledged his fault in allowing the previous, irregular betrothal and has paid a fine imposed by the family. The joy of the meeting of several generations in Amaglo's houses is tempered by the fact that Keledome has died. I suspect, however, that audiences will feel little pain at his passing, since he had been such a champion of Agbe-bada's cause.

The family gathering has three young women to marry off. Summoned before her relatives, Fudzikomele acknowledges that she finds Kumasi an acceptable husband. She agrees to follow the family's wishes – and, of course, we have seen evidence of his devotion to her and of her concern for him. However, these elements are not considered on this occasion. The younger sisters are quickly matched: the female relatives briskly reject the suit of De, because of the talk of witchcraft in his mother's family. There has hitherto been little talk of witchcraft in the play, but there have been allusions to sinister powers that I have drawn attention to.

Surprisingly, and I suspect partly to keep the play moving forward, the younger girls are not asked their opinions of their suitors. The betrothal cup is produced, and Gakpada pours a libation, invoking "All you sons of God..." Senofe then presents him with a calabash in which water has been mixed with corn. Fiawoo glosses this in the stage directions as "*a*

symbol of peace” (76). The scene closes with drinks being served to everyone.

V.ii

Act V, scene 2, set on the Dzita–Anloga road, establishes an entirely different mood. It involves Kwawu, “a contemporary of Agbebada,” about whom the audience knows nothing and who seems at first little more than a sounding-board for another moral debate. Despite having confessed to adultery, Agbebada is still the braggart, still presenting himself as the misunderstood man of virtue. He lies as easily and plots as relentlessly as ever. He refers to having made plans to kill Kumasi. Kwawu’s words refer to the need to think well of people, to avoid evil plans, and to be childlike. In a sentiment that chimes with Biblical orthodoxy, Kwawu says: “it is a simple fact that children live nearer to the will of God.” The two men enter a house where they are given water to drink, and Fiawoo writes: “*There follows a long salutation according to custom*” (78). The King’s Marshal and Kpegla enter, and it is clear that the “custom” surrounding the preparation for execution described by Westermann is being followed very closely. This sequence is fascinating in the way that it provides scope for the actors to work out the details of a portion of the text and then shows the playwright following a sequence – the Nyiko custom – that has been described by an anthropologist.

While Agbebada withdraws “to pay [...] respects to Kobla” (79), Kwawu tells the Marshal that his companion has been sentenced to death by the “elders of Dzita.” Following closely the pattern described by Westermann, the late-night journey is undertaken, and the executioners take over custody of the condemned man. When he realizes what is happening, Agbebada, predictably, protests his innocence. He maintains that he has “often fought for Anlo,” and, aware of the importance of lineage, begs that no disgrace be brought on the names of his father and grandfather. Confronted with this self-serving tissue of lies, the Third Executioner provides a reminder of the Anlo code:

Born in the kingdom of Anlo you need no teacher to tell you that lying, reckless indebtedness, stealing, seduction and evil practices of sorcery are not allowed in our land. The very air you breathe tells you this. (81)

He then draws attention to the extent to which elements in the code have been violated.

As I suggested above, it is significant that while the audience know Agbebada to be a liar, a debtor, an adulterer, we have not seen him steal or practise sorcery. However, we have, I have argued, wondered how he came by the gifts he showered on Gbadago's family and have considered how he managed to prevail against Amadza's witnesses. We may propose that there is circumstantial evidence to prove that he is a thief and a sorcerer.

Ever resourceful, still resilient, Agbebada responds to the Executioner by using his bedraggled appearance as proof – in *Othello*, it might have been called “ocular proof” – of his virtue. He says “Do you not see that goodness, kindness and pity for my fellow creatures have left me almost in rags; that for the sake of others I myself have become a poor man?” (81). The sense of outrage that must be felt by the audience witnessing this finds expression in the words of the Third Executioner, who refers to Agbebada's “insolence.” The Third Executioner goes on to show himself to be not only familiar with the charges we know about but also as identifying other married women with whom the wretch has had affairs. Agbebada has fallen foul of the ‘three strikes’ rule, and the Executioner concludes menacingly: “So now the crows are to have your eyes” (81).

The Second Executioner shows how Agbebada has besmirched the names of his parents, in an attack that includes the comparison: “like the pig dressed with jewels [you] went back to the slush” (82). For the reader familiar with the injunction not to cast pearls before swine in Matthew 7:6, this would seem to express a similar sense of inappropriate and wasteful conduct and to be part of Fiawoo's intertextual engagement with the Bible.

Fiawoo puts some more terse, resonant expressions into the mouths of the executioners as Agbebada, his villainous resources finally exhausted, begs abjectly and then confronts his end. The First Executioner says, with a fine sense of symbolism: “It is night for you. You are too late. Mercy has retired and justice is now on the throne.” He looks ahead to the journey Agbebada will have to make, the “mighty rivers” he will have to cross, without benefit of cowries to pay the boatman. and the torments he will have to face. His speech ends with “Everything will add to your wretchedness. Come.” This is followed by the chilling sound of the execution drummers playing “We went at night and returned at night.”

The reference to the rivers that the dead have to cross and to “the ferryman” will remind those familiar with classical mythology of the rivers Acheron and Styx, and of the boatman, Charon. The reference to cowries reflects the use of the mollusk shells as a form of currency. In all this, the student of Fiawoo’s work and Anlo culture should be aware that there has been discussion about Ewe ideas of the dead crossing rivers. For example, A.B. Ellis, working in the late-nineteenth century, found these ideas among the eastern Anlo–Ewe but not among the Dahomeyans, suggesting that this might be because of their familiarity with the River Volta, as well as influence from outsiders.¹²

V.iii

Agbebada then has a scene to himself, “alone, buried up to his neck” at the fifth landing-stage. Fiawoo refers to this as “Agbakute,” presumably for the reason given by Westermann and quoted above. This provides a further example of the common information supplied by both writers.¹³ At last, it seems, Agbebada is aware of his wickedness. As he grows thirsty, he recognizes that “the defenders of justice were watching [his] every step” and wonders why his father had not slain him much earlier “for his disobedience” (83).

The divergence from Westermann at this point in accounts of the execution method is intriguing but, I think, easily explained. Westermann suggests that “the fifth landing-stage” is part of a code and that condemned men were, in fact, beaten to death before being buried in a shallow grave. I can see no reason for preferring this account over Fiawoo’s, since I think it unlikely that Fiawoo would have exaggerated the gruesomeness of the Anlo method of execution. It is very possible that the explanation lies in the date. Fiawoo has set his play in the past when burial up to the neck was still practised. In the 1930s, when Westermann was in contact with Fiawoo and writing, execution at the fifth landing-stage had been replaced by beating to death, as perhaps more humane and more certain, followed by burial in a shallow grave. The process had changed; the terms in which it was alluded to had not.

¹² A.B. Ellis, *The Ewe Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (1890; Chicago: Benin Press, 1965): 102, 108.

¹³ Diedrich Westermann, *A Study of the Ewe Language*, tr. A.L. Bickford-Smith (*Grammatik der Ewe-Sprache*, 1907; London: Oxford UP, 1930): 86.

V.iv

The penultimate scene of the play shows the modest and industrious Kumasi cultivating links with his in-laws-to-be, and being visited by his betrothed and her sister. Despite his wounds and the fact that his parents would have forbidden him from going fishing if they had known of his intentions, he has been out and has sent a “fine basket of fish” to Amaglo’s house. This provides yet another aspect of the theme of (dis)obedience: he has been fishing, but he slipped out to do it because he knew he would not be allowed to if he asked. The parents’ attitude to this seems to be concerned admiration.

Amaglo’s daughters refer to the serious wounds Kumasi suffered in the course of his adventures. We are told that, when he was wounded at Ningo, Fudzikomele wanted him to leave her to the slaver. At this point Kumasi became angry and “threatened her with a whip. He became so fierce that [she] had to yield” (84). On the one hand, this would seem to be a narrow escape from terrible abuse, but the story is told to show Kumasi’s courage and loyalty rather than to indicate his readiness to whip a woman.

Kumasi then clears up the reputation of the “robbers” who had helped to rescue the young women by explaining, rather long-windedly at a point when the drama is moving to a conclusion, some of the ways in which payment of debts was ensured. It seems relatives or neighbours of the debtor were captured and held to ransom. To an outsider, this is a clumsy, brutal method, but the men have won the admiration of the family and, in giving thanks for them, Kumasi’s mother says “Thanks be to the sons of god” (85). Once again an awareness of the Ewe original would be helpful, for, as it stands, this reference, with its similarity to ‘children of God’, strikes a familiar religious note. Having said this, the use of the lower case should be noted.

When Amaglo’s daughters leave, Kumasi and his parents discuss the fate of Agbebada. Kumasi expresses a wish to visit him, and his mother gives vent to her strong disapproval. However, Kumasi points out that the decision is his father’s, and Dzakpasu, seeing the pity that moves his son, allows him to go. Ametamenya waves him off with “God go with you,” and Kumasi responds with appropriate humility “Everything is in the hands of God.” Although there are universal patterns for this kind of exchange, it is tempting to see this as another Christian formula.

V.v

The final scene is set at the place of execution, Agbakute, where Agbebada is found with “a number of crows.” Once again the directors and designers are challenged. Here they have to create a convention in which circling, threatening crows can be presented. Agbebada, his voice his only “weapon,” bewails his lack of cowries for “the ferryman,” Kutsiami, and upbraids the crows which are trying to peck out his eyes (86). When Kumasi “*comes out of the shadows*,” Agbebada assumes it is for vengeance, but the good-hearted hero begins to dig the villain out.

It becomes apparent that the inveterate liar has moved towards some form of self-knowledge (“I am the wickedest of men,” he moans). His rescuer encourages him to escape down the coast to Anecho and Seva, and provides him with “water, food and clothing,” with cowries, and with “leaves for [his] throat.” In a statement that incorporates personification with ideas about control of the body (and absolves him from responsibility), Agbebada reflects that “Wickedness stopped my ears and blinded my eyes” (87). The transformation of the man who had led an “evil life” is indicated by a change of name: the reformed villain asks henceforth to be known as “Amegbedzi” – ‘obedience’ – a word that reverberates through the play. Kumasi points out that “the name is little”; “happiness or unhappiness depends on how we live. Goodness brings blessing not only for ourselves but also for our fellows” (87–88).

A final piece of moral advice precedes leave-taking, Kumasi says:

[...] from today onwards respect your fellow-men, and above all listen to the voice of God! So a man finds and gives both joy and peace. (88)

It is significant that Kumasi uses the word “God,” and that it is capitalized. “Amegbedzi” responds “May Nyigbla watch over you.” The contrast draws attention once again to Fiawoo’s intention to create in Kumasi a new Anlo hero, one who combines faith in God and Christian compassion with long-recognized Anlo virtues of courage, honesty, obedience, sexual restraint, prudence, and industry.

∫ ∂

It is possible to see in the eventful drama that Fiawoo has presented a concern to blend an appreciation – a qualified defence – of Anlo–Ewe culture with a desire to preach Christian doctrine drawing on the command-

ments to “honour thy father and thy mother,” “to love thy enemies,” and to “do good to those who spitefully use you.”

Apart from the dialogue between Ewe and Christian cultures indicated by these thoughts, there is also a dialogue between Ewe and European theatrical or performance traditions. The overt moralizing, the cultivated debates, the songs, drumming, and courtly traditions of Eweland are set in a consciously imported scripted form with a five-act structure. More specifically, the plays of Shakespeare, including *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*, together with Shakespeare’s reflections in other plays on order, nature, and the tempering of justice with mercy, provide ideas or lines which Fiawoo responds to or echoes.

I must confess that my initial reaction to *The Fifth Landing-Stage* was that it was a rather ill-constructed, heavily moralistic drama, with too many scenes, characters, and ponderous speeches. More mature consideration and wider reading have convinced me that there are lines and effects that sparkle and terrify. The bold characterization of the central villain, the depth of his depravity and the smoothness of his tongue – all ensure that the play would have a huge, melodramatic impact. I recognize that the challenges to a company putting on the play are substantial but consider them not insuperable. They could be tackled by adopting a boldly theatrical technique, learning where necessary from the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre and stylized African traditions. I have ventured, on the basis of very limited reading about the Anlo background to the play and some help from Ewe-speaking friends, to offer some comments on the thinking behind the play, the social values it reflects, and the way it might be received by audiences. A major undertaking by a remarkable writer, it challenges and rewards those who come to it seeking to read across cultures. It demands further consideration by those who can bring to it an understanding of the Ewe original.

PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS



6

Efua Sutherland (1924–96)

The ‘Mother’ of the Ghanaian Theatre

TWO OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY anthologized passages of prose by African writers are the story of “The Complete Gentleman,” taken from Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, and “New Life at Kyerefaso,” a short story by Efua Sutherland. Both take a folktale which is told in various ways along the West African coast as a point of departure. Briefly, it is the story of a proud young woman who rejects all the local suitors and marries a stranger, only to find that he is a monster.

Even from this summary, several interpretations of the tale suggest themselves. Tutuola, in a magnificent display of inventiveness, has his stranger a ‘complete gentleman’ who cuts a dashing figure on the market but is later “reduced to a skull.” The shallow young woman who had been attracted by his outward appearance finds herself increasingly perturbed as her husband detaches the parts he has borrowed or rented to make himself “complete.” Sutherland’s version also incorporates radical departures: her stranger impresses because, for him, “toil is joy and life is full and abundant.” Foruwa, the young woman, is not proud but perceptive, not scornful of local suitors but rightly appreciative of a man who had travelled “to see how men work in other lands” and who has “knowledge and strength.”

The stranger’s craftsmanship, his skill as a weaver of baskets and *kente* cloth, and as a builder and farmer – all this impresses first Foruwa and then the community. A true inspiration, his example is followed, and because of him, the storyteller informs readers or listeners,

A new spirit stirred the village [...] The people themselves became more alive and a new pride possessed them. They were no longer just grabbing from the land what they desired for their stomach's present hunger and for their present comfort.

The brief story ends with a procession in which the fruits of the harvest are carried to the royal house where Foruwa's mother, the Queen Mother, waits to receive them.

In this retelling of the story – which provides the basic plot of Sutherland's play *Foriwa* – the young woman and her mother occupy centre stage for much of the time. Foruwa makes a wise choice in accepting the stranger, and the 'new spirit' which stirred in the village holds promise of an illustrious future. At various points in the account of Sutherland's life and work which follows, rough parallels can be drawn between the Ghanaian writer and this, her most widely published story.

Cape Coast

Efua Sutherland, née Morgue, was born in Cape Coast on 27 June 1924, named after her maternal great-grandmother, Nana Ama Nyankoma, and christened "Theodora." The castles of Elmina, built in 1482 near the point at which the European incursion into West Africa began, and Cape Coast, constructed by Swedes in 1650, dominate the area and provide constant reminders of the centuries of contact between Europe and the coastal Fante community into which Sutherland was born. Dungeons in which African captives were imprisoned before being transported to the plantations of the Americas and rusting cannons projecting over battlements draw attention to the inhumanity and violence of much of that contact.

Through her parents, Sutherland was related to those who had contributed decisively to the life of the local community. Her father, Harry Peter Morgue, was a teacher whose stations included Accra Academy. He came from the family of Chief Moore of Sompā House, Cape Coast, and her mother, née Harriet Efua Maria Parker, was from the royal families of Gomua Brofo and Anomabu. Her maternal grandmother, Araba Mansa, was a baker, and relatives included nationalists who had joined the pioneering Aborigines' Rights Protection Society. When she was five months old, her mother, then aged eighteen, was killed in a lorry accident, According to a "Biographical Sketch" by Kofi Anyidoho that appeared in a booklet of memorial *Tributes* and later in *FonTomFrom*:

The child was left in the care of her grandmother, Araba Mansa, whose personal sacrifice and example of hard work as a baker ensured Efua's survival and provided the single most important impact on her later development into a most resourceful personality.¹

During the early twentieth century, Cape Coast became a major centre for formal Western education and Sutherland began hers by attending the local Government Girls School, before moving to St Monica's. This was an Anglican foundation, established in 1926 and staffed by Sisters of the Order of the Holy Paraclete (OHP), based in Yorkshire. Precocious and gifted, Sutherland continued her education as a scholarship student at St Monica's Training College, situated in Asante-Mampong, where the Sisters had built a convent and primary boarding school. In 1936, the teacher-training college which the sisters had established at Cape Coast moved to Asante-Mampong, and in 1946 a secondary school was opened there. In the course of time, all these institutions were important to Sutherland.

For a child, leaving Cape Coast for Asante-Mampong, a town beyond Kumasi, must have represented a 'venture to the interior' and provided an encounter with a very different historical experience. In contrast to Cape Coast, Asante-Mampong had been comparatively little affected by European influences. It was in an area where Sutherland's accent was quite distinct from the Asante Akan spoken in town and village, and where the diet lacked the fish and crabs that were so important to Fante fisherfolk. Setting off for their new school, some of the Cape Coast girls feared they would feel hemmed in by the forest and all that it contained. But, in fact, Asante-Mampong offered spacious premises with large playing fields where the pupils and students could concentrate in a way that was not possible in crowded Cape Coast with all its distractions.

The OHP Sisters were making a substantial contribution to female education in the country, drawing strength from their religious convictions and their base within the Anglican Church. Their missionary zeal was communicated to many of their pupils, who were encouraged to contribute to improving the quality of life in nearby villages, in some of which schools were started. One of the villages affected was called Kyerefaso. In such places, the young Efua's interest in nature study – encouraged by the

¹ Kofi Anyidoho, "Dr Efua Sutherland: A Biographical Sketch," in *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film*, ed. Kofi Anyidoho & James Gibbs (Matatu 21–22; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Atlanta): 78.

Sisters, and in general well-being – she was secretary of the local Red Cross Society – developed. While there, she was provided with experiences that strengthened her sense of vocation, though whether this was to take the veil or become a teacher was not initially clear. It seems that her grandmother intervened to prevent her from joining the Order.²

Despite removal to Asante, Cape Coast continued to provide important experiences for the youthful Sutherland. One of her uncles was at St Nicholas Grammar School, now Adisadel College, which was held in high esteem in an educational centre that was sometimes called “the Athens of West Africa.” In addition to featuring in academic and athletic activities, the school contributed to the cultural life of the community. For example, drama flourished at Adisadel, where the Athenian tradition was manifest in a series of production of plays by classical dramatists. *Antigone* was directed by Stephen Nicholas in 1934–35, *Agamemnon* in 1936, and *Alcestis* in 1944–45.³

Teaching

From an early age, Sutherland expressed an interest in teaching – and there is a sense in which her whole career can be seen in terms of this vocation. At about eighteen, she started teaching at Senior Primary level and then joined the staff of St Monica’s Training College. In 1947, at the age of twenty-three, with five and a half years of work experience behind her, and with a great sense of adventure, Efua Sutherland set off for England to begin a two-year teacher-training course at Homerton College, Cambridge. She was impressed by the high standards at the College, the fearless experimentation, the bold planning, and the way in which her lecturers encouraged her desire to “orient all [her] college work to Africa.” During her time at Homerton, where her special subjects were education and divinity, she impressed those she worked with. They have recorded their appreciation of her maturity, her personality, the care she put into preparing her lessons, and the trouble she took to communicate clearly. It was recorded that she conveyed to her geography classes a vivid sense of what it was like to live in Africa. Apparently, her English classes included

² Anyidoho, “Dr Efua Sutherland: A Biographical Sketch,” 78.

³ G. McLean Amisssah, *Reminiscences of Adisadel* (Accra: Afram, 1980): 9.

not only textual analysis of Shakespeare's plays but also a storytelling session.

From the start of her time in England, as she wrote in *S. Monica Calling*, she resolved to keep her eyes and ears wide open and to ask many questions. The two years whetted her appetite for "work among students in [her] own country," and her exposure to the children's books and the material available to teachers in England was a revelation. What she saw made her determined to contribute to providing African children with books that were attractively produced and in which local experiences were reflected.

From Cambridge, Sutherland, known at this stage as "Theodora O. Morgue," went to London, where she spent a year at the University of London "specialising in Vernacular Languages and Dramatic Studies": i.e. concentrating, in an educational context, on two of the disciplines to which she devoted her life. Although London still bore the scars of German bombing and the mood of postwar gloom must have been pervasive, the theatre was enjoying considerable support. Amateur drama in particular flourished as the restrictions of war-time life were removed and people enjoyed freedom of movement. A strong theatre culture was re-emerging, uncertain of direction but boasting major acting talents and an awareness that tradition must be put to new purposes. For an intellectually curious and politically aware African, London, the focus of movements for colonial freedom, was a particularly exciting place to be. There was a concentration of African nationalists and intellectuals, and hope of freedom for the peoples of the Empire was in the air. African nationalists in London might have said "Great was it at that time to be alive, but to be young was very heaven."

On her return home in 1950, Sutherland was posted to St Monica's but subsequently transferred to Fijai and then to Achimota School.⁴ During this time she continued the journey she told interviewer Maxine Lautré about in 1968, the "journey of discovery" into certain "areas of Ghanaian life" that had been "hidden" from her during her closeted upbringing. She also began another journey, since, as she told Lee Nichols in another interview, it was not long after her return home that she began to take her

⁴ Kojo T. Vieta, "Dr. (Mrs) Efua Theodora Sutherland (1924–96)," in *The Flag-bearers of Ghana* (Accra: Ena, 1999): 472–73, and Anyidoho, "Dr Efua Sutherland: A Biographical Sketch," 78.

writing seriously. This was around Easter 1951.⁵ It seems that she was particularly stimulated by the needs of the children in the villages and of the student teachers she was supervising. Her early poetry suggests that the intense spiritual life lived by the OHP Sisters continued to affect her deeply. This gave her verse from this period a religious dimension, and draws attention to an intense interest in spiritual qualities that remained with her.

In 1954, Theodora O. Morgue married William (Bill) Sutherland, an idealistic African-American peace campaigner and pan-Africanist, who, in 1953, had helped found a high school, on the model of “Antioch College [...] with a work-study program,”⁶ that eventually became Tsito Secondary School in the Volta region. After two years in Tsito, Bill Sutherland got a job with Komla Gbedemah, the Minister of Finance, who subsequently broke with Nkrumah and went into exile. The Sutherlands had three children, Esi Reiter, Ralph Gyan, and Muriel Amowi, who, in due course, made careers in academia, architecture, and the law respectively. However, Sutherland’s marriage did not last, and Bill Sutherland discovered, perhaps because of his links with Gbedemah, that it was impossible to “find a niche that was satisfactory.”⁷ Bill Sutherland will not feature extensively in this account, but he should be identified as a presence, one of a remarkable group of African Americans who have worked in Africa for decades, and a man of whom it might be said (bearing Labaran in mind) that “toil is joy and life is full and abundant.” He expressed himself tenderly and positively about the mother of his children in the booklet of *Tributes* that was prepared for her funeral. Capturing in a sentence her loyalty and generosity, he wrote:

After our separation, Efua continued to receive my family and friends with gracious hospitality, particularly my late sister Muriel Sutherland, who reciprocated when Efua was invited to the United States. (42)

He concluded:

⁵ Efua Sutherland, interviewed by Lee Nichols in Nichols, *Conversations with African Writers* (Washington DC: Voice of America, 1981): 279.

⁶ William Sutherland, interview (1968) by Ernest Dunbar in *Black Homeland, Black Diaspora: Cross-Currents of the African Relationship*, ed. Jacob Drachler (Port Washington NY: National University Publications, 1975): 160.

⁷ Sutherland, interview (1968) by Ernest Dunbar in *Black Homeland, Black Diaspora*, ed. Drachler, 160.

Yes our mourning the loss of Efua is deep but we will only lose her
and my sister and those who have gone before if we squander the time
we have left and do not *live!* (43)

In 2003, an account of Bill Sutherland's purposeful, "unsquandered," Labaranesque life and work in Africa, *Guns and Gandhi*, was published.

By 1957, (Efua) Sutherland was back at Asante–Mampong, and it was there that her interest in drama and in experimenting with dramatic form led her to direct *Lady Precious Stream* by S.I. Hsiung, an "old Chinese play done into English according to its traditional style." The play had made a considerable impact in London when produced there in 1934 because of its topical relevance and its self-conscious theatricality. References to tensions between marriage partners and between generations brought to the fore experiences that were common to East and West. Moreover, the play incorporated within its presentation of distant China cultural conflicts relating to, for example, degrees of formality and the position of women in which London audiences could see their own experiences mirrored. The winning convention involved a complete rejection of illusionistic theatre and was something that London in 1930 and Ghana in 1950 were ready for. It seems likely that Sutherland found the play's convention and, to a lesser extent, the theme of the play relevant to the search that was beginning to preoccupy her. This was a quest for a theatre tradition that spoke to "ordinary Ghanaians" and built from a narrative into a theatrical tradition. It was also an exploration of the perceptions found in the character around which many Akan folktales were woven, Ananse the spider.

Creating a National Theatrical Tradition

The task of creating a national theatrical tradition was undertaken with a new urgency during the second half of the 1950s as the country approached and then achieved independence. In addition to the folk-narrative convention already mentioned, the Gold Coast had a tradition of creative writing, both in local languages, such as Twi, Ewe, and Ga, and in English. There was also a tradition of literary societies. These, as Kobina Sekyi showed in *The Blinkards* (1917) and as Henry Ofori celebrated in an amusing radio play from the mid-1950s (*The Literary Society*), were sometimes side-tracked from cultural quests. The "distractions" were frequently political in origin – indeed, some of the groups might, in a more

open community, have been able to call themselves political societies. The cultural was political, and the political cultural.

In 1957, the year the Gold Coast became Ghana, a genuine literary organization, the Ghana Society of Writers (later the Ghana Association of Writers), came into existence. Sutherland was involved from the beginning. Indeed, eleven years later she was able to tell an interviewer “I started the Writers’ Society [...] to get more people interested in writing, primarily for children.” The new organization was supported by such distinguished local authors as J.B. Danquah, J.H. Kwabena Nketia, and Michael Dei–Anang. According to Atukwei Okai, early members included Geombeeyi Adali–Mortty, Frank Parkes, Bob Lee, Peter Myers, Cecile McHardy, Cameron Duodu, and Crankye Denteh.⁸ This list reflects the predominantly Ghanaian but firmly multi-racial and international composition of the group. From early on, the need to produce a journal was recognized, and the publication that emerged, *Okyeame*, will be considered in due course.

The year after Independence, the Ghana Experimental Theatre was created, and once again Sutherland should be quoted: “To give another reason why people would want to write I started to [...] develop the experimental theatre programme.” This, too, built on existing interest. Festivals and rituals were frequently spectacular, some were a form of theatre, and many contained the ingredients of theatre. The production of plays in schools has already been mentioned. With the interest in ‘African Personality’ that marked the late 1950s, and with changing attitudes to certain kinds of popular culture, there came a greater awareness of the traditions of drama within Akan culture. These flourished within the mingling of cultures that had long been apparent in towns such as Cape Coast, Sekondi, and Takoradi.

The Writers’ Society and the Experimental Theatre Group came into existence at a time when Ghana was at the forefront of the independence movement in black Africa. The Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah, had a high profile as a spokesman for pan-Africanism, and proclaimed the importance of the arts in society. At this point, the national coffers were well stocked, and ‘new life’ seemed to be flowing into the country. Sutherland’s eloquence and striking presence, her determination, vision, and

⁸ Atukwei Okai, “From the Secretary General, PAWA,” in *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Kofi Anyidoho et al. (1996): 28.

contacts propelled her into a leadership role. She identified herself with the cultural and political movement which brought together different generations and different disciplines, and which united Ghanaians and those from the diaspora who had 'returned' to share in the adventure the nation was living through. In this context, and aware of the influences shaping the narrative, it is helpful to call on Maya Angelou as a witness and point to her account of a conversation with Sutherland. In it, Sutherland is presented as quoting the President's vision ("Kwame has said that Ghana must use its own legends to heal itself") and then describing her participation ("I have written the old tales in new ways to teach the children that their history is rich and noble").⁹ Her contribution to the movement in the theatre was complemented by the contributions in related fields of Philip Gbeho and J.H. Kwabena Nketia (music), Kofi Antubam (art), and J.H. Nketsia (research). She also worked with those, such as Joe de Graft, who shared her passion for the theatre and writing.

Poetry

Developing a literary culture and taking the national theatre movement into a new phase were inevitably slow processes, unspectacular foundation-laying took some time, and only after several years was it possible to identify achievements. As a writer, Sutherland first made an impact as a poet, and it is her work in this genre that I will consider at this point. The examination will be brief, because her output is small and her achievements in the form were limited. It seems she began writing verse in 1951, and her work was initially published in Germany.¹⁰ The bibliography I prepared for *FonTomFrom* (see the end of this book, after the "General Bibliography") suggests the extent of the work available in print and her progress as a published writer. For example, four poems were published in an anthology of West African verse that came out in Ibadan (1957), and during the 1970s her work appeared in three other collections.

The verses she contributed to the volume of Ghanaian verse edited by Kofi Awoonor and G. Adali-Mortty in 1971 are representative of her strengths and weaknesses. "The Redeemed" shows her feeling for the dramatic, her preoccupation with religion, and her tendency to use obtrusive

⁹ Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (London: Virago, 1986): 13.

¹⁰ Sutherland, interviewed by Lee Nichols in *Conversations with African Writers*, 280.

inversions of natural word-order. The sub-Keatsian description “the poison in me boiled / And clotted in the glare,” is followed by the less ambitious, but somewhat more successful pacing of the concluding description:

The copper neck swerved back with its load,
And down the slope to the market road,
She strode¹¹

It is apposite to remark at this stage that confident, accomplished, and decisive women, like the one in this poem, are frequently central to Sutherland’s work. Explanations for this, if required, may include the fact that she comes from a community in which women play important political, social, and economic roles, and that she went to a single-sex school run by Sisters who, by setting up schools and a training college, provided further examples of what dedicated and purposeful women could achieve. She was herself a leader, who combined queenly resolve with a tremendous sense of life and a nurturing, compassionate demeanour.

The control apparent in “The Redeemed” is not present in the metrically confused “Once Upon a Time,” but it returns when she tackles another religious theme in “The Dedication.” This is a meditative poem in which Biblical echoes and images contribute to the exploration of the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and allow her to lead up to the somewhat metaphysical paradox of a “blossoming cross.” “Song of the Fishing Ghosts” is a poem for several voices and, once again, has a dramatic quality. A blend of the lyrical and menacing, it seems to have slipped into the collection of verse from a volume of ‘rhythm plays’ that Sutherland prepared for children and shows the overlap between her work in different genres. “A Professional Beggar’s Lullaby,” with its awkward diction (“a prodigy beggar kid”) and odd descriptions (“that swanky beat”), indicates that Sutherland’s touch is not always certain in this form.

The spiritual quality that comes through in Sutherland’s poetry was manifest throughout her life. In their memorial tributes, her children recall the celebration of Christmas and Easter at her home, named “Araba Mansa” after her grandmother, as primarily religious festivals. Grandchildren remember that every Friday she wore white and “would tell

¹¹ Efua Sutherland, “The Redeemed,” in *Messages: Poems from Ghana*, ed. Kofi Awoonor & G. Adalai–Mortty (London: Heinemann, 1971): 159.

everyone not to bother her with everyday things.”¹² Sutherland did not take the veil, but she lived a richly spiritual life in which the High Anglicanism of the Sisters who taught her retained a central place.

Okyeame: A Literary Journal and a Short Story

In 1960, the Ghana Society of Writers brought out the first issue of *Okyeame*. Although active in the background, Efua Sutherland was not named as part of the founding editorial committee, which was made up of E.A. Winful, Geormbeeyi Adali–Mortty, and Cecile McHardy. They recorded their gratitude to “the Hon. Kofi Baako and the Arts Council of Ghana” for “encouragement and assistance in promoting this magazine.” Baako was the Minister for Information, and from this may be inferred that the publication benefitted from the government’s policy of state subsidy to the arts. The format chosen, strikingly reminiscent of that used by the Nigerian publication *Black Orpheus*, was expensive: the paper thick, the layout generous, the art-work extensive. The name of the journal was taken from the Akan word that is often translated as ‘linguist’, the ‘spokesman’ through whom a leader addressed his people, and the first issue included fifteen poems and three works of prose fiction. One of these, a short story entitled “Samantaase,” was by Sutherland.

“Samantaase” is the retelling of a familiar tale in an elegant and unobtrusive style which reveals a storyteller’s skill in maintaining interest. Briefly, a village plagued by “nymphs,” dryads or “spirit beings associated with the forest” is saved by the man many regard as a “fool,” Afram, who meets cunning with cunning and childishness with childishness. The despised misfit is discovered to have skills society needs. In a time of trouble his worth is recognized, and he is made a chief.

A clue to Sutherland’s interest in this folktale which celebrates the spirit of playfulness and, possibly, the ‘holy fool’ is echoed in a review of *Playtime in Africa*. This was a pictorial essay for children with text by Sutherland and illustrations by Willis Bell, a photographer with whom she worked closely for several years. The unsigned review recommends the book as “fun,” defining this as “the exercise of ingenuity, imagination and skill.” It is clear that Sutherland had given priority to communicating – particularly with children – and had identified a social role for the artist as

¹² *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Anyidoho et al., 11.

one who both celebrates and participates in the life of the community. Showing determination and an ability to improvise, Sutherland and Bell had, it seems, published the book themselves, and their belief in it was confirmed when it was subsequently brought out by a Soviet publisher, and later by Atheneum in New York. This pattern, incidentally, reveals Sutherland's involvement in publishing, and the cultural and political orientation of Ghana under Nkrumah and later, which included links to both the East and the West. During the early 1970s, Sutherland's interest in local publishing was shown by her involvement in setting up a publishing house in Accra, Afram.

Sutherland's interest in encouraging writing and publications also found expression in *Talent for Tomorrow*. Volumes of work by young writers, initially in teacher training colleges, later in Sixth Forms as well, were published in 1966, 1967 and 1968, with important editorial work undertaken by Ellen Geer Sangster, who was the "Creative Writing Adviser to the Teacher Training Colleges." Though modest in appearance, these were substantial volumes: the 1968 collection, for example, runs to 164 pages and contains work by more than sixty authors. One of those represented, who was then at Accra Training College and who has gone on to produce major work, wrote under the name "Mansfield C.K. Anyidoho." Sutherland was on the editorial board of *Talent for Tomorrow* and also contributed to conferences, such as the one held at Achimota during April 1968, that stimulated youthful creativity. On that occasion, 246 students were able to benefit from presentations by writers, such as Parkes and Okai, by the sculptor Oku Ampofo, and by the musicologist Professor J.H. Nketia.¹³

Anansegoro: A Local Dramatic Form

What an interest in folktales and play might begin to mean in theatrical terms was conveyed by Sutherland's brief account of a performance given by the Ghana Experimental Theatre Players in the courtyard of the Teacher Training College in Akropong on 27 March 1959. The occasion had been shaped so that it bore a striking resemblance to the kind of storytelling session that might have been held the night before in one of the

¹³ Ellen Geer Sangster, "Foreword" to *Talent for Tomorrow: An anthology of creative writing from the training colleges and secondary schools of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation/Ministry of Education, 1969): ii-iv.

homes that stretched along the road beside the College. In such a context, a storyteller would recount a familiar tale, impersonating a number of characters in the course of the narrative. There would be formalized exchanges between the narrator and the 'spectators', and opportunities for members of the audience to interrupt the story in order to sing a relevant song. Such songs were referred to as *mboguo*, which is often translated as 'interlude' or 'musical interlude'.

The event at the College also shared some features with productions as mounted by touring companies in Europe and that were part of 'conventional' theatre: the performance had been advertised in advance, entrance was by ticket, a set had been constructed, the actors, who took on individual roles, were from out of town and had rehearsed meticulously. The combination of the traditions was most clearly apparent in the chorus of performers: they made the responses and produced a singer who led the audience in singing relevant songs.

This dramatic form bringing together elements from different traditions Sutherland described as *anansegoro* or 'spider play'. In "Venture into Theatre," she explains that the word

was coined from *Anansesem* (Spider Stories) which is the traditional name for a popular class of Folk-Tales of the Akan. Ananse (The Spider) is a constant character of the Ananse Tales. The character is called Spider because of the role of cunning and ingenuity he plays. Obviously created as a vehicle for satire, the Ananse Folk-tales are a marvellous source material for dramatic use. Recreated and contemporised they offer exciting food for dramatists in this country.¹⁴

At the end of the song, Dansowa, described in the list of *dramatis personae* as "Ananse's wife," enters. She is carrying a basket and sits on a stool that has been placed "in the centre" by the Property Man, "in an attitude of patient waiting." The Story-Teller then offers a formulaic opening for an Ananse story: "An Ananse story is not meant to be consumed." The Chorus are quick to take this up, responding: "It is meant to be stored." This suggestion that there will be substance for reflection is of importance in any discussion of the reception of theatre in Ghana – audiences attend performances expecting to go home with a moral or message. The reference to storing is followed, in time-honoured fashion, with

¹⁴ Sutherland, "Venture into Theatre," *Okyeame* 1.1 (1960): 48.

“Wasn’t it Kweku Ananse?” This is greeted by the ‘culturally literate’ Chorus with “Aha!” At this point, Ananse: i.e. an actor playing Ananse, enters. Sutherland provides guidance to the actor about his mood and to the costume designer on his appearance: he is described as absent-minded, “dressed in patchy sacking” – the embodiment of the poverty that the Story-Teller begins to speak of and that explains why he is leaving his home-town. At this point, Dansowa identifies herself to the audience by addressing Ananse as “Husband!” and the *anansegoro* shifts to dialogue. The switch between a Narrator and dialogue is a feature of Sutherland’s dramaturgy that has many parallels. These can be found in Shakespeare’s use of a chorus, Bertolt Brecht’s narrative devices in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and the kind of virtuoso performances given by storytellers who use different voices for different characters.

By this stage, it can be seen that Sutherland has incorporated elements from the Ananse storytelling tradition in the hybrid form of narrative theatre she has created. For example, from the cycle she has taken the name “Ananse,” certain established exchanges, and the idea of incorporating songs. From the tradition associated with Europe, she has borrowed the position of authorial authority implicit in producing a written script, and the convention of impersonation in which an actor takes on a specific role. I suggest here, and will argue later, that the designation of the “Property Man” and the brusque avoidance of illusion that is established by his actions suggest a debt to the Eastern theatre. (See the essay later in this collection on *Lady Precious Stream*.)

Within the narrative of the play, Sutherland draws on several traditions, operating as an oral artist who has a certain freedom to improvise and amend. For example, one wonders where precisely the name “Dansowa” came from. In her collection of Ananse stories, Esther Bekoe Mfodwo gives Ananse’s senior wife the name “Konnore Yaa,”¹⁵ and in his collection Samuel Kwasi Toprah, using different conventions of transcription, represents the name as “Konoroh Yaa.”¹⁶ Hannah Dankwa–Smith, heir to a different tradition, gives Ananse’s senior wife the name “Okondor.”¹⁷ These variants indicate the flexibility and variety found in oral traditions.

¹⁵ Esther Bekoe Mfodwo, *Folk Tales and Stories from Around the World* (Accra–Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971): 1.

¹⁶ Samuel Kwasi Toprah, *The Adventures of Ananse* (Accra: Virtuoso, 1994): 7.

¹⁷ In *Some Popular Ananse Stories* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1975): 104.

At this point, I want to look at *You Swore an Oath*, described as an *anansegoro* and as a “one-act play by Efua Theodora Sutherland” [sic] when it was published in *Présence Africaine* (1964). As will become apparent, I do not consider that it follows the description provided by Sutherland in 1961. However, I think it reveals her preoccupations in this period and reveals elements of the narrative theatre she was creating. The opening stage directions introduce the “*property man who could be a member of the Chorus*,” who soon places a stool in the centre. Sutherland then calls for the informal arrival of musicians and of members of the Chorus. When the Story-Teller arrives he greets the Chorus and, by extension, the audience with “We are gathered.” They reply that he should “Proceed.” A song, “Take up my song / Amoaba ei,” is initiated by the Story-Teller and picked up by the Chorus, and, in all probability, by members of the audience familiar with the conventions of Akan storytelling.

As the action at the centre of *You Swore An Oath* gets under way, it becomes clear that, despite being subtitled “Anansegoro,” the narrative is not usually linked with Ananse. Indeed, it must be pointed out that the protagonist, who is given the name “Ananse,” does not reveal the characteristics of “cunning and ingenuity” associated with Ananse that make him such a complex national figure. I suggest that Sutherland’s play incorporates elements and motifs from several antelope tales and other stories, adapting them in order to facilitate staging and to incorporate themes. The antelope-woman narrative can be seen as a companion-piece to “The Complete Gentlemen”-plot that is used in *Foriwa*. It is particularly appropriate as a theatrical source, because it initiates the exploration of appearance and reality.

In Sutherland’s play, to draw attention to the main narrative features, “Ananse,” a hunter, has shot an antelope and taken it home. He believes that a haunch left hanging has been stolen. In fact, that haunch is “Oforiwa,” a beautiful woman, who enters Ananse’s life as a bringer of good fortune. Having sworn him to secrecy, she confides in Ananse that she is that haunch of venison. Oforiwa then begins to sing a song that starts “Nnenne. Nnenne” and that the Chorus take up. The song speaks of the importance of community; in response to it, male members of the Chorus, taking the roles of villagers, step forward and introduce themselves to Ananse. A second song, which includes the line “God’s fruit come along,” prompts female members of the chorus to collect “*brass trays loaded with fruit and other food stuffs*” which they place before Ananse with lines that

suggest that poverty, want, and hunger have been banished. Oforiwa's third song includes the line "treasure come along," and when it is finished members of the Chorus deck Ananse with chains and bracelets of gold.

When Dansowa enters, she is disconcerted by the transformation that has taken place. Ananse introduces Oforiwa as a niece who has "been living abroad for a long time." When the actors playing the named characters move out of the performance area, the chorus discusses the situation while the Property Man performs yet another 'scene-changing' action. The Story-Teller then moves the action forward a year, and, after he has spoken of "a festival spirit" in Ananse's house the festive mood is created by the actors and by dancing members of the Chorus. Hints of dangers present in the situation are offered by indications that Ananse is tipsy and "*pays a lot of fond attention to Oforiwa.*" According to the stage directions, he is soon gazing at her "*with infatuation.*" His tongue loosened by drink, Ananse tells his wife Oforiwa's history, and the Story-Teller points out appropriate morals about the dangers of drink.

At this point, Dansowa, concerned that Ananse means to take Oforiwa as a wife, calls to the Chorus with "Players, agoo!" They reply "Amee!" As Dansowa prepares to launch her attack on Oforiwa in song, the Story-Teller observes dryly that "Rivalry has pushed its way into the story." Dansowa addresses her song to "Deer haunch," accompanying the insult with an unambiguous gesture: "*she seizes her own thigh and hops as a gesture of mockery.*" Well-performed, this defiant dance is guaranteed to produce gales of laughter, and when Dansowa is joined on the "dance floor" by two members of the Chorus one might anticipate that members of the audience would also enter the performance area. While the dance is being performed, the hapless Oforiwa stands "*absolutely still and tense, her face alone registering her emotions.*" Ananse's concern that the secret has been revealed, Oforiwa's pain and power, and Dansowa's triumphalism, wedded to ignorance about the inevitable result of her actions, combine to make the dialogue that follows compelling. Oforiwa, betrayed by Ananse and insulted by Dansowa, sings again, this time withdrawing all the gifts she has bestowed. After this stripping has been performed, Oforiwa and the Chorus depart, leaving Ananse and his wife reduced to the poverty in which they were first encountered. The Story-Teller steps forward to close the play, which has also been a storytelling session with a slightly amended formula:

Whether this Anansegoro was amusing or not, if you have received something from it, so be it.

Like others before her, Sutherland set out to develop a national theatrical tradition from existing sources, and the bibliography lists many of her experiments in this area and the texts produced by this process. Towards the end of "Venture into Theatre," she wrote a few sentences about the group's second experiment, which was to create *asafogoro*, "big [dramas] along the lines of Greek tragedy" based on the odes of the Asafo companies of the country. Nothing seems to have come of this, and it is for her work in developing the *anansegoro* tradition, in creating opportunities for drama, and as a writer that Sutherland is remembered. She did not articulate the extent to which "You Swore an Oath" reflects longings for plenty, and recalls that the banishment of hunger is a feature of some festivals and celebrations.

The Drama Studio: A Base in Accra

While the Experimental Theatre Players had been preparing the *anansegoro* for performance in Akropong, Sutherland was addressing the problem of creating a suitable space for rehearsal and performance. After some time without a base, a bungalow in central Accra was secured and then, with funding from the Farfield and Rockefeller Foundations and from the Government's Arts Council, a Drama Studio was constructed by the Danish firm of Geelack and Gilles. With an entrance that incorporated an Ashanti stool motif, this structure was essentially an enclosed space with a raised and covered platform on one side which could be used for conventional productions or simply become part of the auditorium. In the interview she gave in 1968, Efua Sutherland spoke of having "set up" the Drama Studio and said "[she] started to build [it]" in order "to give another reason why people would want to write." The building, which had a capacity of 350 and was clearly the result of the efforts of many, was inaugurated by Nkrumah on 21 October 1960. Kojo T. Vieta's valuable profile of Efua Sutherland includes the following injunction from the President's speech at the opening:

Study the history, culture, institutions, language and Arts of Ghana and Africa in new African centred ways in entire freedom from the prepositions [sic] and presuppositions of the colonial epoch.¹⁸

The complexity of the situation in which Sutherland operated is indicated by the revelation that the Farfield Foundation was a ‘front’ set up by the C.I.A. during the cultural Cold War that followed World War II. While she was well aware of the mixed motives of many American organizations, there is no reason to suppose that Sutherland had any information about this specific link. There is no suggestion that she ever compromised her vision to accommodate outside interests.

Foriwa: The First Major Play

It was in the Drama Studio and with twenty-eight members of a new group, the Studio Players, that Sutherland’s first major play, *Foriwa*, opened in March 1962. As might have been anticipated in view of the experience with *anansegoro* and the primacy given to communication, the performance was given in Akan. From the English text which the Ghana Publishing Corporation brought out five years later, it can be appreciated that the play has much in common with the short story already referred to, “New Life at Kyerefaso.” The underlying situation is the same; indeed there is even a reference to the folktale on which both works are based, but the plot has been “re-created and contemporised.” *Foriwa* is *Foruwa* of the story, and she is a teacher visiting her home-town, where her mother is the Queen Mother, a woman anxiously looking out for signs of new life in the community. The “stranger” of the story is Labaran, a graduate and a Hausaman, who has been in the village for a short while when the play opens. In that time he has worked with his hands to clear away rubbish from near the main street and he has set in motion plans that will improve local agricultural practices. He has also taken steps that will transform the Postmaster’s “ramshackle shop” in a dilapidated street into a centre for enlightenment – a place where newspapers and books, especially well-illustrated children’s books, can be purchased.

¹⁸ Kojo T. Vieta, “Dr. (Mrs) Efua Theodora Sutherland (1924–96),” in *The Flagbearers of Ghana* (Accra: Ena, 1999): 475.

The play begins at daybreak on the eve of a purification ceremony with a speech by Labaran directed at the audience, and with Foriwa's rejection of a pompous and conceited suitor. In the course of the day she learns what Labaran has been doing for the community, and agrees to marry him. The play, which also explores the Queen Mother's concern that small-mindedness and stultifying litigation should be swept away, ends with a coming-together of the community, the presentation of gifts, a performance by an Asafo company, and the promise that new life will come to the village.

While drawing on folk traditions and traditional rites – incorporating spectacular elements from traditional culture and delighting in the comic deflation of the europeanized – the play is clearly intelligible within the European tradition. It is transparently propagandist: time and again, as is clear from the summary, issues close to the author's heart come to the fore – the emphasis on the provision of books for children being a case in point. There is even a deliberate attempt to contribute to nation-building, since Labaran is from the north but the point is made that he is not a "stranger." He is, as he says, "a Ghanaian," and he has much to offer the community in which he has settled.

One problem with the play is that the solutions for problems offered often seem inadequate. For example, bookshops are fine, but is it sensible to invest in a bookshop in Kyerefaso? Will it have a high enough turnover to remain in business? In fact, one constantly feels 'short-changed' about the financial implications of actions and undertakings: one inevitably asks, for example, how Labaran can afford the investments he makes. Sutherland ducks such issues, and as a result *Foriwa* is far more instructive as a piece of theatre, an exemplar which uses traditional material in a contemporary context, than as a template for community development. A busy, crowded play, it is full of insights into life in Ghanaian villages, and of rather unconvincing development models. As a piece of theatre it draws on diverse sources and achieves a variety of theatrical effects

Edufa: A Mixed Ancestry

Eight months after the premier of *Foriwa*, Sutherland presented Accra theatre-goers with her second major dramatic text, *Edufa*. We have already seen that she had been exposed to the tradition of classical theatre in Cape Coast, that she aspired to create "big drama along the lines of Greek drama," and that she was interested in "re-creating and contemporising."

With this background, it was not entirely surprising that her next play should be a reworking of *Alcestis* (Euripides) and the placing of it in a contemporary Ghanaian setting.

Although an “adaptation” and despite a certain confusion over the protagonist’s attitude to witchcraft, *Edufa* stands on its own. Many have responded to its poignant mixture of moods and its theatrical qualities without being aware of its links with ancient Greece. Indeed, the play has several strengths, including the ‘chorus’ of women who help to establish the mood and become involved in the action. In a sense, they fulfil some functions resembling those of a chorus in a Greek play or in *anansegoro*, but they are thoroughly integrated into the text. Senchi, the Heracles figure from the Greek play, is also successfully reworked: he comes across as vivid, amusing, and distinctively West African. The humour and comedy which accompany him mingle effectively with the sombre mood of the threat which hangs over the household of Edufa and which results in the death of his wife, Ampoma.

In her “re-creation,” Sutherland exploits some of the similarities in world-views of Ancient Greece and Africa which have made the productions or adaptations of Greek plays so compelling for West African audiences. She explores the roles of fate and chance, relishes the dramatic effectiveness of communicating through symbols, and preaches a sermon against materialism. As with the closing moments of *Foriwa*, it is the handling of moods and of ritual action that lifts the play.

Academic Career

In 1963, Efua Sutherland moved to the Institute of African Studies, part of the University of Ghana, Legon, as a Research Associate. While there, and while enjoying a degree of professional security as a Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies, she remained in touch with her previous projects – indeed, she took some of them with her. For example, she “handed over the Drama Studio to the University of Ghana to be used as ‘an extension division of the School of Music, Dance and Drama’.”¹⁹ And she continued with *Okyeame*. Delays in publication, possibly occasioned by uncertainty about finance and printers, meant that the second volume

¹⁹ Anon., “Tribute to Mrs Efua Theodora Sutherland,” *Weekly Spectator* (3 February 1996): 4.

of the journal did not appear until 1964 and that by 1969 there were still only four issues. During this period, Sutherland emerged from the shadows: she became editor of *Okyeame*, with an editorial committee that varied somewhat but frequently included Geormbeeyi Adali–Mortty, Jawa Apronti, E. Ofori Akyea, and Kojo Gyinaye Kyei. The involvement of the Writers' Workshop gradually diminished, and eventually the Institute of African Studies became the sole publisher. The journal abandoned the lavish format of the first issue and adopted a much more modest appearance. It brought a series of poets to the attention of readers, and printed chapters from novels and scenes from plays. An awareness of literary issues was fostered, achievements were chronicled, and debates were encouraged about the directions in which fiction, poetry, and drama in the country were moving. One of the liveliest of these debates concerned language, and Sutherland's commitment to Akan, the language in which she had first written most of her plays, was indicated by the inclusion of poems in that language and by her work as a translator. Poets who wrote in Akan were brought to the attention of a wider community as a result of Sutherland's labour. In appearing in the role of translator, as in much else, she showed how ready she was to collaborate and cooperate, to enable and encourage.

A Village Theatre Project

Efua Sutherland appeared in the journal in several guises. For example, in 1968 E. Ofori Akyea wrote on the experiment in village theatre that Sutherland had fostered at Atwia–Ekumfi, and the following year an extract from *The Marriage of Anansewa* was included. Sutherland first visited Atwia/Atwia during the Ahobaa Festival in June 1965. She was attracted by the strong sense of community and vital tradition of storytelling. Even before June 1965, she knew Nana Baa Okuampaa VI, who had distinguished herself as a storyteller on the radio. Despite the initial suspicion as to what a “Lady” could find of interest in Atwia, a village of 500 inhabitants in the Ekumfi district of the Central Region, Sutherland came to enjoy the affectionate respect of the community and took great pleasure in her contacts there. With support from the Ford Foundation and local labour, a “Kodzidan” or “Kodzi Dan” – a ‘story house’ or ‘storytelling theatre house’ – was constructed. Ofori Akyea described it as an eleven-sided structure with a “stepped-down area [...] flanked by a higher-

level stage [...] The back wall of the stage arcs gracefully, and there is a door to the dressing room at each end of the arc.” He might have added that there is a sunken performance area partly surrounded deep terraces on which tables and chairs can be arranged. The “back wall” is reminiscent of a cyclorama, and the whole is roofed. However, since part of the roof is transparent, this provides both shelter and light. According to Ofori Akyea, *kodzi* is a form of the folktale in which, as in *anansesem*, the narrator may be interrupted by those who want to sing or to provide comic relief through jokes, clowning, or wearing grotesque clothes.

In a manner that would have delighted Foruwa/Foriwa, the Kodzidan not only encouraged an existing tradition of theatre but also brought money into the community. Ofori Akyea reported that income from performances had been spent on the construction of a cooperative store, and fees from filming a documentary about the community had financed the extension of the local school buildings. The Representative of Atwaman wrote in *Tributes* of the way the story house

... was the cornerstone of her development programme. Through this platform our culture was exposed and sold to the entire world. It was also to serve as a factory for extracting the values and virtues of our rich heritage and inject them back into the general fabric of the community.²⁰

The Representative was able to point to improvements that had followed Sutherland’s initiative in supporting the village and that had come as a result of her unflagging support for the community. For example, he reported that income from filming projects had financed the expansion of the Middle School, that a Dutch NGO had financed a pipe-borne water project, that the pineapple industry had been rehabilitated thanks to a Japanese volunteer, and that the Takebe Childhood Centre had been established “to inculcate the values of our heritage at an early age” (13).

The Atwia–Ekumfi project is consistent with Sutherland’s attitudes to village communities as custodians of cultural traditions and to children as a resourceful and creative element in society. She told Voice of America interviewer Lee Nichols that “the village [communities ...] have done a wonderful thing for the country. They have minded the culture. [They] are

²⁰ Representative of Atwaman, in *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Anyidoho et al., 12.

the people whom we ought to thank for what has been maintained of the culture." She insisted that it was the "village community" that constituted the important audience.²¹

Ofori Akyea seemed to be quoting Sutherland more or less verbatim in 1965 when he wrote:

Before the Ghanaian child goes to school he is such an imaginative and intelligent being. Before he is ten he is something else. Just what happens in the classroom must be found out [...] the Ghanaian child living in an adult world develops two languages – a language for the adult world as well as a children's language. School ignores this remarkable linguistic advantage.²²

Part of the experiment at Atwia was directed at encouraging children to live vigorously in their imaginations and to recognize the value of their own 'language'. This comes through in a documentary, *Araba: The Village Story*, shot by ABC in 1967.

The year Ofori Akyea's article appeared, Sutherland published *Vulture! Vulture! Two Rhythm Plays*. These texts for children exist at one end of the spectrum of her idea of drama – at the point where drama and play are barely distinguishable. There has been minimal authorial intervention in the presentation: these are simple stories that have been combined with well-known children's songs or well-structured games of make-believe, in order to form play-texts. Published with photographs by Willis Bell and the score for music arranged by Kwasi Baiden, they can relatively easily be re-created as 'games' to 'produce' plays.

In the bibliography can be found the titles of other plays for children, some published, some unpublished, some drawing on European sources, others on African inspiration. In all of them, Sutherland can be seen trying to preserve, share, and enrich the culture of Ghanaian children. Once again, her method is essentially based on collaboration, and, once again, it found an institutional structure. From 1974, she explored and developed these ideas through the Children's Drama Development Project.

²¹ Efua Sutherland, interviewed by Lee Nichols in Nichols, *Conversations with African Writers* (Washington DC: Voice of America, 1981): 280.

²² E. Ofori Akyea, "The Atwia-Ekumfi Kodzidan: An Experimental African Theatre," *Okyeame* 4.1 (1968): 83–84.

The Marriage of Anansewa: Fully-Fledged Anansegoro

The excerpt from *The Marriage of Anansewa* that was published in *Okye-ame* (1969) provides an indication of the date by which a scripted English version of part of the play was in existence. The full published text did not appear until 1975 – the kind of delay which has become the norm when considering Sutherland’s work. The genesis of the play that I have explored more fully elsewhere was complex (see below). For example, Sandy Arkhurst, Sutherland’s right-hand man in the development of *Kusum Agoromba*, told the researcher Awo Asiedu in May 2000 about the development of the play from “a story outline and scenarios” that was worked on by the Workers Brigade and then “transcribed and edited” and translated by Sutherland.²³ The polishing, or ‘editing’, process seems to have involved other productions, including one with girls at St Mary’s School, Accra, during the mid-1960s.

Sutherland provided ‘her’ text with a foreword of importance to all those seeking to understand her theatrical vision. In it she wrote about the origin of *anansegoro*, the significance of Ananse (“a kind of Everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination”), the function of the musical interludes or *mboguo*, and the problems she had encountered in attempting to invoke the “element of community participation” in performance.

The plot of the play is quickly outlined: impoverished Ananse, who lives in a world of post offices and secretarial colleges, encourages each of four chiefs to believe he is the favoured suitor for the hand of his beautiful daughter, Anansewa. He expects and receives gifts from each of them. When the suitors all decide to visit their “fiancée,” Ananse extricates himself from embarrassment by announcing that Anansewa has just died. This brings a further batch of gifts; it also bring one suitor in person – Chief-Who-Is-Chief, who, as luck would have it, is the man Anansewa has fallen in love with. To escape from this tight corner, Ananse pretends that the force of the suitor’s love restores Anansewa to life. As the spectacle ends, the marriage of Anansewa to Chief-Who-Is-Chief is anticipated.

The cast-list for the play suggests that about twenty-five performers are required, but that number could be increased or, if necessary and by

²³ Awo Mana Asiedu, “West African Theatre Audiences: A Study of Ghanaian and Nigerian Audiences of Literary Theatre in English” (doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2003): 331.

means of doubling, reduced. When not involved in the action, the performers are required by the playwright to be “grouped together as a unified pool of musicians, dancers, actors, and *as a participating audience*.” Properties are, in the manner of the Chinese theatre and S.I. Hsiung’s *Lady Precious Stream*, handed to the performers in full view of the audience by a Property Man.

The play draws strength from Sutherland’s ear for dialogue, her ability (partly exercised through the Storyteller) to control the pace and the tension of the play, and her incorporation of various of the performing arts into the drama. The text has verve, wit, and energy, but the playwright does not feel it incumbent upon her to comment in any depth on Ananse’s actions. She is a collaborator with the tradition, simply making available in a topical manner the community’s perception of the trickster hero. There may be an expectation that self-examination will continue after the performance ends, but the important notes are of ambiguity and uncertainty. In the present context, the play is most significant as an *anansegoro* text, representing Sutherland’s most substantial contribution to the debate about the form of African drama.

Kusum Agoromba: A Professional Company

Before the Longman edition appeared, *The Marriage of Anansewa* had already been produced in Akan by the Workers Brigade Drama Group, and by a combined *Kusum Agoromba* – Drama Studio Players company. It is to *Kusum Agoromba*, Sutherland’s successful attempt to establish and maintain a large, professional drama company, that I now wish to turn.

In the interviewed with Nichols already quoted from, Sutherland explained the company’s name thus: ‘*Kusum* means the right cultural thing to do [...]. *Agoromba* means players.’²⁴ In a brochure outlining what the company offered in terms of productions (*Kusum Agoromba Presentations*, probably written by Sutherland), we read that it was “a full-time drama company established in 1968,” based at the Drama Studio, and dedicated to performing “quality plays in Akan [...] in towns and villages all over the country, for the general public and for specialised audiences such as church congregations, clubs and associations.”

²⁴ Efua Sutherland, interviewed by Lee Nichols in Nichols, *Conversations with African Writers*, 284.

It was appropriate that, after the Experimental Theatre Players and the Drama Studio Players, there should be a company which, like Sutherland herself, was committed to the use of Akan, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ghana, as a vehicle for contemporary drama and for contributing to the national theatre movement. *Kusum Agoromba* represented Sutherland's major achievement in creating a company, and inevitably she faced problems of training, equipment, finance, organization, transport, and communications. The undated *Kusum Agoromba* brochure, from which I have already quoted, indicates the seriousness with which the task of assembling a repertoire was tackled and the group's success in putting shows together. The productions available, all of which were in Akan, and several of which had strong musical components, were: *Everyman*, an adaptation of the morality play; *Yaa Konadu*, a version of Chekhov's *The Proposal*; *Blood is Mysterious*; *The Rumour-Monger's Fate*; *Love for your Neighbour*, a musical play based on R. Kofi Hihetah's novel *Painful Road to Kadjebi*; *God's Time is the Best*; *Foriwa*, and three Ananse plays – *The Marriage of Anansewa*, *You Swore an Oath*, and *Ananse and the Dwarf Brigade*. The productions varied in length from forty minutes to two hours and the list represented a total of over fifteen hours of drama. As we have seen, some of the plays required large casts – though not necessarily the twenty-eight who performed in the first production of *Foriwa*.

The full history of *Kusum Agoromba* remains to be written, but in a sense it was both a product and a victim of Ghana's metaphorical and actual climate. The group flourished in the 1960s, but during the 1970s and 1980s it was affected by political instability, high inflation, and drought. Eventually and inevitably, the group became a victim of changing circumstances.

Sutherland's commitment to building up and providing for *Kusum Agoromba*, a burdensome task requiring immense resources of patience, energy, and tact, did not absorb all her energy. This was, no doubt, partly because of able and reliable assistants such as Arkhurst (already mentioned) to whom she could delegate with confidence. Her position at the Institute of Africa Studies, University of Ghana, gave her security and status, but involved an obligation to carry out research, so that, while much of her time was spent on practical projects, there was also writing to be done. In 1970, she published the fruits of her research into the life and

work of one of the founders of the Ghanaian Concert Party, a form that had emerged from the fusion of local and imported traditions in the 1930s.

Entitled *The Original Bob: The Story of Ghana's Ace Comedian*, the twenty-five page booklet, published by an Accra-based publisher "in association with" the Drama Studio, drew on interviews with Bob Johnson and on long acquaintance with concert parties in performance. The essay traces the life of the man she describes as "the Father of the Concert Party" and outlines the development of the tradition of comic plays which may be said to have begun in Sekondi during the first decades of the last century. Since Johnson had founded a theatre company and operated as a creator of plays, many illuminating parallels can be drawn between his career and Sutherland's. Like her, Johnson was a Fante, the group most closely associated with popular drama in Ghana, and, like her, he found that political independence created both opportunities and complications. For example, after Independence, Johnson became involved in the Workers' Brigade Drama Group, which, while enjoying a considerable measure of state support, found itself expected to work uncomfortably closely with the party in power (the CPP).

The profile, like Sutherland's other academic essays, is written in an elegant and accessible manner. It was published as a pamphlet and thus made available to a comparatively large public. In recent years, extensive research has been carried out, notably by Kwabena Bame, John Collins, and Catherine Cole, and new light has been shed on the traditions that Sutherland investigated. However, her booklet remains a pioneering publication in the field of Ghanaian popular-culture studies.

After Nkrumah

Although sometimes in the political wilderness after the fall of Nkrumah (24 February 1966) and during periods of military rule, Sutherland remained as a presence within the university, and a guide and support to younger people working in the theatre. While further research is required to chart in detail her relationship with the politicians of different backgrounds, persuasions, and attitudes to the arts, she managed, on the whole, to continue the work to which she was committed. Despite major disagreements, she continued to be treated with affection and respect. On occasion, powerful political figures went out of their way to proclaim, if not always to show, respect for her, while some groups among her

countrymen and -women bestowed genuine honours on her. For example, in 1972 the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) organized “An Evening with Efua Sutherland.”

I have already noted her 1974 initiative in nurturing children’s imagination, capacity for play and creativity. This prepares for her involvement in the work of the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC), of which she was a founder member in 1979 and Chair from 1983 to 1990. With the Commission, she oversaw the creation of Park-Library Complexes in Accra, Kumasi, Kyekyewere, and Gomoa Assin.²⁵ She also established Christmas programmes for talented children, who were taken to Peduase Lodge, where they spent time with artists, musicians, scientists, and writers,” a programme that was linked with the creation of Mobile Technical Workshops.²⁶ With support from the Ministry of Education and the VALCO Fund, she promoted the Children Drama Development Project, and she linked up with UNICEF to formulate a code of human rights for the protection of children. Involvement with UNESCO led to Sutherland’s attending the General Conference of that body in Nairobi in 1976, and the following year *The Marriage of Anansewa* scored a success at the Pan-African arts festival held in Lagos (Festac ’77) that brought credit both to her and to Ghana. As a writer and innovator, she had made her mark, and continued as a major force while younger men and women emerged, often from groups she had encouraged, to take over the leadership roles in the Ghanaian theatre.

In 1984, Sutherland was appointed to the Education Commission established by J.J. Rawlings and the Provision National Defence Council (PNDC). She did not, however, always agree with the working of the Commission, and on one occasion resigned from it. However, she returned as a coopted member, and made a decisive impact on the reports about teacher training and Language and Communication Skills.²⁷ her differences with the Rawlings/PNDC regime came out in the open after the Chinese government had indicated its readiness to make a major contribution to Ghana’s infrastructure. The PNDC was given the choice between a stadium and a theatre; they opted for the latter. This was not, I suspect, out of any great interest in the theatre on the part of Rawlings, but

²⁵ Windley, in *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Anyidoho et al., 37.

²⁶ *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Anyidoho et al., 20.

²⁷ *Tributes to Efua Theodora Sutherland*, ed. Anyidoho et al., 49.

because Accra already had a serviceable arena for sporting contests and lacked a grand building in which “national events, such as beauty pageants,” could be mounted. The site selected for the National Theatre was that occupied by the Drama Studio. Sutherland’s concrete statement about the theatre was going to be replaced. One of those within the PNDC hierarchy, Mohammed Ben-Abdullah, had a passion for the theatre and a record as a resourceful playwright, director, and theatre company leader. He recognized what the Drama Studio stood for in terms of the evolution of Ghanaian theatre and negotiated with the Chinese, who, incidentally, did not expect to be paid for any of their work, to ensure that a replica of the Drama Studio be rebuilt “somewhere else.” In March 1987, after a “one-year silence” on the issue, Sutherland wrote a “Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the PNDC” on the subject of future action for the development of Ghana’s potential in dramatic art.” The memorandum, which she copied to major figures in the University, made it clear that she wanted a clean break with the experimental “Drama Studio” period. She maintained that the “demolition of the Ghana Drama Studio as ordered by the PNDC should constitute a decisive conclusion of a 25-year period of research and creative work for the development of Ghana’s potential in dramatic art.” She recommended that “the proposition of a substitute Drama Studio somewhere in Accra” be discarded, and argued for the development of projects for research and experimental creative work “in every region, and especially in the Districts where rich lodes of our distinctive dramatic heritage abound.” She emphasized that she wanted a “clear cut conclusion” to the essentially experimental work of the Drama Studio, and a recognition that a National Theatre would be seen in very different terms – as, in fact, “a venue for exhibiting the best.”

Sutherland also drew attention to other developments, attaching a programme for the observance of the 25th anniversary of the inauguration of the Ghana Drama Studio and its programme (21 October 1986 to October 1987), and expressing concern about the impact of the PNDC’s moves on the livelihoods of those she had been working with. She referred, for example, to the “arrangements for the projected retirement in December 1987 of the Studio’s full-time company of actors (*Kusum Agoromba*).”

Despite Sutherland’s recommendation, the “proposition” for a “substitute Drama Studio somewhere” was carried. The site eventually chosen was on the campus at Legon, next to what was once the School of Music and Drama but had by this time become the School of Performing Arts

(SPA). Efua Sutherland's opposition to the building scheme was implacable. After the National Theatre was completed, she never crossed its threshold. When the replica Drama Studio was opened, she never visited it. Her obvious distress at the scheme did not prevent the SPA from naming the Studio after her.

Much could be said on both sides about the issues raised in the Memorandum. Sutherland's view was uncompromising and somewhat proprietorial. Ben-Abdallah might have argued that the experimental work could continue in an open-air theatre that he had ensured was constructed as part of the National Theatre complex, and that the experimental work would find a natural focus at "The Efua T. Sutherland Drama Studio" at Legon.

The penultimate paragraph of the March 1987 Memorandum provides further indications of the complexities of Efua Sutherland's position and of the kinds of difficulties she encountered. There we read:

I am joyfully looking forward to the projected December, 1987 dateline when, at long last, I shall be freed from the many tiresome factors including malevolent and subversive attitudes with which I have been burdened constantly while trying to help sustain a continuity of work in this area of dramatic art on behalf of my people and my black race in general.

This cry from the heart provides indications of the difficulties she had had to contend with over the decades, and the reference to "malevolent and subversive attitudes" is telling. While it may find a specific instance in the National Theatre Affair, that should not be taken as the only area of controversy and ill-feeling. A realist would see that anyone who wielded as much influence as Efua Sutherland would inevitably come in for criticism and would encounter resentment that might express itself as ill-will and sabotage. For those familiar with Ayi Kwei-Armah's novels, the portrait of Akosua Russell in *Fragments* provides an impression of how she might have been seen by a disaffected younger writer. Sutherland had helped Armah, as she had helped many other talented young people, but benevolence may breed "malevolent and subversive attitudes."

A balance has to be struck in the attempt to assess how Efua Sutherland was regarded and how she should be assessed, as, even after retirement, she was honoured and remained in a position to take initiatives and bring her visions into being. In 1991, she was presented, by GAW, with the Noble Patron of the Arts Award and, in November, the University of

Ghana recognized her contribution to national development by awarding her an honorary doctorate. The Citation ran quickly over some of the activities covered above and included an allusion, which made a political point, about the fact that the Drama Studio was initially “Happily, [...] suitably placed in town to bring the University’s offering to the public.” Having sent a few ripples through the alert assembly, the citation concluded with suitable resonance:

Efua Theodora Sutherland, for the inspiration provided to the development of the Dramatic Art, and in recognition of your efforts on behalf of children for whose benefit you have canvassed children’s libraries and amusement parks, the University of Ghana is privileged to honour you with the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

After being awarded the degree, Sutherland dedicated it at a special service in the Chapel of Akuafu Hall, on the campus. The brief service was conducted by the Anglican chaplain, who formed a link with Adisadel, the Rev. Canon Seton R.S. Nicholas.

Specifically, she dedicated the degree, in her words and in the layout of the order of service:

TO MY PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

OF ARTISTS
SCHOLARS
DONORS,
ADMINISTRATORS

who, for 34 years (1958 to date)
have shared with me in a spirit of GOODWILL
the aspirations and burdens of
the tasks undertaken for the development and promotion of
DRAMATIC ART
as an essential Medium of Communication in Ghana.

TO MY PERSONAL FAMILY AND FRIENDS
At Home And Abroad
WHOSE LOVE, TRUST AND FAITH,
WHOSE BEAUTIFUL CONCERN AND
CARE
HAVE SUSTAINED ME.

The “Ceremony” included the 23rd Psalm and Isaac Watts’ paraphrase of Psalm 145 beginning “Praise, my soul the king of Heaven / To his feet thy tribute.” There were also three “Exhortations,” all from Matthew. Offered without concessions to modern spelling in the following translation, they seem particularly apposite in view of the charges of malevolence and subversion noted above.

Love thy neighbour as thyself.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law.

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Towards the end of the service there was silence, “in Tribute To Ancestral and Other Historical Creators Of Ghana’s Artistic Heritage – and to the departed.” The names of deceased actors, writers, and directors who had worked with the Ghana Experimental Theatre, the Studio Players, and *Kusum Agoromba* were recorded.

The service drew to a close with the singing of Joseph Addison’s thanksgiving hymn, originally appended to an essay on “Gratitude” that can be seen as a spiritual autobiography: “All Thy mercies, O my God.” After final prayers, recordings of “Heritage Music” by Mahalia Jackson and Marian Anderson were played. I have spent some time on the service because it brought together many of the strands in Sutherland’s life, transforming a day which might have been seen as a celebration of an individual’s achievements into a statement about shared effort and collaboration.

As she left Akuafu Hall and Marion Anderson’s voice faded away, Efua Sutherland would have been within about two hundred yards of the rebuilt Drama Studio. It stands on its new site as a somewhat ambiguous memorial to Sutherland’s contribution to the Ghanaian theatre and her position within it. Ambiguous, because although she clearly disapproved of having it “re-sited,” the move was in fact a good one. Drama Students now have a ‘laboratory’ on their doorstep, and the audience is drawn not only from the university audience, but also from Madina, Adenta, and other densely occupied areas.

In December 1992, the first of a series of pan-African arts festivals (PANAFEST) was held in and near Cape Coast. Publicity material ind-

icated that the festival drew inspiration from Sutherland's work, specifically from her paper entitled "Proposal for a Historical Drama Festival at Cape Coast" (1980). However, despite an initial venture to encourage playwriting, the Festival was never closely tied to history plays. The second PANAFEST was held 1994, and there were subsequent gatherings – in 1997 and 1999, for example. It soon became clear that the emphasis had moved a long way from the interest in historical theatre that Sutherland had articulated. For example, PANAFEST '99 opened with the "One Love International Football Extravaganza," a match between Ghana and Jamaica. As Felix Abayateye argued speciously in the *Daily Graphic*,

for an occasion [such] as the celebration of the Pan African Historical Festival, PANAFEST it is just right that soccer being part of the colonial heritage, kicks off the celebrations.²⁸

The definition of PANAFEST in this passage is worth noting. Subsequent documents stress issues linked to globalization and Africa as a "global partner," and I am not persuaded that any more than lip service was ever paid to Sutherland and her document.

1996: Death of Efua Sutherland

Sutherland died in January 1996 after a prolonged and painful battle with cancer. On 9 February, a "Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service" was held at the spacious W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture. This essay has drawn on the *Tributes* booklet produced for the occasion, reflecting the many areas of life in which Efua Sutherland was active. It opens with a biographical sketch, written by the Ewe poet Kofi Anyidoho, who held leadership positions in the School of Performing Arts and the Du Bois Centre. This is followed by brief essays by Efua Sutherland's children and grandchildren, and tributes by leaders of the Atwaman community, the Institute of African Studies, the "Children in the Arts" (actually, Anyidoho again), Afram Publications, the Staff of the National Commission on Children, the Organization of African Unity, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, the Forum for African Women Educationists, the Pan African Writers Association, the National Commission on Culture, the Ghana Association

²⁸ Felix Abayateye, "PANAFEST Soccer at Oguaa: can Dwarfs hold sway over Hearts today?" *Daily Graphic* (6 August 1999): 31.

of Writers, the Education Commission, the School of Performing Arts, the Musicians Association of Ghana, and the Africa Centre London. Those whose contributions were presented as being in a personal capacity included Naakwaale Dove, Adotey Bing, Kofi Asare Opoku, Johnetta B. Cole, Diedre L. Badejo, Merle Worth,, William B. Branch, Vivian O. Windley, Margaret Watts, Bill Sutherland, the actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Maya Angelou, George Benneh, and J.H. Kwabena Nketia.

From this it can be seen that, in addition to affectionate recollections by relatives and friends, tributes were paid by those with whom she worked in her literary, theatrical, academic, educational, and philanthropic ventures. The order of service for the day shows that the organizing committee had a sympathetic awareness of the deceased's wishes. Certain elements were duplicated from the celebration marking twenty-five years since the Inauguration of the Drama Studio, and there were overlaps with the service for the dedication of the honorary doctorate. From 6.30 in the morning, the body lay in state "for sympathisers to pay their last respect." From 8.00 tributes were read, "interspersed with music and poetry." The Reverend Canon Seton R.S. Nicholas officiated (once again) and the hymns by Watts and Addison were part of the service. The service reflected the Anglo-Catholicism that is a feature of Anglicanism in Ghana. An Introit, Kyrie, and Collect were included, communion was celebrated, and the "Post Communion Prayers" were followed by the Absolution and the Benediction. All the hymns were from "Ancient and Modern"; some were from the High-Church tradition, which linked up with the Order of the Holy Paraclete and Adisadel. In addition to the "pilgrimage" hymns that were used, the service involved the participation of the Winneba Methodist Junior Choir, who sang "Let not your heart be troubled," "Now praise we great and famous men," "It is well," and Ephraim Amu's composition "Asomdwoe Mu." The choir drew the service to a close with "Come down, O Love Divine." The presence of a composition by Ghana's foremost composer, Amu, and of poetry by Nketia in Twi ("Amoma in praise of Efua") gave the occasion an appropriately Akan dimension. The readings were from 2 Corinthians (4:5–14) and John (5:24–29), which, respectively, speak of the treasure that is held in earthen vessels and of the promise of resurrection for those who have been virtuous. The sense of reward and rest after a lifetime of struggle is understandably a feature of many funeral services, and in this sense Efua Sutherland's was part of a tradition. It is possible, seeing how much she achieved, to assume that her

life was an easy one. Notes have been sounded throughout this essay to indicate that this was not the case – from the loss of her mother to her life as a single parent, she faced and overcame difficulties. There was also the experience of malevolence and subversion that we have noted. In this respect, the service speaks eloquently of the strength Efua Sutherland – or Efua Theodora Sutherland, as her name is rendered on the booklet of tributes – drew from her Christian faith.

The final hymn was one that is often sung at Whitsun, and speaks of the “coming down” of “Love Divine”; however, it was particularly meaningful in the context of 9 February 1996. The last verse reads:

Changed from glory into glory
Till in Heav'n we take our place
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

This must have been a moving conclusion to an emotional occasion for members of the congregation, whose hearts were full of the life and work of a particular woman, a woman with whom it was easy to link the word “glory,” who had battled with the world, and who had been upheld by her faith.

By the time she died, the beautiful face that had, in both youth and maturity, seduced the camera had been creased by pain. But the image that will be reproduced over and over again is a youthful one – of Efua Sutherland at the door of the beautiful house that takes its name from the grandmother who brought her up, Araba Mansa. Dressed in Ghanaian cloth as always, smiling, stepping forth like her heroines.

7 What Is Married in *The Marriage of Anansewa* and Who Performed the Wedding Ceremony?

Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE of Ghanaian performance traditions, of Ananse stories and plays, to *The Marriage of Anansewa* is clear enough. So, too, is the role of Efua Sutherland in writing the play. In this brief essay, I want to ask two questions: What is married in *The Marriage of Anansewa*? And: Who performed the wedding ceremony? The answers I offer add a new dimension to ideas about origin and authorship. First of all, I draw attention to the sometimes neglected influence of Chinese performance elements on the play. These are indicated by the presence of the Property Man, who was, I maintain, ‘borrowed’ at several removes from the Chinese theatre and makes his presence felt in the opening sequence when he gives Ananse an old umbrella as he enters the performance area (99). The form of the play involves the ‘marriage’ of various conventions, one of the parties to the complex marriage being represented by a defiantly non-naturalistic figure with links to the Chinese theatre.

I then intend to draw out the extent to which Sutherland collaborated with others in the process of creating the play. Although the play credits “Efua Sutherland” as the sole author, this obscures the sharing of ideas that went into its creation and that is hinted at in the prefatory note to the text. That note draws attention to some of the groups that, animated by Sutherland, worked on the play in Akan and English before publication.

From that brief study emerges an emphasis on Efua Sutherland as someone who was acutely aware of which foreign, non-naturalistic, narrative theatrical conventions could contribute to the development of Ghanaian theatre. I also argue that as a playwright she was a formidable team leader, open to the suggestions of creative people in a joint endeavour. I think that the investigation goes some way towards explaining the origin of what critics such as Michael Etherton have regarded as the tension between form and meaning in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.¹ In teasing out the different strands, I will first provide an historical dimension for theatre in the Gold Coast, and place Efua Sutherland in an appropriate context.

Background: Theatrical Conventions in the Gold Coast/Ghana, 1930 Onwards

During the 1930s, when concert-party ‘trios’ were emerging as a form of syncretistic theatre, Efua Morgue (b. 1924) was growing up in Cape Coast. An early exposure to drama in an educational context was provided by a production of *Alcestis* she saw at St Nicholas Grammar School (later Adisadel) in 1934–35. The idea of putting on plays from the Greek repertory showed that teachers were open to outside influences and eager to explore different forms of drama. Attitudes to how far those foreign forms should be amended or fused with indigenous traditions varied, as did the adaptability of the foreign conventions themselves. Greek tragedy was one of the traditions that was introduced, and it was to prove one of the most rewarding imported traditions to which local traditions were ‘married’. A multiplicity of imported conventions were vying for attention in Accra and Cape Coast during the 1930s and 1940s, and by the 1930s local playwrights had begun to emerge, including Mabel Dove, F.K. Fiawoo, and J.B. Danquah (these conventions and playwrights are detailed above in my “Introduction”).

Efua Sutherland came half a generation or so after those pioneers. She was born in 1924, and, as she indicated in interviews, received an immersion in foreign traditions that took her away from the life that existed in the villages of the Central Region. She pursued her education under the

¹ Michael Etherton, *The Development of African Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1982): 196.

influence of the nuns of the Order of the Holy Paraclete, and then taught at their school, St Monica's Asante–Mampong, before going abroad. When she returned to Ghana she brought an international awareness of the theatre to her work, and became deeply involved in the practicalities of theatre production

Efua Sutherland came to know S.I. Hsiung's play *Lady Precious Stream* and the work of Bertolt Brecht, and to recognize the valuable links with the oriental theatre they provided. She produced Hsiung's play twice in Ghana, once at St Monica's and once in Accra, and Brecht's *Mother Courage* was also mounted. Evidence for two of these productions is provided by Maya Angelou in *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*, the vivid account of the time the American writer spent in Ghana during the early 1960s. Angelou, who had worked as a professional actor and deeply valued her contact with Efua Sutherland, writes that she played *Mother Courage* and was involved in Sutherland's production of "a Chinese play" at the Drama Studio, Accra. It seems that Angelou helped back-stage on *Lady Precious Stream*, sewing costumes, repairing the sets, coaching student actors, and "[synchronizing] the taped music with the on stage action." She was also involved front of house in arranging and rearranging 'bleachers' and selling tickets.² On the reception of Hsiung's play, she observed:

The play's pomp and pageantry had been a great success. Ghanaians finding a similarity between the ancient Chinese spectacle and their own traditional dramas kept the theatre filled. (81–82)

As I hope to show, there were additional reasons for the success of the play.

Sutherland had "found the similarity" and was attracted to the non-naturalistic convention that Hsiung's theatre revelled in. It is useful to put this beside her childhood-inspired fascination with the Greek tragic form that shaped *Edufa*, and her interest in severe medieval morality plays, in which abstractions are effortlessly bodied forth on stage, the latter leading her to write *Odasani*, a Twi version of *Everyman* put on by Kusum Agoromba. While Greek and medieval influences are widely recognized and openly acknowledged, the case for the influence of *Lady Precious Stream*

² Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (London: Virago, 1986): 81.

on *The Marriage of Anansewa* has to be argued. The evidence for influence is partly circumstantial: Sutherland knew Hsiung’s play, as is shown by the productions mentioned above, and it is partly found in the text of *Anansewa*. The “real give-away” is, as anticipated, in the role and name given to the Property Man, who is described by Sutherland as “primarily a property manager, manning a property stand on stage, and distributing props on cue.”³

Lady Precious Stream: History and Qualities

I wish at this point to include a few words about the history of *Lady Precious Stream* in order to place it in relation to European/American interaction with Asian theatre during the 1930s. From there I will move on to a summary of the action of the play and comment on its position within intercultural theatre. Beginning with a note on some of the properties and following this with a quotation from the Honourable Storyteller, I will then suggest some of the qualities of Hsiung’s play that made it of interest to a Ghanaian dramatist forging a national theatre tradition during the 1950s and 1960s. The “pomp and ceremony” mentioned by Angelou have their place, but there are other reasons why the play was an inspired choice, and why it contributed to *Anansewa*.

Described as “An old Chinese Play done into English according to its traditional style,” *Lady Precious Stream* was originally published in June 1934, and the first production opened at the Little Theatre in the Strand in November of the same year. The author or, more properly, adaptor was, according to the Methuen 1968 edition of the play, born in Nanchang in 1902 and “educated at the National University of Peking.” The note continues:

He became the Associate Manager of the Chen Kwang Theatre, Peking in 1923 and the Manager of the Pantheon Theatre, Shanghai in 1927.

The very name of the theatre he managed from 1927 onwards indicates an openness to the West – an awareness seen in *Lady Precious Stream*. Writing the play seems to have involved taking “The Eight Acts about the Wang Family” and judiciously cutting and conflating for a London audi-

³ Sutherland, *The Marriage of Anansewa* (London: Longman, 1975): ix.

ence. In his introduction to the play, dated 1934 and reproduced in the Methuen edition, Hsiung observes that conventional Chinese theatrical entertainments might be described as “‘a triple bill’ of eight or nine acts from an equal number of different plays.” He explains that Western visitors to theatres in China might have been deceived into thinking they were a continuous drama, because “no drop-curtain is used.” He continues:

Though the second act of the play *Lady Precious Stream* has moved thousands to tears and the third and fourth have delighted millions, these acts were, as a rule, performed separately and rarely produced as a whole play.

Hsiung moves on to describe the Chinese stage as “not at all realistic” and outlines the role of the “the indispensable property man [who] is the greatest obstacle to realism” (vi). It seems to be on the basis of his fidelity to the non-realistic that he concludes his introduction by saying that “the following pages present a typical play as produced on a Chinese stage. It is every inch a Chinese play except the language” (vii).

In London, *Lady Precious Stream* was presented by the People’s National Theatre and directed by the playwright himself with Nancy Price. Some eighteen months later, it reached New York, with the playwright, once again, involved in the direction. On this occasion, the décor was by an experienced man of the Peking Opera, Mei Lan-Feng, an interpreter and innovator who had a profound effect on both Chinese and European theatre. An acting edition of *Lady Precious Stream* was published by French in 1938 and reprinted five times by 1954. All this speaks of a remarkable diffusion of a version of a text in which Chinese conventions and traditions were packaged by an innovative ‘heir to the tradition’ for Western audiences.

At this point, it should be noted that Asian theatre had made an impact on European taste during the previous century; Hsiung was not the only one carrying a banner for oriental theatre. Evidence of earlier impact can be seen from the taste for japoniserie that is travestied in *The Mikado*, and reflected more seriously in W.B. Yeats’s dream-plays. For those who came later and were interested in mid-twentieth-century avantgarde theatre, the influence of the Orient on Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht was of considerable significance. In the case of Brecht, it was, once again, Mei Lan-Feng, this time featuring as an actor, who played a bridging or

interpreting role.⁴ Brecht responded to Lan–Feng’s acting and referred to it in “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting.” That essay appeared in an English translation in 1936, and contains what may be the first reference by Brecht to the ‘*Verfremdungseffekt*’.⁵ It is noteworthy that, while Brecht built on his encounters with Oriental theatre in trenchant political dramas, Sutherland responded more to the decorous intercultural dialogue initiated by Hsiung.

In the 1930s, Hsiung offered a combination of the familiar and strange that tempted London’s palate by providing something new while not radically challenging entrenched prejudices. From his play, the East emerges as different without being threatening – as charming in a quaint, exotic way. There is much to delight visually, and the distressing or genuinely surprising can be passed over quickly. The narrative at the centre of *Lady Precious Stream* concerns a domestic situation played out against a background of politics and conquest. On entering the picturesque garden of Wang Yun, Prime Minister at the imperial court, at the beginning of the play, we encounter a world in which Wang’s two older daughters have been married off to powerful buffoons, and the youngest, the sixteen-year-old Lady Precious Stream, is lively, independent, and unattached. Her brothers-in-law are both generals, but rather than prompting a ruthless examination of a rotten military structure this merely gives an edge to the comedy. Here and elsewhere in Hsiung’s rendition, complexities are suppressed in a play about marriage and the family that is closer to *The Princess and the Woodcutter* than to *King Lear*. Wooed by a pathetic band of well-heeled suitors, Lady Precious Stream has found a strong, talented, able young man in Hsieh Ping–Kuei, the Prime Minister’s gardener. She contrives that Hsieh, who is, of course, too lowly to be considered a serious suitor, will emerge victorious from the test that is set up to allow God (Confucian theology is not examined in any depth) to select a husband for her. All this is presented in a picturesque non-naturalistic style

⁴ Mei Lan–Feng, a master of the Peking Opera, was partly responsible for its transformation during the 1930s. He travelled widely, made an impact on international artists, including Paul Robeson, and influenced generations. Significantly, he was never invited to perform in London. On his immense status, see www.inmotionmagazine.com/beijing.html, and related pages.

⁵ Bertolt Brecht, “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” (1936), in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay (London: Routledge, 2000): 95–97.

with despatch and economy by means of a narrative that is accompanied by occasional music. The performance is leavened with direct address, formal exchanges, poetry, proverbs, and riddles. The actors are clad in dazzling costumes, and the props are elegantly, wittily minimalist. The first act includes strange customs, such as a feast eaten *al fresco* as snow falls and a poet composes verses. But bizarre though this is, there is much that is reassuringly familiar in the Wang household, including the feudal social structure and the central portrait of a powerful public figure whose private life is dominated by the women in his family.

Interventions from the chorus-like (Honourable) Reader ensure that the plot moves quickly. For example, Hseih is, indeed, the man who is chosen by God to take Lady Precious Stream's hand, and the audience soon learns that, following their marriage, Precious Stream and Hsieh are reduced to living in poverty. The possibility of a 'happily ever after' resolution is further distanced when Hsieh joins the army and leaves his wife of a few weeks to go and fight in the Western Region. Hsieh's evil brother-in-law, Wei the Tiger General, subsequently plots the young man's death, and reports circulate that he has been killed. At this point we are informed by the Honourable Reader that eighteen years pass. That is to say, if we are counting, that between the ages of sixteen and thirty-four Precious Stream lives lonely, poor, and childless. During this time, Hsieh rises to power in the Western Region and is loved by the Princess of that region. Just after he has been crowned king of the Western Region, on the eve of his marriage to the Princess, a goose brings a desperate message from his wife. Suddenly touched by her circumstances, he sets off on the long journey through several mountain passes to his old home, only to find – so distant are we from romantic conventions – that his wife does not recognize him. His reaction is to conceal his identity and contrive a test to find out whether she is a "good and virtuous woman" (68). Precious Stream passes the test and Act III ends with the couple together once more. Act IV continues immediately with the Honourable Reader setting the scene for Prime Minister Wang's sixtieth-birthday party and the return to Wang's home of his youngest daughter. At the family gathering, the talk turns, as it had in Act I, and since Hsieh is presumed dead, to the need to find a husband for Lady Precious Stream. The audience is happily aware that Hsieh, despite the plotting of his brother-in-law Wei, is alive and is now powerful enough to make a decisive impact on the family that had previously spurned him. Hsieh invites his in-laws to

visit his “temporary court” “to-morrow” and commands that Wei be brought before him under arrest. The next day, Hsieh gives the order for Wei to be beheaded. It seems inevitable that the sentence will be carried out – until Madam Wang, who has throughout been a moderating and compassionate influence, uses her wits to secure a pardon. Her manoeuvring includes an argument that runs counter to European prejudices about the subservient position of women in China:

in this and every other kingdom all the best families are ruled by the wife. My husband here will tell you that he always listened to me and that he always will listen to me. (99)

The arrival on the scene of the Princess of the Western Region in pursuit of her lover offers the possibility of open discord between her and Precious Stream, but matters are resolved, superficially at least. The play then moves towards a close with some self-conscious comments on the “punctilious etiquette and strange customs” of the Chinese, a leave-taking that comments on the public display of affection found in London, and with references back to the imbalance of power between the sexes.

I have devoted some space to relating developments in the play in order to suggest the scope of the drama, hint at the kind of humour it indulges in, and point out a few of the moments when it flirts with the expectations of a London audience. It will have been apparent that *Lady Precious Stream* inhabits an intercultural space within which are to be found knowing comments, in-jokes, and self-reflexion. These qualities enable those who enjoy the play’s spectacle and its occasionally patronizing attitudes to feel that their taste is daring and their amusement sophisticated. This is a play in which Confucian virtues are quietly taken for granted, not one in which trite romanticism or conventional melodrama dictates attitudes. Magic geese are more to its taste than profound engagement with religious differences, or concern with the borderline between religion and superstition. It is an exotic trifle with a fragile beauty that is likely to fragment if scrutinized too rigorously.

While I think the lightness of tone influenced Sutherland, my interest in the play in relation to *Anansewa* is particularly with the ‘traffic’ of the stage, the way the performance space is regarded, the manner in which props are handled, and the kind of sets used. I referred above to the minimalist props, and in order to appreciate the extent of the stylization it is useful to quote from the list of stage properties that is conveniently

included in both of the editions of Hsiung's play that I have located. There we read of the "Snow effect. – Square of black silk 30 in. rolled around with paper snow inside." The snow is simply shaken out of the silk square. "Firewood. – Small twigs bound with cord, 15 in long 6 in diameter." This is delivered to Precious Stream and, we are informed, represents ten hundredweight (35)! A pavilion, a carriage, and a (mountain) pass made of sticks and pieces of cloth, sometimes embroidered, are among the items that qualify as parts of the set. They are simple, elegant, and non-naturalistic, even meta-theatrical. When the Princess of the Western Region threatens to attack the Third Pass, she is told by Mu, standing on a chair beside "the pass," to take care because "The pass is made of cloth; it will be damaged" (63).

In providing a summary of the play, I referred to the Honourable Reader and his 'choric' function. His first speech begins the play and a quotation from it establishes both the 'rules of the game' and the specific position of the Property Man. The Reader enters "between curtains" when the house lights have been dimmed and "Gong No. 1" sounded. He stands in a spotlight, and addresses the audience in the following terms:

Good evening (afternoon), ladies and gentlemen. You are now introduced to the traditional Chinese stage, which, according to our humble convention, is not in the least realistic. Scenery is a thing we have never heard of, and the property men who are supposed to be unseen by the audience, are taking an active part in the performance. The success or failure of a production is sometimes in their hands. They provide chairs for the actors to sit on and cushions for them to kneel upon; and when the hero is to die an heroic death he can fall down majestically and without any hesitation, for the never-failing hands of the property men are always on the watch and will promptly catch him before any disaster can take place. Nevertheless they sometimes, in an excess of zeal, overdo their duty by even looking after the worldly comforts of the players. When the actor has just finished some long lines, they would present him with a cup of tea to ease his throat. These actions would certainly be condemned by a western audience but we accept or rather pretend not to see them. There is, at least, one advantage; if some accident happens to the actor or property they can come forward and put it right before the audience can decide whether it is part of the play or not.

This is the cue for Gong 2, for the Reader to appeal to the audience to imagine a suitable set for the garden of Prime Minister Wang Yen. The play begins to pick up speed with this scene and with the introduction of characters, some of whom address the audience directly. Hsiung's theatrical manner is urbane, witty, self-reflexive; the society he summons up is formal, full of ceremony, picturesque. On one level, it is involved in the affairs of a great state; on the other, it is torn apart by family rivalries and divisions between the sexes. Astonishing and terrible events take place, yet the response to them is marked by pathos rather than high drama; much is understated.

Hsieh has incorporated several elements that would particularly divert his London audience. There are, for example, references to the length of plays on the London stage: he promises his drama will be shorter than *Hamlet* or *Back to Methuselah*.⁶ He refers to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who (breaching Chinese decorum) kisses the Princess's hand in the closing moments of the play, as having learnt his "charming manners" in London (105–106)... This and much more in the text would appeal almost as strongly to Ghanaian audiences in the 1960s as it did to the Londoners for whom it was inserted in the 1930s. Moreover, and following Angelou, those who gathered in the Drama Studio, Accra, would have appreciated the "pomp and pageantry" and have relished the formality of some of the exchanges, They would also have enjoyed the study of family life, the cruelty of the tests Hsieh set for his wife, the reality of calculating wickedness reflected by Wei, the miraculous intervention of the goose, and the subtle, table-turning wit displayed by Madam Wong. The plight of Precious Stream during the eighteen years Hsieh was in the Western Region and the reality of poverty would, I suspect, have deeply moved a community which has a robust recognition of such privation. The Drama Studio audience in the 1960s was acutely aware of negotiating passages across cultural borders, of encountering different ways of doing things, and of the strange customs of foreigners, particularly "Londoners." There would, in other words, have been many points at which the Ghanaian

⁶ The "Introduction" to the Methuen edition reflects the difficulty Hsiung had in correcting "the belief here" (in the West) that "a Chinese play must at least last a whole week, otherwise it would not be considered a real Chinese play!"; S.I. Hsiung, *Lady Precious Stream* (London: Methuen, 1968): v.

audience would have been delighted to recognize their experiences of intercultural encounters echoed in the Chinese play.

Ghanaian audiences would also have enjoyed the bold theatricality of the convention Sutherland brought to them. They would have shared the delight taken in the self-consciousness of the production. As anticipated above, I think this is handled with confidence through devices borrowed from the Chinese theatre. In *Anansewa*, the Property Man is described as

[Serving] primarily as property manager, manning a property stand on-stage, and distributing props on cue. In addition, he does scene-setting duties, and is conveniently available as an actor for supporting roles. He can function, if necessary, as a prompter, and quite openly, provided he does it with skilful informality. When *free*, he is responsive to the action of the pool of PLAYERS or of actors on stage. (ix)

This should be linked to the account of the Property Man in the Chinese theatre given by the Reader at the very beginning of *Precious Stream* and quoted above. The overlap between the two is remarkable enough to establish the premise from which I am working: namely, that Sutherland found encouragement for the non-naturalistic in her encounter with the Chinese theatre and ‘borrowed’ the Property Man from Hsiung’s play. The result is that a distinctive theatrical convention is established.

Once *Anansewa* starts, we are immediately aware of the presence of the Property Man, standing at the edge of the stage and handing props to the actors as they enter. In this way Ananse receives his umbrella and Anansewa her typewriter. As they take these objects, they become ‘complete’ and enter the performance area in role. The members of the audience watch the transformation, and, with Sutherland, they revel in the make-believe, the dressing-up, the change that occurs to the performer on entering the ‘sacred’ performance space. Bertolt Brecht and students of his writing would speak of a ‘*Verfremdungseffekt*’; the Ghanaian audience might have seen it as part of the show, of the ‘hoaxing’ they went to the theatre to enjoy.

So far, so true to the Chinese source. However, in *Anansewa* the part of the Property Man has been expanded, as hinted at in the latter part of the section just quoted (“When *free*...”). He comes to combine the functional roles of prop distributor and scene-shifter – becoming, in effect, an actor playing a supporting role, responsive to the ebb and flow of the action, “conveniently available.” As the play moves on, the Property Man con-

tinues to provide items of clothing, or props including a sort of money belt (3) and a chair (30–31); he also starts to take part. For example, in the church sequence, he sits beside a collection plate “as the priest,” and begins to organize the congregation, calling out that “*Those Born on Sunday*” should “*come forward with their gifts.*” This line is, significantly, in the stage directions rather than the body of the text, suggesting that the Property Man has not made the full transition to becoming ‘a character’. The church sequence is followed by the entrance of the Carpenter, the Mason, and the Painter, “each identified by the tool he is carrying” (34). In other words, the definition of the performing space has now altered and they ‘enter’ or emerge from the pool of players already defined; they are complete and ‘in character’. As the workmen’s scene develops, the Property Man has to help them by responding to their calls for “Concrete” and “Water” (36). By this point, his role has shifted from being the anonymous automaton, the provider of properties whom “we pretend not to see,” to being the harassed attendant. It would be hard, and inappropriate, to curtail the comedy inherent in his situation as the Property Man merges into the comic “servant of two masters.” His role as servant is also apparent later when Ananse addresses him directly, first asking him to switch on a fan and then, feeling that it is too strong, telling him to “Cut off the breeze” (41). Here it is appropriate to recognize links with the roles taken by comic “servants” in drama through the ages and, specifically, the well-developed roles for such characters in concert-party performances.

As we move towards the end of the play, Sutherland continues to use the Property Man in the two ways we have noted. Sometimes he is the figure borrowed from the Chinese theatre, silent, ready with a stool or a chair (41, 47). In this capacity he delivers a telegram (52) and has the task of moving around the “web screens” that are used when Ananse is “up to his tricks” and under pressure (51, 75). As “Property Man,” he is also pressed into service to provide sound effects for the storyteller’s “leaping numbers” (the Chinese theatre-style clock) and for the Story-Teller’s account of Ananse hitting his head violently against the wall (69, 70). But the Property Man also segues in and out of the action, which, still resolutely non-naturalistic, involves miming passing luggage (64). A little later, he is drawn deeper into the performance in a naturalistic way. When the stage is rearranged for the “funeral,” he “passes over” to become the Servant, and in this capacity he brings in the gifts sent by the various suitors. Involved with the text, he is Ananse’s “general factotum” lending

a hand to keep the action moving. While he remains wordless (with the exception of the lines spoken as Priest), the Property Man as Servant becomes deeply involved as the tension mounts and the action speeds up. At one point, we read that he “rearranges himself” and this possibly reflects the tension between the Chinese Property Man function and the Ghanaian servant role he is combining (84). By the end, he has responded to the action, become a participant, and is now a concerned “Houseboy.” More than this, he is a well-drilled member of Ananse’s gang of confidence tricksters (87, 89). It is appropriate that he should be in the triumphant huddle with the shape-changing Ananse and Christie when Anansewa makes her remarkable and face-saving recovery. At the curtain, he is fully integrated into the celebration, totally africanized, thoroughly domesticated.

The Making of *The Marriage of Anansewa*

As a brief second part to this essay, I want to suggest that the development of the Property Man through the play may provide an insight into the way the play evolved from Sutherland’s initial plans. Earlier on I referred to the prefatory material in the 1987 edition of the play, and I want particularly to draw attention to the note recording that several groups worked on the play prior to its publication. The relevant passage from the front of the text reads as follows:

The Marriage of Anansewa is published after productions of the play in Akan and in English by three different companies in Ghana: the Workers’ Brigade Drama Group, Kusum Agoromba (Kusum Players) and the Drama Studio Players and Kusum Agoromba combined.

While playwrights often like to see their work on the stage before publication, the process described is somewhat unusual. The idea of three different productions in two languages (and I will suggest there were four productions) suggests that the playwright sought more from the process than simply fine-tuning. I think she was hoping for the benefit of input from many angles, that she was experimenting and inviting experienced, creative, and/or trusted performers to help her with the experiment. This interpretation is particularly tempting in view of the fact that she had described her desire to create a theatre that would draw its strength from Ghanaian life. How better to achieve this, especially given her sense that education had sequestered her from her community, than by encouraging

many Ghanaians to take part in shaping a “work in progress”?⁷ The groups mentioned indicate that she was working with hugely experienced men and women of the Ghanaian theatre, with concert-party troupers recruited by the Workers’ Brigade, with her own professional company, and, in the Drama Studio Players, with the cream of the local amateur talent, actors who could make an informed contribution to the emergence of Ghanaian theatre in English.

In conversation with Jane Wilkinson in 1984, Mohammed Ben-Abdallah provided further insight into how Sutherland worked as a playmaker. Answering a question about the way languages are combined in the Ghanaian theatre, he revealed how open was the challenge that Sutherland threw down:

Efua Sutherland, [...], has a group called Kusum [Agoromba]. It was a concert party group which she cut down. They maintain the concert party format: they use the guitar – the concert party relies heavily on the guitar – and she put in more and more dialogue. What she does with them is that the group makes the play, she doesn’t write, she works with them on the play. *The Marriage of Anansewa* for instance was done like that. I was one of the original performers in it. It was done in Akan by the group, with her, and then when they finished she wrote the script in Akan and then translated it into English.⁸

Although the relaxed nature of the interview, lack of firm dates, and absence of follow-up questions means that this is not clear at every point, the main thrust can be appreciated. It suggests very extensive collaboration and offers an image of Efua Sutherland as animator, scribe, and translator. A similar impression was created by Sandy Arkhurst in conversation with the researcher Awo Asiedu:

The Marriage of Anansewa was a production script in Twi; it was just the story outline and scenarios and it developed as we worked with the Workers Brigade. The whole process was recorded and later tran-

⁷ Efua Sutherland, “The Drama of Ghanaian Life,” *Drum* (February 1962): 12.

⁸ Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, interview by Jane Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *Talking with African Writers* (London: Heinemann, 1992): 41–42.

scribed and edited by Mrs Sutherland into a play which she then translated into English.⁹

Indications that Sutherland continued to work on the English version with a group not yet mentioned are provided in an affectionate tribute from Naana Banyywa Horne. Writing from Indiana University after Sutherland's death (1996), Horne described playing Anansewa in a production of the play put on by "Mrs Arthur's third year students" at St Mary's Secondary School, Accra. Horne provides an account of the read-throughs in the "first term," her classmates' reactions to what seems to have been a draft, and Sutherland's response. Horne wrote: "[Efua Sutherland] took notes and went back to polish it up." At the beginning of the second term, Sutherland "reappeared [...] and worked with [the cast] all that term in the afternoons after classes to bring *The Marriage of Anansewa* to life on [St Mary's] school stage during [the] end of year Speech and Prize Giving Day Celebrations."¹⁰ Horne referred to her experience of Sutherland's "dramatis operandi," which she glossed by adding: "the key to her dramatic productions [was] a collaboration between artist and community."

Horne dates this polishing of the English text rather vaguely to the "mid-sixties." Just what sort of changes Sutherland might have made will only emerge with any clarity from a comparison of drafts – supposing they exist. However, there may be a hint of the kind of revision process undertaken from a comparison between two published texts of the play. In an issue of the literary magazine *Okyeame* dated 1969, a version of what appears on pages 24 to 35 of the Longman text was published. In the latter, presumably revised and polished text, the writing is more concrete, the stage directions are clearer, and the lyrics of songs are put down in full. It may be that these amendments reflect the sort of changes Sutherland made following her collaboration on the English text with the girls in "Mrs Arthur's class" at St Mary's.

I am convinced that Efua Sutherland would have wanted the credit for the play to be distributed as widely as is due, and I suggest that the dedication of the Longman edition of her two major plays to "the 25th Anni-

⁹ Arkhurst, in Awo Mana Asiedu, "West African Theatre Audiences: A Study of Ghanaian and Nigerian Audiences of Literary Theatre in English" (doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2003): 330–31.

¹⁰ Naana Banyywa Horne, "Auntie Efua, Nantsew Yie! to Efua Sutherland," *ALA Bulletin* 22.3 (Summer 1996): 13.

versary of the Ghana Drama Studio” may be taken to reflect this. At the service for the dedication of her honorary doctorate (1991), she took the opportunity to refer to and, in some cases, to name those she had worked with and been supported by in her creative endeavours over the years.

Conclusion

The comparison of drafts initiated above opens up fascinating areas for research into the creative process by which *The Marriage of Anansewa* came into being. It is tempting to suggest that, if multiple versions exist, examination would show that the Property Man was part of the original ‘outline’. What I think may have happened – and the tense indicates that I have begun to speculate very tentatively – is that, as collaborators engaged with the Property Man, he lost his aloofness, his inscrutability, becoming more of a participant servant and less the Property Man that Hsiung – or Lan-Feng for that matter – would recognize.

Unfortunately, I am not in a position to undertake a more detailed investigation into the evolution of the text. Those who took part in the play-making culture have to be interviewed at length and the Sutherland papers, together with other records, have to be examined. Such further scrutiny will show that some of the inspiration for *Anansewa* came from outside and that the *Marriage of Anansewa* incorporates the coming-together, or marriage, of the local with the foreign. The marriage is “for better and worse” – but it is not a monogamous one. Ghanaian folk narrative marries the English language with elements from the Chinese theatre.

The unusual wedding ceremony, to answer the second question in my title, was ‘performed’ by all those who were involved in the early, ‘workshop’ productions. Their contributions were marshalled, sifted, and mediated by a woman who had a special skill for collaboration, and whose achievements run through this volume. The process produced a text that has proved popular on the stage, but that, because of the many hands involved, does not embody a single, tough, uncompromising vision.

8

The Call to the Priesthood and Other Stories
in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*

A

THREE-LINE DEDICATION at the front of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* reads:

For my mother
'AUNT ABESEMA'
who told a story and sang a song

As with much in the play, the dedication prompts a double-take, a question. In this instance, the question is "Why does the playwright address her mother as 'aunt'?" Several possibilities suggest themselves. For example, it may be that 'mother' is being used with an extended meaning to indicate 'one of my mothers' or 'one of those I called "mother"'. Or it may be that so many of her contemporaries in the family addressed her (birth) mother as "aunt" that young Ama Ata picked up the usage. Aidoo expects 'us', her readers and the members of her audiences, to make considerable effort in grappling with issues prompted by the tasks of translation she has been involved in. She also wants 'us' to think about what is involved in moving from one family system (and society) to another. She does not find it either desirable or necessary to explain all the 'translation' work she is involved with: she is a master of effective transliteration. The challenge she throws down extends from the language to the structure of her play and prompts the reader (or member of her audience) to ponder what is happening to *Anowa* in *Anowa*. This makes it a 'dilemma play'. Also, since I suggest that several narratives are interwoven, it ensures that we are never quite sure what story and what song "Aunt Abesema" might have passed on.

Anowa is full of stories and of references to stories. The eponymous protagonist is at the centre of several tales, and lurking within the text are

‘shadows’ of other narratives. For example, reference is made to the familiar tale of the “Headstrong Daughter,” the self-willed girl who rejects approved suitors and leaves home to marry the man she has chosen. This story exists in many variations along the Guinea Coast and in most, but not all, the man selected is a superficially attractive stranger who turns out to be a monster. Aidoo has spoken of another narrative source for her play, a local anecdote, possibly her aunt’s tale, which caught her imagination. It concerned a domestic quarrel that led to public knowledge of a couple’s circumstances and from there brought about the breakdown of their marriage.¹

The play also incorporates ‘narratives’ of a more general sort. Abena Badua, Anowa’s mother, wants to be able to tell a happy “tale of motherhood.”² She wants her daughter to follow the approved and accepted path through life – and she claims she has a right to insist on this partly because Anowa is her only daughter. To flesh out this tale or ‘life story’: Abena Badua wants Anowa to get married, become a mother, and, in the fullness of time, enjoy an honoured position in the community. This, however, is not to be. It seems that Anowa has shown signs of being different, of having another, a different ‘life story’. She was “restless” as a child and, when the play opens, she has gone six years beyond puberty without getting married. She is referred to as a “wanderer” and becomes a “wayfarer” – a word given a special, negative weight in the play, suggesting vulnerability, insecurity, and, most important, rootlessness. Anowa goes her own way, partly because she is headstrong, and partly because she may be living in a different story.

Again and again, the audience of the play is made aware that Anowa may be the protagonist in this other story, which I will call “The Calling to the Priesthood,” the tale of the girl who should have become a priestess but rejected the call. For the outsider like me, it is not easy to appreciate just how a vocation might manifest itself and just what the effects of resisting that vocation might be. However, the clues in the text and an unpublished “research note” by Brigid M. Sackey, based on information

¹ Sarah Chetin, “Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo,” *Wasafiri* 6–7 (Spring–Autumn 1987): 24.

² Ama Ata Aidoo, “Anowa,” in *Contemporary African Plays*, ed. & intro. Martin Banham & Jane Plastow (1970; London: Methuen, 1999): 153. Further page references are in the main text.

gathered in a relevant part of Ghana, provide helpful background. Sackey's paper is entitled "The call to traditional priesthood among the Akan of Ghana and the consequences of its renunciation," and my extensive debt to it in this essay will become obvious.

Drawing on long-term investigations into what she describes as "three Fante–Akan towns located in the Central Region," Sackey writes about how belief in the possibility of a call to the priesthood might be manifested through a person's being possessed by a deity, and of the call being confirmed before the world through the strange behaviour exhibited by the youthful candidate. Those who reject such a vocation may, according to Sackey's article, do so because it "does not help with human capacity development." Sackey observes that if they demur and reject their destiny they incur the wrath of the deity. Among the punishments regarded as possible, Sackey includes "infertility, mental diseases, successive and inexplicable deaths in the family and even the death of the person." I suggest that selective use of Sackey's findings is useful in understanding *Anowa*, particularly for making one aware of the several stories that converge in the central character. These stories contribute to making *Anowa* a complex and disturbing presence. She grows in stature to raise issues related to gender, history, morality, and "human capacity development." She is a nineteenth-century figure whose experience is relevant for women and men in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

From the exchange between the Old Man and the Old Woman that forms the Prologue to the play, the audience learns that *Anowa* is "unfortunate," exceptional, self-sufficient. The Old Man speaks of her as follows:

A child of several incarnations,
She listens to her own tales,
Laughs at her own jokes and
Follows her own advice. (143)

Her mother, Abena Badua, is criticized for "[spoiling] her shamefully," but Abena Badua defends herself by going on the offensive and attacking those who have repeatedly gossiped about *Anowa*. By talking this dubious position, she encourages the audience to cultivate a critical attitude towards the information she is providing from the stage. The final lines of the Prologue are strongly emphasized – indeed, they resonate with significance, and take us to the centre of our interest here. The Old Woman's

exit line is: “And the gods will surely punish Abena Badua for refusing to let a born priestess dance!” This assertion does not come with unchallenged authority, but it is an idea that is planted in the mind of the audience and ‘watered’ by being mentioned again. It demands to be taken seriously and establishes Anowa as the central figure in the tale of the nimble-footed girl, a “born priestess,” who did not respond to a sacred summons.

The detailed account of what I take to be Anowa’s call comes much later on in the play, but it is convenient to consider it here. In the third and final phase of the drama, Anowa recalls that when she was young she questioned her grandmother with a persistence that irritated the old woman (184–86). The grandmother told the little girl about a visit she had paid to the coast, about seeing the sea and the “houses,” or castles, built by the “pale men.” She gave an account of the foreigners, who looked “as if you or I / Were peeled of our skins / Like a lobster that is boiled or roasted,” and she talked of the trade in human beings in which they were involved. The night after hearing all this, Anowa had a vivid nightmare composed of apocalyptic distortions of what she had been told. She fell ill, and the experience prompted talk about “apprenticing [her] to a priestess.” Anowa says she doesn’t know what came of this “talk,” but the weight of evidence from the play suggests, as we shall see, that her mother must have successfully opposed the suggestion that the dream followed by the illness constituted “a call” or confirmation of a call. Anowa recovered her health, but the nightmare left a legacy that she describes in the following words: “since then, any time there is mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me and a bursting ripe tomato or swollen pod” (186). Anowa’s moral scruples about trading in and owning human beings lie at the centre of the play. They come between her and her husband, and eloquently raise the issue of how the humanely aware individual is treated by a society that dwells in darkness. The image of the “woman who is me” and the “bursting ripe tomato” indicates how personally and intensely she feels about slavery.

Aidoo does not follow point-for-point the example of the “Call to the Priesthood” that Sackey’s paper presents, but I think we can assume, because she directs attention to “the talk of apprenticing,” that Aidoo means us to take this dimension seriously. The word “nightmare” used above to describe the terrifying dream is, incidentally, one that carries within it, even in English, a sense close to possession. The definition of ‘nightmare’

in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* begins: “female monster sitting upon and seeming to suffocate a sleeper, incubus.” We should also note that linking the nightmare with an account of slavery enables Aidoo to provide an element of psychological consistency, an ‘explanation’ for Anowa’s intense unhappiness when her husband, Kofi Ako, starts buying human beings.

In view of the ‘denial of call’ theme, it is significant that both Abena Badua and Anowa are punished. Anowa disappoints her mother by rejecting the role the latter wants her to play in the “Tale of Motherhood”: she moves away from her home, and, after an arduous, childless existence in which she amasses wealth but does not find happiness, she ages prematurely, begins to show signs of insanity, and commits suicide. These ‘punishments’ closely follow those listed by Sackey. The list, it will be recalled, included: “infertility, mental diseases, successive and inexplicable deaths in the family and even the death of the person.”

The responsibility for ‘spoiling’ Anowa, by refusing to countenance employment as a priestess, is placed firmly on the shoulders of Abena Babua. Osam, her father, is able to remind his wife of his position in the following terms: “I have always asked you to apprentice her to a priestess to quieten her down.” Badua acknowledges she has resisted this, insisting, somewhat intemperately, that she “[is not going] to turn [her] only daughter into a dancer priestess” (147). Pushed to explain her attitude, Abena Badua says: “in the end [priestesses] are not people. They become too much like the gods they interpret.” We are informed that “*her voice grows hysterical and her face terror-stricken*” as she “*enumerates the attributes of priesthood.*” The suspicions triggered by this bizarre delivery are strengthened by her enumeration of what priestesses do. Her list includes “[counselling] with spirits,” reading “other men’s souls,” swallowing dogs’ eyes, jumping fires, and drinking goat’s milk and sheep’s blood. She concludes her catalogue thus: “They do not feel / As you or I, / They have no shame” (148). Predictably, Abena Badua insists that she wants Anowa to “be a human woman.” By this she means successful in the terms regarded as ‘normal’ in Yebi, and where normality means marriage, motherhood, and, in due course, a place at clan meetings. Abena Badua makes respectability and responsibility concrete by saying: “a captainship in the army, / Should not be beyond her / When the time is ripe!” (148).

Osam is aware that child guidance is not an area where his wife is open to persuasion and he knows that his position (since theirs is a matrilineal

society) is marginal in this matter. As a result, he resigns himself to the inevitable, offering only the following, fatalistic prediction: “the yam that will burn, shall burn, boiled or roasted” (149). This represents a pusillanimous reluctance to challenge his wife’s intense and unbalanced outburst – an outburst which, I suggest, is undermined not only by the hysterical delivery but also by Abena Badua’s scorn for “dancing” and the banality of the aspirations that emerge.

A moment after Osam has delivered his assessment, Anowa is heard calling from the street. This is a violation of proper behaviour in itself, but only a minor infringement compared to the outrageous conduct she is about to exhibit. She runs on stage and announces that she has met the man, Kofi Ako, she wants to marry (151). At this point, Abena Badua brings into the open parallels between her daughter and the protagonist in the familiar, clearly inscribed “Headstrong Daughter” narrative by saying “you want to behave like the girl in the folk-tale” (151). But even while that element is being emphasized, the spiritual dimension is also meant to be borne in mind. For example, in justifying his reluctance to become involved in the crisis, Osam refers back to a tangled occasion when he was targeted by his wife’s relatives over the issue of vocation. Speaking of the matriline, he interjects: “Did they not say in the end that it was I who had prevented [Anowa] from going into apprenticeship with a priestess?” (153). Clearly, Osam can never do the right thing as far as some of his in-laws are concerned, and the oral tradition distorts his position. As on a previous occasion, a lighting cue gives a line resonance, and the movement of the play allows the audience time to think about what has been said. The suggestion behind the line is that his wife’s “people” had been among those who felt that Anowa might be failing to heed a call to the priesthood. The audience recognizes that Abena Badua must have fought tenaciously on several fronts, perhaps alone, to keep Anowa out of the sacred grove. Incidentally, I am convinced that we are right to detect in the mother’s restricted vision an acute, contemporary awareness of the way girl children are sometimes held back from self-development by the conservatism of older women.

The ‘second round’ of the family conflict begins, when the lights come up again, with Anowa accusing her mother of being a “witch” (154). Without conceding for a moment that she is a member of a coven, Abena Badua throws at her daughter the accusation that she has claimed to have spiritual insight: she says Anowa has “divined her out” – thereby

acknowledging, if only through sarcasm, the special dimension she has sought so hard to deny (155). Anowa's spiritual connections, and the possibility that she is herself a "witch," will be raised again later in the play. No reconciliation between mother and daughter is possible, but, once again, a significant spiritual dimension to Anowa as an exceptional woman has been suggested. A moment later, Anowa is slipping back from potential witch into a role in the *Headstrong Daughter* story: she leaves her parents, expressing her shocking determination to remain in self-imposed exile (156). This is an astonishing position to adopt, and one that encapsulates her wilfulness.

In the choric exchange between the Old Man and the Old Woman that follows, attention is once again drawn to the notion that "Anowa should have been a priestess." The Old Man reminds the audience of his reference to a "born priestess" who dances when he says:

Abena Badua should have known that Anowa wanted to be something that she herself had not been. [...] They say from a very small age, she had the hot eyes and nimble feet of one born to dance for the gods. (157)

The "nimble feet" seem to proclaim, to those who have eyes to see, that Anowa has a gift that should be used in the service of the deities. However, the Old Woman steers attention away from certainty towards the ambiguity on which drama thrives by referring to the mystery surrounding an individual's destiny. She is given a "Hmm" that provides the actor with plenty of scope for 'non-verbal communication', and then says: "Our ears are breaking with that one" – meaning: 'We have heard about the vocation too many times'. The Old Woman then sows seeds of uncertainty by asking: "Who heard the Creator tell Anowa what she was coming to do with her life here?" This question, which expects the answer 'No one', takes us into territory opened up earlier on by Osam's fatalistic observation about the "yam that will burn." It takes us into theological territory and reminds us that Aidoo is also offering us an Anowa for whom fate has prepared a fire.

The Old Woman continues: "And is that why, after all her 'I don't like this' and 'I don't like that', she has gone and married Kofi Ako?" (157). This takes us back to the "*Headstrong Daughter*" narrative. However, since Kofi Ako comes from a family that is well known to the 'headstrong daughter', there is a move away from the 'familiar narrative' at this point:

a stranger has not been selected. Aidoo shifts even further away from her source by presenting a husband, Kofi Ako, who is no sense a “Complete Gentleman,” to use the term memorably employed by Amos Tutuola in describing the husband in his version of the story. The ‘picky’ Anowa selects a husband who is certainly not dashing or outstanding. Abena Badua calls Kofi Ako a “good-for-nothing, cassava man,” and he does have easily recognized shortcomings. A director might cast an actor with legs like cassava sticks in the role to illustrate the truth of the angry woman’s observation. Kofi Ako is also vain and self-regarding, vulnerable and morally myopic, and the actor playing him has to suggest these qualities.

Near the end of the play, a version of the anecdote I mentioned earlier as having been passed on to Aidoo about the Couple who Quarrelled in Public comes to the fore. Anowa, unaware that there are eavesdroppers, speaks openly about her husband’s impotence, and Kofi Ako walks off and shoots himself. In the course of the play, Aidoo has provided a variety of hints about the reasons for the couple’s childless state. For instance, early on we learned that the “doctor” consulted by Kofi Ako is reported to have said “there is nothing wrong with [Anowa’s] womb” but her “soul is too restless” (166). Later, the credulous Abena Badua shares with the audience a persistent rumour “that [Anowa] and her husband sold their birth-seeds to acquire their wealth” (170). Osam, as usual more pragmatic than his wife, modifies this by interjecting an un-superstitious and more plausible, psychological explanation for childlessness when he says: “it certainly looks as if she and her husband are too busy making money and have no time to find out and cure what is wrong with her womb” (171). Kofi Ako’s reluctance to countenance the second wife whom Anowa offers to secure for him should be read as the result of his impotence, rather than as a commitment to monogamy. He doesn’t want to risk more people finding out about his condition.

Sackey’s suggestion that childlessness follows or, more precisely, was believed by her informants to follow, rejection of a vocation should also be kept in mind at this point, as should the possibility that there is a moral and psychological dimension to the drama. Aidoo would be within her rights to allow an element of poetic justice to operate: she could have simply told a story of a wicked man, a trafficker in human beings, who is punished by childlessness, impotence, and public humiliation. There are certainly suggestions that Kofi Ako’s decision to buy and sell human

beings makes domestic happiness impossible. This reflects a sense of justice that frequently finds expression in Ghanaian discourse: those who do evil will be punished on this earth. The playwright is in a position to show that this happens in the world of the theatre.

When the scene shifts to Anowa and Kofi Ako, Aidoo continues to “break our ears” with talk of the vocation to the priesthood. Bewildered by Anowa’s energy, drive, and commitment, Kofi Ako asks: “Anowa, is it true that you should have been a priestess?” She replies with an affirmative to which Aidoo adds a curious question-mark, so that the text reads “O yes?” (176). This formula creates difficulties of interpretation and performance. Should the actor try to communicate the affirmative or the interrogative? This problem is followed by others. Anowa’s lines are: “But how would I know. And where did you hear that from?” This time the absence of a question-mark (after “know”) requires consideration, as does the fact that the vital question – for so I take it to be – is not answered. To further complicate the issue, the stage directions ask for a dimension that no performance could convey entirely. The actress playing Anowa has to say these lines while “*Looking genuinely lost.*” This is as close as we get in the play to finding out what the playwright wants to suggest is at the root of Anowa’s state of mind. It seems that Anowa really is sincerely flummoxed by the question: she is unsure how one recognizes a vocation to the priesthood. I must say that, by this point, I think Anowa is being less than totally honest with Kofi Ako about her analysis of her own experiences. The third part of this fractured speech, “Where did you hear that from?” can be taken to represent an enquiry which the audience, having heard the conversations between her parents and between the Old Man and the Old Women, could answer very easily. ‘We’ know that Anowa’s vocation has been the talk of the community and of her extended family. It has been ‘breaking our ears’. The query should also be taken in the context of a tradition of dialectical exchanges in which aggressive questioning is an essential part of debate, discussion, and argument.

A little later Kofi Ako asks: “Who were you in the spirit world?” (178). This brings together many questions, and predictably, in view of the ambiguities in the play, it is not answered. In fact, to the outsider it opens up lines of enquiry that could be fruitfully pursued elsewhere.

In Phase Three, Anowa is introduced as behaving very strangely. She is described as “flitting about like a ghost” (188), and is accused, for a second time, of witchcraft, a very sensitive issue. Specifically, she is said to

have “stared so hard at Takoa’s baby” that the infant started having convulsions. It is being rumoured that she “is swallowing the baby because she is a witch” (188). She talks to herself, saying “O my husband, what have I done, what have I done?” – which suggests that she is bewildered, consumed by regret or remorse. When she takes control of the stage, she expresses the anger she feels at her husband for having children fan his empty chair, and then ruminates on pregnancy and motherhood. She greets a picture of Queen Victoria “(*unamused*)” with “hei sister” and shares her sense of dislocation with the Empress of India by asking “Do you sometimes feel like I feel, that you should not have been born?” This recalls a line that was given great prominence in the angst-ridden twentieth century: “never to have been born is much the best.” Although philosophical influences from Aidoo’s experience of mid-twentieth-century European thought may be at work, I think that Anowa’s cry relates specifically to her position as a woman who has not been able to find fulfilment in the society into which she was born. Anowa moves on to bewail to “her spirit mother” the frustrations that constrain a woman in her society at marriage: “here, O my spirit mother, they let a girl grow up as she pleases until she is married.” Through a prayer placed within a traditional context, Anowa reveals that she has become more acutely aware of gender prejudices and the limitations on women’s “capacity for development” in Ghanaian society. These are themes that Aidoo has returned to again and again in her writing, and reference to her novels and short stories is highly illuminating.

When Kofi Ako enters, we see what sort of a “monster” he has become, and what Anowa has come to resent. He is richly dressed, endlessly self-regarding, callous, suspicious of the community, frightened of women. After a lull during which Anowa compulsively rearranges plates on the sideboard and digs her toes into the skins covering the carpets on the floor, she launches into an enquiry about what the “priest” had said on his last visit. Reconstructing statements from Kofi Ako’s comments and questions, it becomes clear that the visit has reintroduced the issue of Anowa’s vocation. Eventually, Kofi Ako says: “Why don’t you wash your mouth so you can be a priestess at last.” Although constructed like a question, it bears no question-mark. This may simply continue the inconsistency in punctuation or indicate a rhetorical style already noted. In this instance, it seems the man does not expect an answer. However, these are just the opening exchanges in a scene that shows Anowa at her most tenacious,

and at her most lucid. Indeed, she does “divine him out,” ‘smelling’ his weakness through insight and analysis that some might term ‘witchcraft’. Although she has long been a stranger to his bed (where his impotence would have been revealed (203), she ‘sniffs’ her way to the conclusion that Kofi Ako no longer exists (to translate the Akan idiom ‘he is not there’). She asks, in a way that effectively ‘translates’ her question for the non-Akan speaker: “Kofi, are you dead? (*pause*) Kofi, is your manhood gone?” She then provides her own diagnosis for his behaviour with a question followed by a ‘question–answer’: “tell me, is that why I must leave you? That you have exhausted your masculinity acquiring slaves and wealth?” (203).

Kofi’s attempts to silence Anowa as she asks, now within earshot of many witnesses, whether the priest had offered the same diagnosis suggests the accuracy of her words. Her conviction is memorably expressed through giggles – a powerful weapon to turn against the male. She says (and her ‘translation’ is no longer necessary): “He is a corpse. He is dead wood. But less that dead wood because at least that sometimes grows mushrooms.” Her torrent of words, and the fact that they are heard by the eavesdroppers, drives Kofi Ako from the palace and to suicide. The couple have finally become characters in the anecdote about the Overheard Domestic Quarrel. By this time, Anowa has drifted into madness and from there it is but a short step to her own death by drowning. As Sackey has it, the final punishment for rejecting the vocation to the priesthood may be “the death of the person.”



The exploration of narrative has been a preoccupation of Ghanaian dramatists such as Efuwa Sutherland, Martin Owusu, Asiedu Yirenkyi, Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, and Yaw Asare. Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa* is a particularly subtle contribution to the tradition, in that it incorporates a series of stories which are laid on top of one another as part of a complex design. Elements of gender and history, ideas about destiny and morality, notions of conformity and individuality, of vocation and opportunity, flow from one story, tale, or anecdote to another. In reading or watching the play, one is acutely aware that one is in the presence of a formidable and alert intelligence, acutely aware of debates about the position of women that flourished from the 1970s onwards.

The foregoing essay has left unanswered some of the many questions Aidoo raises about destiny and the spirit-world, about witchcraft and outside influences that the foreign critic is ill-equipped to comment on. However, thanks to Sackey's essay, it is possible to throw some light on at least one aspect of a complex and rewarding drama that is deeply rooted in a particular community.

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9 Joe de Graft: A Theatrical Prophet with Strange Honours

A Response to a Profile by Kofi Agovi

Introduction

IN 1994, WHILE TEACHING at the University of Ghana, I gave a seminar paper in which I looked closely at an essay Kofi Agovi had written about Joe de Graft for volume 117 of *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1992). The presentation was given in the School of Performing Arts, and Agovi, who was based at the neighbouring Institute for African Studies, was invited to attend. I told him that I was concerned about the reputation of de Graft and outlined some of my objections to his work. However, Agovi was not in the audience when the paper was delivered and discussed, and he did not, I think, put pen to paper in response to it before he died.

The untimely passing of Agovi has created the possibility that laying out my unanswered objections may be unfair to him. However, I have nonetheless decided to make them available to a wider public in the hope that debate and discussion will lead to a juster estimate of the work of two Ghanaians, brought together at the University of Ghana, and, all too soon in both cases, united in death. Those who are left must regret that they were among us for such a short time and concerned that they were divided by cultural experience and ideological position. In preparing this paper for publication, I have taken advantage of work published since 1994 in order to extend my argument.

In the pages that follow, I draw attention to primary sources that Agovi neglected, and suggest that he approached de Graft's plays in a manner more suited to the examination of prose fiction than stage drama. I offer variant readings of key texts and a very different assessment of de Graft's

achievements as a playwright and a poet. Using not only the *Dictionary of Literary Biography (DLB)* profile but also other comments Agovi has made about de Graft, I explore the idea that the younger scholar was fundamentally out of sympathy with what de Graft stood for. I draw attention to the strategies employed by Agovi to create or support the impression that de Graft was an alienated opportunist. Inevitably, questions are raised about who should be invited to submit entries for reference books.

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One of the most authoritative of recently published reference works is the beautifully produced *DLB*, which contains entries prepared by contributors who can write with insight, accuracy, and authority. Many achieve a high standard. I was, however, distressed that, in the entry on Joe de Graft in the volume devoted to black African and Caribbean authors, the contributor's perspectives and his firmly held convictions extensively and damagingly influence the assessments offered. The information presented is not always accurate or adequate, and the strategy adopted repays critical scrutiny. The distance between critic and subject is far greater than that required for ensuring optimal critical objectivity, and the result can be described as ideologically motivated character-assassination.

The author of the profile, Kofi Agovi, failed to analyze de Graft's confident handling of theatrical elements, did not appreciate his searching honesty, and showed no acknowledgement of the value of his resistance to the demands of fashion. This was coupled with apparent ignorance about important achievements, and a narrow interpretation of relevant artistic movements. Agovi's whole essay is marked by a lack of sympathy for much that was central to de Graft and his work. A basis for the limitations of the entry is betrayed by reference to some of Agovi's other publications and the positions he took in relation to various cultural, literary, and political issues affecting Ghanaian theatre. This is not the place for an account of Agovi's work and life, but, at the risk of being reductionist, it is pertinent to note that his first degree was in English and his first postgraduate thesis was on novels of social change, and that only with his Legon doctorate, entitled "Kundum: Festival Drama Among the Ahanta-Nzema of South West Ghana," do we find him dealing at all with the genre, drama, in which de Graft made his major contribution.

Agovi incorporated a substantial amount of background information into his brief entry. Some of it is useful, some contentious, some tenden-

tious. An example of the last quality is to be seen when, writing of “the emergent theatre of the country in the 1950s,” Agovi described it as being “dominated entirely by the performances and activities of itinerant concert-party troupes.” Since the period under consideration saw performances by the Experimental Theatre Group in and beyond Accra, I suggest that Agovi’s sweeping “dominated entirely” is misleading and dismisses a small but influential group of activists. As will become apparent in the course of my comments, my reading of Ghanaian theatre history differs from Agovi’s, and these differences are of importance in coming to terms with de Graft.

Of de Graft’s work as a teacher at Mfantsipim School, Agovi writes: “from 1955 to 1960, de Graft appeared completely unaffected by the strong nationalist aspirations of the popular theatre.” It is not clear what this is based on, and, given de Graft’s role as a pioneer of adaptations, Nigerian texts, and local writing, seems unfair. There is no indication whether Agovi carried out research on de Graft’s work at Mfantsipim. This is a recurrent problem; as will become clear, I am concerned that Agovi, based at the Institute of African Studies, Legon, did not seek out informants or track down relevant records. He did not, as I was told by Martin Owusu, interview de Graft’s former secondary-school pupils or his colleagues who were working at the School of Performing Arts at Legon. His use of “appeared” is calculated to provide a defence, should it ever be shown that de Graft did in fact sponsor a concert-party performance on the school campus.

Agovi does not show a firm grasp of the material on which he was working and, at an early point in his article, plants the impression (false, as it happens) that de Graft was not interested in popular theatre tradition, represented in this instance by the concert parties. This is of some importance, because, whether or not evidence can be found for de Graft’s interest in concert parties when a schoolteacher, there is abundant evidence that he took an interest in the phenomenon later. Agovi does not return to the topic, so I shall include a few comments on it here.

If he had done research or read primary sources closely, Agovi would have seen that de Graft was very interested in the concert-party groups, and sought to draw on them in the work of the School of Music and Drama. In other words, as soon as he was freed from the limitations of the classroom and the narrow secondary-school syllabus, he sought to interact creatively with popular theatre. Agovi’s ignorance was strikingly revealed in a grad-

uate seminar he led at Legon on 8 June 1994, where he appeared to be quite unaware of the existence of Patience Addo's play *Company Pot*. Originally submitted in 1969 as an assignment for de Graft's playwriting course and, incidentally, subsequently published by Heinemann, the text draws on Addo's familiarity with the concert-party genre. Encouraged by de Graft, and familiar with the convention through having transcribed performances when working with him at Legon, she employed in her play elements derived from the performances of the itinerant groups.¹ The use of concert-party conventions was encouraged by de Graft.

The same encouragement of interest in popular theatre led Alan Tamakloe and others to prepare a concert-party version of Chekhov texts, *The Proposal* and *The Bear*, which were produced at the School in the mid-1960s. Note should also be taken of the opinion de Graft expressed in his essay on "The Roots of African Theatre," where, after an account of the past and present of the form that included a reference to an obscure *Sunday Mirror* article of 29 May 1960, he wrote: "Concert Party constitutes perhaps the most popular and dynamic form of contemporary theatre in Ghana today."² Agovi listed this important article among de Graft's publications but, sadly, he did not draw attention to the evidence it provides of de Graft's informed interest in popular theatre.

I have allowed myself to run on a little, but, as will be appreciated, I have tried to draw attention to the manner in which Agovi builds up his portrait. He creates an impression about de Graft's position ("de Graft appeared completely unaffected by ...") during a period – between 1955 and 1960 – from which there is little material available, and he fails to indicate the way in which subsequent work challenged that position. While a university teacher, de Graft showed himself fully aware of the claims of the concert parties, anxious to record their performances, and eager to incorporate their conventions into the work done at the School of Music and Drama.

On another matter, Agovi's failure to represent adequately what de Graft was doing at Mfantsipim is more easily exposed. Writing in a condescending tone, Agovi leaps from comments on popular theatre to Shake-

¹ Patience Addo, "Company Pot," in *Nine African Plays for Radio*, ed. Gwyneth Henderson & Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1973): 163–85.

² Joe de Graft, "Roots in African Drama and Theatre," *African Literature Today* 8.1 (1976): 15.

spere. De Graft was, he says, “unmoved in his love for Shakespeare’s plays, since he was still active in producing and acting in the English classics, and School Certificate set plays.” This statement, with its devious conjunction – the plays set for examinations were English classics – should be seen in the context of the fact that, while de Graft was unashamed in his recognition of the power of Shakespeare’s plays, he was also keen to direct local material that came his way. For example, he introduced the Nigerian playwright James Ene Henshaw to Ghanaian audiences through a production of *This is Our Chance*. This by itself shows that Agovi failed in the task of presenting an accurate picture of de Graft as a schoolteacher.

Moving on, now alert to his bias, it should be noted that Agovi dates from “the early 1960s” the development of de Graft’s “sympathy for the aspirations of cultural nationalism.” He adds, helpfully quoting from a review of *The Catechist*, that sympathy developed “with caution and circumspection.” I am not convinced that de Graft ever was a cultural nationalist, and would welcome the opportunity to examine whatever evidence proves his affiliation to the movement. The format insisted on by the editors of the *DLB* does not allow the use of footnotes, but supporting evidence could have been incorporated into the prose. In order to indicate what I take to be de Graft’s position, I would draw attention to a major statement on a related issue entitled “Dramatic Questions.” Forthright and energetic, it emerged from years of experience of African theatre and of listening to debates, some of them at Legon, about “African Personality.”

One paragraph in the paper begins:

The idea of ‘the African Personality’ needs looking at very critically, especially if at the centre of it is to be placed the African as a fossil, with all that constitutes his supposed ‘traditional culture’, for the edification of curious scholars and easy-handed [sic] tourists.³

De Graft continues, eloquently and pertinently, to acknowledge what Negritude has contributed, and pinpoints its limitations. Astonishingly, Agovi did not list this major publication in his entry or, I think, recognize the inhibiting effects of cultural nationalism. Frantz Fanon has written perceptively about the process by which colonial subjects may move through imitation of metropolitan styles and re-creation of an imagined past, before

³ Joe de Graft, “Dramatic Questions,” in *Writers in East Africa*, ed. Andrew Gurr & Angus Calder (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974): 55.

achieving the freedom to make use of material from all sides. I think that this is the sort of freedom that de Graft won through to.⁴

Agovi's position is different. Towards the end of his essay, he shows that he is aware of "great artists" who have "reflected deep-seated ambiguities and ambivalences in their attitudes and presentations." But, despite this, he argues, sinisterly, that de Graft's "apparent need to distance himself from any commitment to a culture system reflects a weakness that goes beyond his works."

I suspect that this directs attention to a fundamental difference between Agovi's position and mine – and between his position and de Graft's. Agovi considers commitment to "cultural nationalism," related to what he describes as "'authentic' African theatre," as a good thing, perhaps ensuring a certain consistency. I regard it as essential that a writer be sceptical of slogans, independent of romanticizing movements, such as cultural nationalism, and I think that de Graft recognized the importance of scepticism. The recognition was part of a healthy and liberating view of the position of individuals in the community. Quite simply, de Graft was aware of "deep-seated ambiguities and ambivalences in [...] attitudes."

The underlying rift between Agovi and de Graft is clarified by recalling that when the School of Music and Drama was opened in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah spoke about it working "in close association with the Institute of African Studies" and providing "this Institute with an outlet for creative work."⁵ Given the Institute's links with the concept of 'African Personality' and the School's obligation to provide a broad education in the theatre, there was obviously room for differences of opinion. In working out what lies behind the *DLB* profile, it is helpful to appreciate Agovi's position within the Institute and de Graft's responsibilities within the School. They shared a nationality and an employer, little else: they had very different origins, responsibilities, and orientations. The Institute was ideological, part of an Nkrumahist programme of research, while the School, charged with providing an education in drama for young people who would find employment within the education system, was not. Agovi was "at home" within the Nkrumahist tradition, encouraged to promote it; de Graft was

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1952; tr. 1967; London: Paladin, 1970).

⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech at the opening of the Institute of African Studies, 25 October 1963," *The Spark* (Accra) 8 (November 1963).

not. The differences between them echoed many differences, including a clash between the organizations in which they worked.

Before moving on to other considerations, I want to pause to consider the use of the word “apparent” (“apparent need to distance himself from any commitment to a culture system reflects a weakness that goes beyond his works”). This illustrates a quality that I object to strongly in the profile. A single usage, with its brother in insinuation ‘seems’, and other forms of the root, would imply little. However, as used in Agovi’s article the words provide a refrain that culminates towards the end in serious allegations about appearance and reality, (self-)deception, and deeply held feelings. By the calculated deployment of vocabulary and structure, ‘seeds are being sown’ which will later lead to the suggestion that there were elements of hypocrisy in de Graft’s position. In this instance, “apparent need,” there is a possible inference that the need was not real or genuine.

Agovi writes that for de Graft “it was necessary to assert a freedom of choice and an individual claim to responsibility in the conduct of life.” Agovi’s distance from the point of view he summarizes here – one that may be equated with liberal humanism – makes him, unfortunately, fundamentally out of sympathy with the man whose portrait he had undertaken to present to a wide readership. From this point, I will proceed by responding to Agovi’s comments on particular works and issues. I will begin with two early plays and move through the National Theatre Movement to a poetry collection before discussing the plays *Muntu* and *Mambo* and offering a final judgement and conclusion. Positions and strategies exposed so far will be seen to be at work in Agovi’s portrait.

Sons and Daughters

I find Agovi’s interpretation of *Sons and Daughters* unexceptional, but just as important as its theme is its theatrical achievement – and Agovi seems not to have recognized this. It is a well-made play characterized by easy, flowing dialogue, sharp characterization, and neatly contrived dramatic moments. My emphasis on the work in these terms, regarding it as the basis for a production, is, I think, necessary. Agovi, who concentrated on prose fiction at an important stage in his academic career, provides only a ‘reading’ of the play.

Visitor from the Past / Through a Film Darkly

Agovi's treatment of de Graft's much more substantial play *Through a Film Darkly* is, once again, very obviously desk-bound, that of a critic used to writing about novels. Before proceeding further, it should be noted that, according to Agovi, this play was "adapted (under the title *Visitor from the Past*) as a novel in 1968." Agovi listed the novel among de Graft's publications as having appeared from Anowuo, and, in the course of his profile, he twice described de Graft as a "novelist." I have not been able to find anyone who has seen or read a continuous prose narrative entitled *Visitor from the Past*, and would welcome information that would throw light on the issue of "de Graft – novelist." It is tempting to regard Agovi's description of de Graft as a "novelist" in terms of a 'revealing slip'.

Returning to *Through a Film Darkly*, Agovi presents it to readers of the *DLB* through a summary of part of the plot. It is a summary that sounds to me much more like Agovi's view of "the bewildering experience of contemporary Africa" – as indicated by his comments on de Graft's poetry – than anything in the play. I find the interpretation offered unconvincing, and perverse.

There is, in fact, no need to search the text for a symbolic meaning as Agovi does. The work announces itself very firmly in the theatre through an opening sequence that is described in detail in the stage directions, and through the audience's likely reactions to the start of a production. *Through a Film Darkly* examines, in dramatic form, the ways in which people jump to conclusions and the bases, often quite inadequate, on which judgements are formed. (How relevant, you may say, to this essay. How many conclusions has Agovi leapt to!)

Consulting some of those involved in the first two productions of *Through a Film Darkly*, starting with Agovi's erstwhile "neighbours" at Legon, Martin Owusu and Asiedu Yirenkyi, teachers in the School of Performing Arts, my attention was drawn to the centrality of Fenyinka. Creative, eccentric, confident, married to a white woman, and quick to make new friends among fellow Ghanaians, the guitar-playing, poetry-loving Fenyinka establishes a special relationship with the audience from the beginning of the play and communicates important elements of the playwright's vision. He, rather than the neurotic, marginalized John or the obsessed "visitor from the past," Rebecca, is at the heart of the play. Significantly, he is strong enough to move between cultures, responsive and

creative, relaxed and charming. There is no doubt in my mind what the playwright wants to suggest about the possibility of reconciling cultural traditions through this character and this text.

The National Theatre Movement

After a few disturbing sentences on *Hamile*, a film version of *Hamlet*, Agovi returned to the National Theatre Movement, about which he had already written in the profile. He observed:

But while de Graft's works seemed to support the aspirations of the National Theatre Movement, his stated personal convictions and ideas were completely at odds with the ideology of the movement.

A reader might well take this statement – with the tellingly placed “seemed” – to impute that de Graft was, at best, caught up in unreconciled contradictions. A less charitable view would make him into an opportunist, a deeply divided individual whose work was “at odds” with his statements, but who nonetheless rode the gravy-train marked “National Theatre Movement.” According to this (ideological) reading, he was rescued by the Movement from the anonymous grind of secondary-school teaching. Then he rose, dissembling, to inhabit the cool heights of Legon, the mount of knowledge.

In this instance, the critic's imputation of contradiction and opportunism is based on an assessment of the National Theatre Movement which I regard as narrow and inadequate. Somewhat earlier, Agovi had written that the Arts Council

... had the mandate to create a National Theatre Movement, whose central objective was to stimulate the growth of new artistic idioms, new forms or new styles of music, dance and drama that have their roots in African tradition, but which also express the contemporary Ghanaian experience.

I have quoted these comments because it is important to know how Agovi saw the Movement which de Graft “seemed to support” while his words indicated principles “completely at odds” with it. My impression is that the Movement did not have the narrow ideology Agovi imputed to it. Indeed, the passage just quoted, with its emphasis on novelty and the contemporary, as well as on roots, points to a broad, pragmatic development. There were, it is quite true, those working within the Ghanaian theatre who were

explicitly committed politically and culturally, and they might have been regarded as having an ideological view. But even this strand, represented by the Haitian playwright and director Félix Morisseau–Leroy, was quite eclectic. In addition to *Akosombo*, a celebration of labour and the inspirational impact of Nkrumah, Leroy directed *Antigone in Haiti*, which, as the title suggests, had a different focus and origin, different ‘roots’. Other productions that contributed to the Movement included Efua Sutherland’s adaptation of *Alcestis*. The breadth of sympathy of the Movement was also apparent from the officially sanctioned and unambiguously named Osagefo Players. They were brought together in order to be the cutting edge of the Movement, and presented two plays. And what were these plays that presumably related to the ideology of the Movement? Well, one was George Bernard Shaw’s celebration of the unorthodox and the individual, *Arms and the Man*, and the other, put on for the 1965 OAU Conference, was Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* – fascinating choices. From this it would seem that here was a Movement that could accommodate Caribbean and Ghanaian versions of Greek classics, an Irishman’s devastating exposé of romantic cant, and an affectionate portrait of life in small-town America. Surely it could find room for de Graft, his *Ananse and the Gum Man*, his *Hamile*, and his belief that there should be individuality and diversity.

Beneath the Jazz and Brass

Of de Graft the poet, Agovi wrote: “the result of the African record of amalgamation, of reconciling with European values, has been particularly unfortunate and negative.” This Africanist (Chinweizuesque? neo-Tarzanist?) dismissal of vast swathes of African endeavour includes de Graft’s verse. The implication is that it should be ‘decolonised’, africanized; but this is surprising, since Agovi, rightly, drew attention to virtues in the poetry. He refers to qualities of “sensitivity and forthrightness.”

Beneath the Jazz and Brass is condemned because of what the critic calls “the total atmosphere of unremitting pessimism and disillusionment, powerfully rendered, which seem to dominate the poems.” First, I take issue with Agovi’s use of the words “seem to” – they have no place in this sentence except to blur the critic’s statement and protect him from the searching questions of those who challenge him. The reader of the profile wants to know whether Agovi thought the poems were unremittingly pessi-

mistic or not. I will assume that “seem to” is a stylistic mannerism that can be omitted, and proceed on that understanding.

De Graft’s poetry, or, to pick up Agovi’s words, “the total atmosphere” of his poetry, is not unremittingly pessimistic. The “sensitivity [...] forthrightness” and “powerful [rendering]” which Agovi detects take the reader far, far from “unremitting pessimism and disillusionment.” Re-reading *Beneath the Jazz and Brass*, I was struck by its qualities of honesty and energy, humour and intelligence, and by the moving and frequently celebratory manner in which the poet responds to integrity, to the triumph of the human spirit, and to beauty. I am not arguing that de Graft is a major African poet, but, and this is a significant achievement, he found his voice in verse. To summarize his vision as angst-ridden nihilism as Agovi does is a disservice to criticism. I regard the charge of “unremitting pessimism” as being an instance of the critic reaching for a handy, hand-me-down ideological stick to beat a writer with.

I hope that Agovi’s provocative, and, in my view, unjustified observations will send many back to the poetry – I am confident that they will find the experience enjoyable. They will encounter a poet in control and vigorously engaged in the task of understanding and explaining himself, his times, and his position. More to the point, in the context of this discussion, they will find the verses sometimes uplifting, the work of a compassionate, honest, humane writer.

Muntu

Moving back to de Graft’s work for the theatre, Agovi approved of *Muntu*, which he described as a “total affirmation of African culture.” This, from his point of view, was “a good thing.” I will limit my quarrel with his treatment of this play to a different kind of error than cultural imprecision (Agovi refers, for example, to the use of “Akan creation mythology” – whereas de Graft drew attention to the *Zambian* origin of the myth that Muntu tells his children) – namely, Agovi’s attempt to define the play’s qualities in terms of European dramatists:

[*Muntu*’s] absolute concentration on ideas, in the tradition of Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, provides eloquent testimony on the contemporary African predicament.

For this statement to have any meaning, there must be a “tradition” to which Brecht and Beckett owe allegiance, but, in fact, they belong to separate, and, often sharply opposed, traditions. From this, it is clear that Agovi’s attempt at definition by means of a foray into the world of twentieth-century European theatre confuses rather than clarifies. It shows what a stranger he was to discussion about theatre. For what it is worth, I regard *Muntu* as an occasional piece; written for an international conference, a particular audience in a specific performance area, it works in the manner of a pageant, making its points with a broad brush.

Mambo

Agovi moved from *Muntu* to de Graft’s adaptation of *Macbeth*, entitled *Mambo* (1978), and described it as “finally [consolidating] de Graft’s vision of contemporary African politics as the locus of the ‘latest political murders and military coups’.” This note of approval – which gives a ‘prodigal returned’ shape to Agovi’s account of de Graft’s life – must be examined closely, because it sits oddly with an assertion made earlier in the profile, to the effect that de Graft’s “fondness for Shakespeare was later to become a significant factor in his career because it prevented him from a total allegiance to the African theatre.” That statement appears just after an account of de Graft’s work in Nairobi, and, because of the “later,” it is difficult to link it up with any play other than *Mambo*.

It looks as if, when all is said and done, *Mambo* is being condemned as part of a debilitating preoccupation with Shakespeare and praised for its recognition of the occurrence of political murders and military coups. That is faint praise. In the late 1970s, it was obvious enough to every concerned observer that the African continent was experiencing bloodshed and coups. de Graft had left coup-affected Ghana in 1969 to work in Kenya, and for much of the next decade lived ‘next door’ to Idi Amin’s haemorrhaging Uganda. It must have been particularly easy for him to “consolidate his vision.”

An insight into what Agovi really thought of *Mambo* is provided by an article published in 1990 entitled “The Origin of the Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1957.” There the work is listed as one of those which, with Sutherland’s *Edufa* and de Graft’s *Sons and Daughters*, reveal what Agovi describes as “a ‘psychic’ ambivalence towards African traditions.” That this “‘psychic’ ambivalence” is an unfortunate condition is

made clear in Agovi's next sentence: "Of all Ghanaian playwrights perhaps de Graft was the most guilty of this phenomenon throughout his drama career."⁶ This statement, with its diagnosis of a serious-sounding condition and despite the weasel-word "perhaps," is accompanied by a footnote which draws readers' attention to the profile that is the subject of this examination. Sent round in circles, the reader emerges enlightened: *pace* the 1990 article, Agovi found "'psychic' ambivalence" throughout de Graft's career – in *Mambo* as well as all the other texts. That it was a crime is indicated by the use of "guilty."

In my view, *Mambo* is simply further evidence of de Graft's creative exploitation of the various cultural resources available to him. It also shows, once again, his particular interest in Shakespeare. The confidence with which he handles Shakespearean material, his readiness to plunder and loot the Bard's storehouse, clearly indicates his sureness of touch as a dramatist. One does not have to regard *Mambo* as a major work to recognize an attractively independent spirit at work in it.

Final Judgement

In the closing paragraphs, Agovi lays some extremely serious charges at de Graft's door, charges that the article just referred to prepares for. Shifting the grounds of his argument from the complaint that the playwright failed to be loyal to one tradition or the other, Agovi acknowledges that "great artists [...] have reflected ambiguities and ambivalences" but avers (shades of F.R. Leavis and the 'Great Tradition') that de Graft's work lacked a "moral centre":

a firm impression of an inner resilience, an inner coherence, and a strength of artistic integrity is hard to find in de Graft's work outside *Muntu*.

First, a stylistic quibble: if by "hard to find" Agovi means 'is absent from', then he should have said so. If he simply meant it is 'not immediately obvious', then he should, as a critic, have taken pains to draw attention to its manifestation. Leaving the allegation vague allows him to create the impression that de Graft lacked an "inner resilience" etc. and at the same

⁶ J.K.E. Agovi, "The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1957," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* (Legon) 6.1 (1990): 17.

time retains for Agovi a space in which to agree with any reader who identifies a moral core. This is a reprehensible kind of academic writing.

Secondly, a variant reading: as will be clear from what I have said above, I do not find the contradictions or the disillusionment, the angst and existentialism, that Agovi detected. De Graft's stated commitment to individual freedom, his work with Efua Sutherland, his plays and poems, and his enjoyment of a life-style which included coffee and toast for breakfast – all were of a piece. In fact, he had come to terms with changing circumstances and with innovations as well as most of us do, and he was able to engage creatively with the tensions that remained. Far from lacking a moral centre, his values are clear. Not surprisingly, they are most crisply articulated in the poetry.

The point about “inner resilience” was not quite Agovi's parting shot; he still had another cannonball – or stink-bomb – to hurl. This is that de Graft “carefully divorced his personal convictions from the convictions embodied in his works.” With this suggestion comes the implication that de Graft was caught up in contradictions that he “carefully” – hence, presumably, deliberately – did not explore. From there it is a short step to the implication that he was in major respects hypocritical, or suffered from the unpleasant-sounding “‘psychic’ ambivalence.” To put it more bluntly, he was two-faced, a hollow man. Agovi does not use these words, but I think they express the ground-tenor of his article.

Finally, I would add, at the risk of being accused of ‘reading too much’ into the profile, that the allusions to roots, which are touchstones of the acceptable in the profile, have the effect of contributing to the image of de Graft as, to use the French term, *déraciné*. Translated into English, this word loses the venom and disapproval that hiss through the French. Perhaps “in need of decolonisation” sums up the remedy Agovi might have applied for that vague condition suggested by “‘psychic’ ambivalence.”

Conclusion

I could have approached the profile of de Graft in a cautious manner, contenting myself for the most part with simply pointing to factual errors and startling omissions. I could have limited my comments to relatively ‘safe’ grounds of disagreement – such as my emphasis on plays in performance. The line I have adopted is risky because it attempts to lay bare and confront partly stated or merely implied judgements. The exercise I have

embarked on seems worthwhile because so much that was extraneous, negative, and irrelevant has been introduced into what should have been an authoritative and enlightening profile of a remarkable individual.

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When de Graft died, the responsibility devolved upon Agovi to organize transport for mourners travelling from Legon to Cape Coast. This he did with a great sense of responsibility. It took him towards his own homeland some way beyond “The Athens of West Africa.” My experience of reading his profile prompts me to observe that “the man who accompanies the mourners is not necessarily the man who should write the epitaph.” I would also add that “Just because people live near to one another does not mean that they will sing the same songs.” Indeed, the proximity of the Nzimas to the Fantes, and of the Institute of African Studies to the School of Music and Drama, may have made Agovi more aware of differences between himself and de Graft rather than minimizing them. The two men had heated discussion in the car park that was the shared territory between their departments.

After de Graft died, the editors of volume 117 of the *DNB* provided Agovi with an opportunity to continue the argument. This he did out of conviction, but in an unworthy manner. I am thrusting my response into the public domain after Agovi’s death with some hesitation, but with a conviction that the issues it raises have to be discussed.

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PLAYERS AND PLAYMAKING



10 The Legon 7

The Story of a Campus Drama Group, October 1968–June 1970

Introduction

IN ANTHONY GRAHAM–WHITE’S carefully researched *Drama of Black Africa*, the Legon 7, a student drama society based on the campus of the University of Ghana at the end of the 1960s, merits the following entry:

1969 The Legon Seven present *An Evening of Brecht*, devised and directed by James Gibbs.¹

The group was lucky to get a mention – many African drama groups that put on more productions and lasted much longer are not referred to. I expect Graham–White picked up his reference from *Cultural Events in Africa*, a monthly cyclostyled ‘update’ to which I sent information from time to time, and one must be grateful for brief references.

David Kerr’s *African Popular Theatre* (1995) is a wide-ranging study characterized by balance and clear exposition, given authority by the author’s long involvement in drama in Africa and his access to a variety of unpublished conference papers. In the chapter on “The Travelling Theatre Movement” on the continent, there is a paragraph concerning events in Ghana. It begins:

In Ghana there was a short-lived travelling theatre movement called the Legon Road Theatre, based at the University of Legon near Accra. The Legon Road Theatre was quite heavily influenced by the Ghanaian Concert Party tradition, and as with the trios was associated with a

¹ Graham–White, *The Drama of Black Africa* (New York: French, 1974): 171.

star performer/ playwright who had a particular knack of communicating to popular audiences. This driving force behind the Legon Road Theatre was Mohammed Ben Abdallah, who joined the university in 1969 as a Masters student, and who had experience of producing Shakespeare in secondary schools in the late 1960s. His first productions were of such ambitious literary works as Brecht's *Trial of Lucullus* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The Legon Road Theatre really started to live up to its name in 1970 when Ijimeré's *The Fall*, along with four other productions was toured to Accra, Winneba, Cape Coast and Kumasi.²

The reason for quoting this will be immediately apparent to all familiar with the contribution made to touring productions in Ghana by such people as Efua Sutherland and Lionel K. Idan of the Kumasi University of Science and Technology. Theatre historians will inevitably want to draw attention to the miles covered and hours of theatre presented by ambitious groups such as *Kusum Agoromba*. The confusion about the Legon Road Theatre's productions and Ben-Abdallah's contact with the University of Ghana, at Legon, will also strike some. Kerr gives his source as an article I wrote for *African Arts*, but it appears that he misread it.³

For those who are under the impression that Graham–White's entry 'told all' and for those interested in seeing the several points at which Kerr's account is at fault, I have put together this essay. In it, a context is provided for the Brecht evening Kerr refers to, and the relationship between the Legon 7 and the Legon Road Theatre is indicated. What follows is the story of a drama group, told from the point of view of the founder of the company and largely through reviews. It is set down in gratitude to those who contributed to mounting the productions.

In October 1968, having been recruited by Voluntary Service Overseas, I took up a post as Instructor in the Department of English at the University of Ghana, Legon. I had long been interested in drama, had studied 'A'-Level English Literature, and included Drama as part of a General Honours Degree at Bristol University. My interest was as much practical as academic: I had acted at school and university, and had written and directed for youth clubs. While doing an MA in Washington DC, I had

² David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* (London: James Currey, 1995): 138–39.

³ James Gibbs, "Mohammed Ben Abdallah and the Legon Road Theatre," *African Arts* (Los Angeles) 5.4 (1972): 33–34. Incidentally, I used the form "Abdullah" in that article.

read a certain amount about African drama and had written a short thesis on Nigerian drama.

The Mensah Sarbah Hall Drama Group

The teaching responsibilities I was given at Legon initially provided little scope for my interest in drama, and the School of Music and Drama at Legon, at which J. Scott-Kennedy was then a dominant influence, appeared unapproachable. Under these circumstances, I decided to form a drama group based on the hall in which I had been accommodated: Mensah Sarbah Hall.

I began by conducting Sunday-afternoon mime and improvisation classes. Using a variety of exercises, the students who responded to my notices to “turn up for drama” explored ideas in dramatic terms, developed characters, practised imitating other people, and began to put together short ‘plays’. It soon became apparent that the group, known at this stage as the “Mensah Sarbah Hall Drama Group,” would only grow in skill and commitment if a production were envisaged. I had little information about the facilities available; no idea who had access to spotlights or dimmer-boards, or tape-recorders or rostra, no idea who had the keys to doors, real and symbolic. While I was beginning to get to know and to trust the actors, I hesitated to embark upon a production that would make too many demands in terms of equipment or would rely too heavily on untested performers.

The Trial of Wole Soyinka

About this time I heard a rumour, false as I discovered much later, that Wole Soyinka, whose plays had been a revelation to me when in the USA and who was then in detention in Nigeria, had managed to gather an acting company around him in Kaduna Prison. This provided a starting-point for the text of a court-room drama which I put together and, with a nod in the direction of Peter Weiss, entitled *A Selection of some of the verse, plays and prose of Wole Soyinka as presented by the inmates of the Federal Prison at Coduno under the direction of Prisoner Jaguna*. This was abbreviated to *Soyinka/Jaguna* or, sometimes, to *The Trial of Wole Soyinka*.

The prison context eliminated the need for elaborate sets or special costumes. In fact, the production was put on under harsh fluorescent lights in

the auditorium of the School of Administration. The sets, such as they were, consisted of the standard items of furnishing provided in the halls of residence, and the costumes – the regulation prison clothing – were, since the captain of the Mensah Sarbah Hall hockey team was in the company, hockey shirts. Into the mouth of the actor playing Soyinka, I put a number of opinions which Soyinka had expressed in interviews or implied in plays, and the actress playing Jaguna articulated a number of the criticisms, particularly the more wrong-headed ones, that had been made of Soyinka's works and conduct. The "evidence" she presented consisted of a series of extracts from Soyinka's oeuvre presented by "inmates." In other words, the evening was a series of plays within a play. Each extract could be separately rehearsed, and if one was a disaster the whole evening would not be ruined.

Among other tasks, I took on the job of advertising the production. I prepared and distributed some provocative, and informative, flyers and was encouraged by the response. A visit to the office of the *Ghanaian Times* and a meeting with a young graduate journalist, Boakye Djan, led to a particularly helpful item appearing in his paper on 8 February, 1969, four days before the first of our two nights. The programmes for the production also had to be prepared, and I did this in such a way that the issues raised by the play were further examined in a cyclostyled handout. I took the precaution of indicating on the programme that Soyinka had not been consulted about the text and that some of the words put into the mouth of the actor playing him had been written by me.

The programme also listed the cast: G.K. Botwe-Asamoah, A.K. Kwaa, Collins Asare, Defie Agyarko, P.V.A. Adamaley, R.C.A. Osa, C.E. Quampah, Joe Quartey, Esther Bodza-Lumor, and Edith Quarcoo. The music was by Peter Abilogu. Cecelia Andoh, Patience Dowouna-Hammond, while Yarle Ako-Adjei looked after the front-of-house, and Osei Bonsu was assistant producer. The sight-lines in the auditorium, which has steeply raked seating, were excellent; the acoustics left much to be desired, and, as producer, I chafed at the poor projection of some of the actors while admiring the competence and flair of others. There was no attempt to light the stage separately – a decision dictated by circumstances but justified by reference to the desire to create a thoughtful, critical audience for an evening that had a political dimension.

The Text

To enlarge on the summary of the text given above: the play opened with a welcome from the Prison Official that was full of sarcasm at the expense of Prisoner Soyinka, and full of praise for the “reliable inmate” who had been put in charge of the “trial,” Prisoner Jaguna. (The name was taken from *The Strong Breed* and the role admirably played by Defie Agyarko.) Jaguna started off by eliciting information about “the political prisoner’s” education. As soon as he mentioned his time in England, she pounced with “Stop!,” following this up with “Were not your habits and way of life at this time [...] disgusting, depraved and disgraceful?” Soyinka did not reply, Jaguna summoned a Prisoner to read – as it were, by way of ‘proof’ of her accusations – “Immigrant One,” a poem about relations between dancers at a multi-racial nightclub in London.

Repeatedly presented as totally unaware of the real nature of the material she was introducing, Jaguna followed the recital of “Immigrant One” with this introduction to “Immigrant Two” (that poem, it may be remembered, begins “My dignity is sewn ...”):

And yet, despite the depravity of his own behaviour, the Political Prisoner criticises other Africans. Men who, unlike the Political Prisoner, dress decently. Men who uphold the great tradition of African tailoring, who wear suits and move with dignity.

The final line of “Immigrant Two,” “Where the one-eyed man is king,” was followed by an introduction to “Telephone Conversation” in which Jaguna said:

[Soyinka] considers the great issue of pigmentation as if it were – were a joke, and, further, accuses our honest and upright friends, the British of, of all things, hypocrisy.

After the recitation of “Telephone Conversation” there was a dialogue in which Jaguna poured scorn on Soyinka for working as a bricklayer – the context for this phase of his life was an international student work camp in a flood-affected area of the Netherlands – and for his attachment to the Royal Court Theatre, which was not, Jaguna pointed out, a “proper”: i.e. commercial, bourgeois, West End theatre. Having drawn from Soyinka the fact that he returned to Nigeria to carry out research on drama, Jaguna launched into a tirade that included:

You are clearly an intelligent boy, you have the good fortune to go to England, and, at a time when the country is crying out for lawyers and political scientists, you study English. You then do research on drama, and return to Nigeria to do research on, of all things, Yoruba drama.

This was a prelude to introducing the opening moments of *A Dance of the Forests*. Jaguna referred to the stage directions as those of “a retarded ten-year-old” and, after the opening five minutes or so of the play had been performed, described the passage, with sarcasm that rebounds on her, as

A magnificent piece of writing I think you will agree. Perhaps Mr Soyinka would care to tell us why he chose to have the nation’s past represented by such despicable creatures, and why the living characters were so lacking in hospitality.

Soyinka’s answer was that Jaguna should read the play, and this led to the presentation, by Prisoner Muallim,” of a response to Soyinka’s essay “From a Common backcloth” that began:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour to speak to you to–night. Were the subject not so serious, it would also be a pleasure. Ladies and gentlemen, the Political Prisoner is a teacher, a man into whose hands we, the child–rearing public, have committed our children, and our children’s MINDS. Friends, in doing so we helped a snake into our house, we brought in the fire–wood and with it brought stinging ants. Brothers let us examine the opinions which the Prisoner expresses in this article and see if we cannot agree that they are nothing short of –heretical. First: Amos Tutuola. I think that we all agree that Amos Tutuola, the author of a book with the title *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and other books with equally ridiculous titles, is a semi-literate. Look at the title: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Drinkard? Drinkard? Who ever heard of a ‘drinkard’? Tutuola is so uneducated that he makes a spelling mistake in the very title of his book. He is clearly to be designated ‘illiterate’, if not ‘bushman’. Yet the Prisoner has a different opinion of Tutuola. He regards Tutuola as, I quote, ‘A truly imaginative writer’. Truly imaginative! Soyinka will be expecting us to have a truly imaginative system of spelling soon, and, indeed, Soyinka, this Political Prisoner, this writer, this lecturer, has started in that way by producing a translation from Yoruba with the title *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, in which demons is spelt D A E MONS. It’s a creeping disease Brothers, but Soyinka approves of it and follows the leadership of Tutuola, a man who is a disgrace to all black men, an affront to the

continent of Africa, a stain on the pure whiteness of African humanity! Enough, as if this were not enough, the Prisoner strides on in his all-slaughtering way and condemns the most sophisticated of African writers, Peter Abrahams. And why? 'Because', I am quoting, 'because his black characters do not have feelings'. Not have feelings? What an idea. What a concept. As if it were not well known that black men have the finest, subtlest, sensitivest feelings of all men.

Prisoner Muallim continued in a similar, confused vein until eventually he rose to a fever-pitch of rhetorical confusion

How on earth does he think that our African writers will ever be accepted by the world unless we – we the African critics – praise them? How does he expect them to accept us if we don't praise them? How? How? How? How?

At that point, Jaguna intervened, and had Muallim moved gently to the side of the stage to cool down. To cut quickly through the rest of the programme: Jaguna summarized *The Strong Breed* as providing support for those who believe "ritual human sacrifice still exists in Africa," and characterized *The Trials of Brother Jero* as setting out to "ridicule religion and to show that the Grace-filled separatists sects in Nigeria are run by [...] opportunistic thieves." The opening of *The Lion and the Jewel* was introduced as coming from a play "stinking with lewdness," and this was followed with comments about the evidence it provided of Soyinka "[indulging his] interest in the salacious and puerile." This was followed in turn by Jaguna's enquiring about Soyinka's involvement in the Ibadan radio station hold-up and a reconstruction of parts of the trial based on an article by John Mortimer. This led on to a discussion of *The Road*, which, Jaguna pointed out, had been produced in London, and in which

Some of the Nigerians on the stage went bare-foot. Bare-foot, Mr Soyinka. And a member of our renowned police force was shown accepting hemp from political thugs as a bribe.

At this, and a number of other points, I had to put words into the mouth of the "Soyinka" character who was being pilloried – an impossible task to complete successfully, as was made clear in the programme. At this point "Soyinka" replied in a way that lifted the discussion of bribery to a higher level:

It has worried me for some time, perhaps you can help me. You seem to have firm opinions. Who are the more responsible: the politicians who waste the country's money buying useless industrial plants in return for bribes from foreign businessmen, or the foreign businessmen who offer the bribes?

Jaguna, deaf to such niceties, then summoned prisoners to perform a scene between Kongi and the Aweris which she linked to Soyinka's criticism, as articulated in his essay "The Writer in an African State," of African leaders as "black tin gods." Jaguna pointed out that this appeared in a journal, *Transition*, that had been exposed as funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. She described the essay as "[deliberately setting out] to undermine the confidence of Africans in their leaders and thus [promoting] subversive NATO policies in the continent."

She also picked up the suggestion in the essay that Africa had once again become a setting for genocide, and it was this theme that took the trial into its final phase, linking up with Soyinka's position in war-torn Nigeria, and his refusal to echo the Federal battle cry: "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done."

Jaguna's final question elicited from "Soyinka" the assertion that he had gone on hunger-strike. Jaguna despaired at this, turning to Judge and audience in anger at Soyinka's recalcitrance. She began:

Exactly. You went on hunger strike. But lately the Prison Psychologist and I thought you were getting better. We made concessions. We kindly permitted you to see your father. We magnanimously allowed you to start an acting group. And how do you repay us? Do you make concessions? Repeat after me; 'To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done'.

When Soyinka refused to repeat this slogan, Jaguna ranted on, various notions slipped into her diatribe, including: "he obliges us to imprison him, he compels us to make a martyr of him, he drives us to elect him the conscience of his people," before she concluded with the following appeal:

Ladies and gentlemen, do not be misled by this actor–opportunist. I can assure you that in glorious, post-independence Africa we keep our prisons for common criminals. You are now in a Nigerian prison and we are part of an organisation and a nation, we have rules and obligations. At present our obligation is 'To keep Nigeria ONE'. Anyone

who shirks this obligation is an enemy and must be removed. Guards!
Assemble the prisoners and lead them to their cells. Ladies and gentlemen
Goodnight! Prisoners chant chant!

All the members of the company, except Soyinka, chanted the Federal slogan as they filed out of the lecture room.

Critical Reactions

After the first night, Alastair Niven, a fellow member of staff in the English Department, edited a critical broadsheet which contained reviews by two students of English, Nana Daniels and Sarah Lynn Nunno. They were the first of a series of critiques, each of which adopted a very different point of view, reflected very varied expectations, and, inevitably, produced widely divergent reactions. Daniels wrote:

The Nigerian Wole Soyinka is a distinguished, epoch-making dramatist of the New Africa, and any person who concerns himself with either the man or his works of art is undoubtedly helping in one way or another, towards the rediscovery of the African's image. However, as I watched the presentation, it seemed to me that this presentation of extracts from Wole Soyinka's works, which runs against the accusation that he (Wole) is facing in prison, has been too nakedly contrived towards emphasizing the 'fuss' the Federal Government is apparently making on what appears (from the presentation) a one-sided political impression of the writer's works of art. One is tempted to ask: Are the accusations against Wole, as we hear them in the presentation, facts from an actual judicial confrontation between Wole and the Federal Court of Justice, or are they from the producer's imagination, as are the words ascribed to the prisoner playing Wole? Again, bearing in mind that it was not possible for the producer to consult Wole about his replies to Jaguna's questions, is the producer not running the double risk of (a) Wole's possible rejection of words ascribed to him? And (b) a possible Federal antagonism?

For her part, Miss Nunno confessed to not having read any of Soyinka's plays and declined to agree or disagree with the accusations levelled at the playwright by Prisoner Jaguna, who, she felt, was "possibly echoing the producer's opinions" [!!]. She went on more confidently:

But one thing is clear: these excerpts bore out the various things she talked about, sometimes supporting the accusations and – as in the

case of Soyinka accusing Nigeria of cannibalistic practices – showing how absurd the accusation is.

Readers who know Soyinka’s plays, and who are familiar with the way in which he uses the motif of cannibalism, will be able to reconstruct the sort of heavy-footed path Jaguna trod, and appreciate how Nunno arrived at her misreading. Irony is not the easiest mode to convey across cultural barriers.

Daniels and Nunno represented the first round of critical reactions. The second round involved an exchange between two Nigerian critics who were already distinguished and have since gone on to establish formidable reputations: Ime Ikiddeh, who was a lecturer in the English Department, and Abiola Irele, who was in the Institute of African Studies. Ikiddeh and Irele, both of whom knew Soyinka personally, began arguing as they left the auditorium. Irele condemned the production for being “tendentious.”

Ikiddeh wrote a supplement to the critical broadsheet that contained the following:

while the evening was a most welcome entertainment, the thought of Soyinka on trial for what amounts to lack of creative integrity was not. The conduct of the trial was enough comment on the values of the accusers and the irony lay in the prisoner’s choice of some of the most celebrated scenes from *Dance of the Forests*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *Kongi’s Harvest*, and the well-known ‘Telephone Conversation’ thrown in.

[...] Was the whole basis of the Gibbs show ‘tendentious,’ as a sensitive member of the audience described it at the end? Perhaps, but just as ‘tendentious’ as any imaginative work expressing an individual writer’s work can be. I saw no suggestion whatever in Mr Gibbs’s theatrical exercise to the effect, for example, that all Nigerians see Soyinka in the same light as the prisoners of Coduno Prison.

Irele’s fiercely critical review, entitled “An Evening with Wole Soyinka,” appeared in the *Legon Observer* for 28 February. It included the following:

It is not enough to admire a writer, one must also understand him. Anyone who is tempted to take that as a mere truism need only to have seen the spectacle which was produced on two consecutive nights last week in the Auditorium of the School of Administration, Legon, and devoted to extracts from the work of Wole Soyinka, to realise the need

to reaffirm so ordinary and so obvious a truth. The vigorous advance publicity that preceded this show led us to expect a truly sympathetic and engaging presentation of Soyinka's writing. What we got rather was a schoolboy's view, in which the complexity of the writer's attitudes and the earnestness of his moral concern disappeared entirely in the evening's atmosphere of levity.

The article went on to accuse me of misjudging and misrepresenting Soyinka, of relying too much "on certain trite notions which constitute the intellectual reflex of those educated people who see and think of themselves as progressives." It concluded:

This so-called *Evening with Wole Soyinka* illustrates the kind of weak-kneed postures that one unfortunately gets when certain sophisticated minds decide to fight their battles with the weapons of intellectual terrorism and moral brow-beating. It is without doubt the last thing that Wole Soyinka would have liked to be associated with, as anyone acquainted with him at all will be well aware.

The ripples caused by these exchanges spread a little wider in the next issue of the *Legon Observer* where Cameron Duodu, an established journalist who had not seen the production, accused Irele himself of "intellectual terrorism." Showing his familiarity with the ironic mode, Duodu wrote:

I find it difficult to believe that the article entitled 'An Evening with Wole Soyinka' (*Legon Observer*, Vol. IV, no 5) was not a hoax perpetrated on the editor by someone who wants to damage Dr Irele permanently. [...] I should like to reassure Mr Gibbs that there are people in this country who admire what he has done. So he should not bother his head about criticisms of the sort purporting to come from Dr Irele.

The production found another champion in Professor Bryn Davies of the English Department, a letter by whom was published in the *Legon Observer* of 28 March.

I sent copies of *Soyinka/Jaguna* to some of those I knew to be interested in Soyinka's work. Professor Eldred Jones wrote on 24 April 1969 to say that he had read the script and found it

very interesting as an introduction to [Soyinka's] work on the one hand, and the ignorant philistine reaction it is capable of producing.

The result is a polarization of sensitive artist and obtuse official which makes your point economically, but perhaps at the expense of subtlety.

Charles R. Larson, who was teaching at American University, Washington DC, used the script as the basis for an item that appeared in *The Nation* on 15 September. He wrote:

The play's significance lies not in its literary or propagandistic methods (strongly pro-Soyinka) but in suggesting the great interest African students and intellectuals all over the Continent are taking in Soyinka's yet to be decided fate.

Gibbs has written a bitterly ironic play which reflects the insecure position of the intellectual in Africa today and the political inanities of the Nigerian–Biafran War.

When Soyinka was released, I sent a copy of the text to him – with a note to the effect that I anticipated his disapproval. A little under a month later, on the 3rd November, quite soon after returning to Ibadan, Soyinka wrote:

Scripts read with great interest. No, no wrath coming. I find your experiment too intriguing for disapproval. Not entirely successful, of course, but then I'm naturally prejudiced, knowing far more of the Wole Soyinka events than you do. I appreciate what you tried to do very much.

Alas, rumours were natural in the circumstances. The rumour that I was running a drama group was real enough to bring a Gestapo squad in to investigate. They found me, as I was for over eighteen months, staring at four blank walls. I regret life did not have any of the excitements you so imaginatively depict. Just four walls and nothing.

As can be imagined, this response went some way towards removing the pain inflicted by Irele's review. I set it against the critic's observation that the evening was "the last thing that Soyinka would have liked to be associated with, as anyone acquainted with him at all will be well aware."

Of course, these letters came after I had moved on to other things – in fact, after the "Legon 7," a name that combined echoes of the concert-party groups with various posses of political dissidents, had emerged out of the Mensah Sarbah Hall Drama Group. The transformation took place in the course of putting on *Frimpong and Lucy*.

Frimpong and Lucy

While an undergraduate at Bristol, I had played Fulgens in Henry Medwell's Tudor interlude *Fulgens and Lucrece*, and even before going to Ghana I had toyed with the idea of adapting that play to a West African setting. Soon after my arrival in Ghana, I saw Saka Acquaye's 'folk opera' *The Lost Fishermen* and observed the audience's delight at the staging of man/woman relationships. I also read books by Ghanaian authors, including E.K. Mickson's *Who Killed Lucy?* (1967) and Amu Alexander Djoleto's *The Strange Man* (1968). The first influenced me as far as the names of characters in my adaptation were concerned, and the second gave me a basis from which I could develop the character of Fulgens, or Frimpong.

Ghana was, at that time, November 1968, under military rule, and I decided to give topicality to my script by presenting the rivals for Lucy's hand as representatives of the military and of the academic community. The Major and the Tutor stood for two of the most obvious pressure-groups in the country. Medwell's A and B, two young men who step out of the audience and seek employment as servants to the two suitors, provided few problems, and the lady's maid, whom they besiege in a subplot, created little difficulty.

I was fortunate to find actors, seven in number, who could make something of the characters, or types, I had created. The cast was as follows: A.K.K. Kwaa (Frimpong), Patience Dowuona-Hammond (Lucy), G.K. Botwe Asamoah (Major), Kofi Adu (Tutor), Theresa Azu (Maid), Seth Ashong-Katai (A), and Peter Kweku Nti (B). I had also, by the second term of my contract and after *Soyinka/Jaguna*, made contact with experienced assistance: Walter Pople helped with transport and arranged the lights; Mitch Strumf looked after the music.

Frimpong and Lucy opened at Commonwealth Hall's Open-Air Theatre on 8 May 1969 and ran there for three nights. The Open-Air Theatre had been constructed on a Grecian pattern but without a Greek awareness of the importance of sight-lines and acoustics: the 'bowl' is too flat, the position too exposed, and members of the audience often find themselves too far from the action to hear or to feel involved. I came across some platforms rotting away in a corner of the campus – I think they had been discarded after serving their purpose at some official function or other – and these were moved to the orchestra of the theatre, where

they formed a very adequate thrust stage. Seats were arranged close to the edges of the platforms and, as part of the ‘elizabethization’, the actors were provided with a ‘tiring house’. This consisted of a screen of red and black tie-dye purchased from a well-known local entrepreneur, Mrs Nkulenu. This form of staging was economical, made effective use of the facilities available, was pleasingly true to the conditions under which Medwell’s play had been presented, and was satisfyingly different from the feeble attempts at naturalism which characterized many Ghanaian productions at that time. The convention was quickly accepted, and the moments when it was stretched, as when A and B started speaking from among the audience, created a genuine frisson of excitement.

After the production, I wrote home, with the enthusiasm of comparative youth, as follows:

Well, *Frimpong and Lucy* has just finished a three-night run in the open-air Greek-style theatre at the top of Legon Hill. [...] The actors, without exception, have enjoyed their parts and the audiences have been outraged, delighted, uncontrollable. It is, in some ways immensely gratifying to send arms waving wildly, friends embracing over three rows and laughter continuing for fifteen seconds. But it is fairly easy to do – for example – when the Major pretends that he has no knife in order to get the Maid off the stage and be alone with Lucy there are ecstatic cries of ‘Cold chop!’ (i.e. the code name for the coup which deposed Nkrumah) and ‘Enhaoro’ (‘to enahoro’ your room mate is to get rid of him when your girl friend visits you: derived, of course, from the extradited Chief.) When the Maid says to Lucy: ‘... and the Tutor will lose,’ there are cheers and shouts of ‘You lose, you lose!’ (The students resent the tutors with whom they ‘clash’ over girls, and shout ‘you lose’ or ‘you lie’ in order to put off a boxer or a footballer.) When Frimpong tells Lucy to consider herself a ‘free agent,’ there is raucous recognition of a piece of campus slang. (‘Free agent’ has replaced ‘unguided missile’ as the description for an unchaperoned girl.)

You can imagine that, with responses like these, I did not feel I was altogether in control either as writer or producer. But – people enjoyed it. Our audiences were quite large. 1,400 programmes disappeared and there were large groups of schoolboys who shared one between them. Some of the University students came for all three nights! I should estimate that about 2,500 saw it in all. (Of course, I may be way out.)

I have been asked by Ghana Broadcasting to do it on TV and by Efua Sutherland to take it to the Drama Studio. The cast has asked me to arrange for them to give it in Cape Coast.

The production was reviewed by Bryn Davies, as well as by Alastair Niven, at that time combining teaching in the Department with work on an MA as a Commonwealth Scholar, in a critical broadsheet. It also provoked an editorial in *The Echo*, the magazine of Commonwealth Hall, which was followed by a review in the same publication. The responses were “mixed” and give some idea of the interest in, as well as the shortcomings of, the text. Davies wrote:

The production was admirably timed and went with a verve and a swing which testified to the amount of work put into it by both producer and actors. Naturally the civil servant, Frimpong, held the centre of the stage and he played up very well indeed. The diction left something to be desired, but fortunately enough got over the noisy appreciation of the amphitheatre at some of the jokes to make the play much clearer and easier to understand than the production in the School of Administration of *An Evening with Wole Soyinka*. It happened that the plot fitted Ghana’s cap very well. My chief criticism is that the two boys [A and B] should have been clearer, though their clowning was amusing and that the climax of the play with the disqualification of the Major should have been better engineered.

Alastair Niven began his review by placing the production in the context of theatrical productions at Legon during the late 1960s:

Like dogs walking on their hind-legs and women preaching and Mr Gbedemah being permitted to form a political party when he is publicly indicted of massive embezzlement, one is not so much impressed by the quality of James Gibbs’s play as by the fact that he was able to put it on at all. There has been a disgraceful lack of dramatic activity at Legon this year and Mr Gibbs’s two offerings [...] have almost single-handedly filled the vacuum.

Mr Gibbs operates as a producer, as a director and as a playwright. As a producer he excels. To get a play mounted at Legon is a task that has defeated more experienced people, among them Francis Ferguson a foremost American expert on drama who visited the University a few years ago. To mount it only days before the exams, and to play it to a handsomely filled house for three successive nights is important. If it can be done in May, how much more ambitious a production could be

presented in November or December? As a director Mr Gibbs has a firm control of theatrical techniques – his unobtrusive lighting, the bold splash of maroon tie-dye which served as an elongated screen, and the projected floor-level stage which allowed the audience to sit on three sides of the play, all exploited the Commonwealth Hall Amphitheatre better than I have seen it used before. The cast was encouraged to project their voices into the night air without any sense of effort or thrust. The group was expertly handled so that in the long duologues (too long, some of them) there was sufficient movement to absorb the eye. The occasional moments of fussy detail, such as the soldier's inexperienced military drilling, broke up the relaxed motion of the play (but should it have been so relaxed? One missed any real boisterousness) and were not intrinsically funny, but the general pitch of the play was restrained and controlled. I am least happy with Mr Gibbs's third talent, his aptitude for writing plays. His model for *Frimpong and Lucy* is Henry Medwell's *Fulgens and Lucrece* which is, in itself such a bastardised and thalidomised rendition of a possibly Roman original that no one can object to a further transplant that removes the heart of the play to Ghana. Mr Gibbs has attempted a satire on Accra and Legon society. The gentle, if inaccurate, abuse of the army and the University flows thick and fast, but it is hard not to find the humour second-rate and the satire tawdry. Much of the 'wit' is based on innuendo. Frimpong has only to refer to the 'sexual habits of university students' to have the said students literally rolling in the aisles. This is 'in' humour for the initiated, and most of the Europeans who have not been based at Legon for some time looked incomprehensibly at the play as Legon jargon alternated with Ghanaian pidgin. True, the play was not principally designed for the outsider, but humour that relies for its effects on snide implication is not really humour at all, but gossip.

Mr Gibbs has an ear for bizarre phraseology, but this is no substitute for wit and apart from a single reference to the price for which Christ was sold, there was not a felicitous verbal stroke in the play. This would not have mattered (Mr Gibbs is not trying to emulate Congreve or Wilde) if the situations had been funnier, but every scene went on too long and laughs were milked from a single joke – that Ghanaian society is sexually obsessed and morally corrupt, but who cares, because it is all jolly good fun and no-one gets hurt. *Frimpong and Lucy* is intended as a light romp and one is perhaps missing the point to be over-solemn about it, but it is hard not to feel that it is pandering to the lowest common denominator in humour. Constructionally the play is

neat, but the ending is blurred, with an over-rushed volte-face by Frimpong in which he changes his favours from the Soldier to the Tutor, and the scheming maid-servant is left unattached.

[...]

Mr Gibbs clearly has a feeling for comic style and a sense of burlesque. I would like to see these very valuable talents directed towards a Jacobean or Restoration comedy, or to a Soyinka play, for the time is fast approaching when a whole generation of Legon undergraduates will have passed through the campus believing *Frimpong and Lucy*, Henshaw, re-written Molière, and their like, to be the apex of social comment and satirical comedy. A self-indulgent romp like *Frimpong and Lucy* is all right once. Let's have something that is seriously comic next time.

The Editor of *The Echo* was more easily pleased. In the issue dated 17 May, he described the play as “interesting and informative” and continued:

No matter what induced (the play-conscious students from all over campus) to throng to the theatre for the three nights, the time spent there was worth the ‘wasted man hours’ and nobody will ever regret watching the play on three occasions, considering the pleasure and entertainment it offered.

The play actually depicts life here on the Legon Campus, and it is doubtful whether the uninitiated understood our hootings when certain speeches were made. Nevertheless they also had their own moments of pleasure and enjoyment.

B.S. Orioko, writing in the next issue of the same publication, saw “more than the Editor could discern.” “The satirical note sounded in the play goes,” he maintained, “deeper and wider than Legon Society and, in fact, touches almost every aspect of African Society.” He concluded:

Thus, the play makes meaning to the philosopher, the sociologist and the student of literature alike. Four major aspects of our developing society are satirised: unemployment, anti-intellectual feeling, corruption and immorality.

Long-Vacation Tour 1969

Encouraged by the response to the performances if not by all the notices, the company, by this time firmly known as “The Legon 7,” was keen to revive the production at the end of the Summer term. Performances were arranged for the Drama Studio, Accra; the Lecture Theatre, Commonwealth Hall; the Auditorium, University College, Cape Coast, and the Great Hall, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

Despite rain, we were able to show a reasonable profit from the Accra performance, and back at Commonwealth Hall we drew a capacity audience. The visit to Cape Coast had to be cancelled because electrical faults had developed in the Great Hall there. We were, however, able to go to Kumasi, where, thanks to help from the (Kumasi) University Drama Society, we had good houses and a pleasant visit.

The tour was allocated considerable space in the local press, far more, in fact, than we received for subsequent tours. But it was a sad comment on the state of theatrical criticism and of journalism generally that, while room was found for almost verbatim transcripts of publicity material, not a single review of the play appeared.

Frimpong and Lucy generated a certain amount of wider interest. Alastair Niven interviewed me about it for the Africa Service of the BBC; the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation wanted to televise it, and the University of Ghana Press showed some interest in publishing the text. However, in the event the play was neither televised nor published.

Other Long-Vacation Projects

During the long vacation in 1969, I was asked by the Committee of the Accra-based International Drama Group to prepare a script for them. I set to work and at the beginning of September was able to send a text to a Mr Macullum. I had dramatized three stories, two Yoruba, one Chaucerian, and the intention was that these should be performed by a “Yoruba Comic Theatre Group” and a band of European comedians who drew inspiration from the *commedia dell’arte*. The idea was that the two groups should arrive at the same venue at approximately the same time and argue about who had booked it. In the course of the dispute, the differences between men and women were to become more important than those between Africans and Europeans. The problem was to be resolved by the groups deciding to join forces and put on a show that, in effect, revealed the con-

siderable affinities between the folk cultures of two continents. After several months, the scripts found their way back to me, and I was left to assume that they had been rejected. I did not, however, consider the work wasted, and I incorporated ideas from them into two subsequent scripts, *Couples* and *Ethiopian Opera*.

At about the same period, I worked on a dramatization of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. I concentrated attention on the fall of Coomson and envisaged that the descriptive passages could be replaced by back-projections. I sent a copy of the script to Curtis Brown, who, I understood, controlled the performance rights of Armah's work, but I did not hear from them or from Armah. In retrospect, this does not surprise me, since I now know how protective he is about his work.

I also worked on three projects which did see the light of the stage: *An Evening with Soyinka*, a dramatization of parts of Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters*, and an arrangement of material by Bertolt Brecht, which became the production mentioned by Graham-White, and attracted the attention of David Kerr.

At quite short notice, an occasion presented itself to fill an evening with readings of Soyinka's work for a group of British teachers. I arranged for a number of the less well-known and more 'public' poems by African writers to be read by one of the cast of *Frimpong and Lucy*, Seth Ashong-Katai, with introductory comments presented by a past student of the School of Drama, Patience Addo, who had already made invaluable contributions to productions. The poetry was followed by a showing of the Transcription Centre's film version of *The Swamp Dwellers*, which I had imported.

The Swamp Dwellers was on the School Certificate syllabus, and I was able to show the film to student groups and arrange for it to be sent to a number of schools and colleges. The print was eventually lost in the post – but not before it had formed part of the first Legon 7 programme of the 1969–70 academic year, a double-bill consisting of the film and extracts from *The Interpreters*, a script which I entitled *The Interlopers*.

The Interlopers

The Interpreters is a notoriously 'difficult' novel and its reputation has deterred many potential readers. At that time, copies were difficult to obtain in Ghana: I pointed out in the programme notes that the book had

not been on sale in the campus bookshop during the 1968–69 academic year. My script put on stage a few of the more dramatic and more easily staged moments from a novel which is clearly the work of a man whose first love is the theatre.

The Interlopers – the reference is to the party sequence that provides a climax to the book and provided the main focus of interest in my script – was presented on the stage of the lecture theatre of Commonwealth Hall. To the bewilderment of many of the audience and both of the student critics who contributed to the subsequent critical broadsheet, I employed a more or less symbolic theatrical convention. Although place was clearly established by the text, it was represented on the stage by pools of light and by a minimum of properties; actors not involved in an exchange ‘froze’ while the drama went on around them. One of the most vivid recollections I have of the preparations involves not a rehearsal but the purchasing of plastic fruit and flowers for the Oguazor’s house. I was astounded at the cost of these revolting items!

The cast was as follows:

Sagoe	Kofi Adu
Egbo	Mohammed Ben-Abdallah
Bandele	E.A. Annor
She	Cecilia Amponsah
Ayo Faseyi	P.K. Nti
Monica Faseyi	Deirdre Gentner
Prof. Oguazor	Collins Asare
Mrs Oguazor	Theresa Azu
Dr Lumoye	Felix Yamoah
Mr Pinkshore	Tim Mason
Mrs Pinkshore	Caroline Simpson

The production crew:

Lighting	Walter Pople
Sound	Don Gentner
Stage Crew	G.K. Botwe–Asamoah
	Suzi Akuetteh
Properties	Josephine Zagbede
Front of House	R.K. Addo
	Gregory Beyir

From this list it will be appreciated that the Legon 7 was an expanding company, and that while some regular performers were well-established in the company there was also room for new talent – both home-grown and imported. The support team brought together a welcome variety of talents. Walter Pople, for example, was one of those whose technical expertise had previously been enlisted by Efua Sutherland and Joe de Graft at the University.

Critical Reactions

The reviews, by A.P. Acheampong and P.V.A. Adamaley, were in a quite different mood from those which previous productions had provoked. Acheampong began:

The applause of the audience was a gauge of the success of *The Interlopers* on the Legon stage. The play was interesting and quite well performed. It has a relevance to University life. The action centres around the cocktail party celebrating the appointment of Oguazor as Professor. The theme is sexual morality as seen by the young and the old.

Acheampong then handed out some cautious praise: “the individual actors [...] did quite well in impersonating their character,” and some gentle criticisms: “It was difficult [...] to realize that the Professor’s cocktail party was a party in spite of the drinks. It didn’t conform in essentials to the one or two cocktail parties I have attended.” His conclusion incorporated a strange assessment of the playwright’s position:

It seems the doctor’s thematic position was slurred over. According to the plot, the doctor tried and failed to seduce the girl and this explains why he brings out the fact of her pregnancy. In a vindictive spirit he extends his moral condemnation to other girls. This hypocrisy of the doctor does not come out clearly enough. One gets the impression that the playwright sides with the ‘old guard’, and this gives the play a puritanic twist. This impression is not corrected even by Bandle’s counter stroke when he repeatedly tells the doctor: ‘You put death before dishonour’. I think in one way or the other the doctor’s attempt and failure to seduce the girl ought to have been shown on the stage to enable the audience to infer the insincerity of his later posture as a moralist. In spite of its success, I think *The Interlopers* could be improved – in the light of the points I have raised.

Adamaley concentrated on specific points, writing appreciatively of the care with which relationships and characters had been presented. He concluded as follows:

All the processes described above are compacted into staccato movements emphasising the uncertain relations between the participants. The regulated motions further aid the audience or readers to have sufficient time to discern the mode of thoughts that prompts the writer's pen.

During the weeks that followed, the Legon 7 helped to prepare for a visit from the Drama Society of the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, in Lionel K. Idan's *We Shall Overcome*, and began work on the production of an evening of work by Brecht.

Of Brecht

Brecht was not by any means unknown at Legon, some years before *Mother Courage*, with Maya Angelou in the title role, had been performed, and several of Brecht's plays were on a Modern Drama course which I had been given responsibility for teaching from the beginning of my second year. The script I prepared owed something to a programme in which I had taken part at the University of Bristol and included a number of poems (including "Thoughts of a Studious Working Man" and "The Legend of the Dead Soldier"). I also incorporated a performance of *The Trial of Lucullus* and an abbreviated version of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The evening was prepared in such a way as to embody certain of Brecht's principles and practices.

The following extracts from the programme indicate some of the ambitions embodied in the production:

In a university setting teaching is obviously in place. In university drama experiment is particularly appropriate. *Of Brecht* is both didactic and experimental. The didacticism is, however, characteristic of Brecht's own teaching methods in that it is embodied in dramatic dialogue and dramatic action. Thus, the audience not only hears about Brecht's concepts of 'a smokers' theatre', the 'alienation effect' and 'ensemble playing', it also sees them in action – this at least is the intention.

The format employed in *Of Brecht* permits a wide range of Brecht's work to be brought within a 'single framework'. The selection from

his writings includes: poetry in various moods and plays with different settings – historical, industrial, Eastern – which express different visions – narrowed by ideology or broadened so as to be comprehensively humane.

Of Brecht has been devised with the intention of creating the minimum number of production problems while affording the maximum amount of effective, Brechtian theatre. Thus the cast is small, the distribution of roles does not demand too much from any single actor, the staging and costume requirements are few. In the commentary between the extracts, issues are raised which are of some interest for the Ghanaian Theatre. The points are made that, like Brecht, the Ghanaian Theatre lived through a period when it was more or less committed to an ideology. And that, unlike Brecht, it sometimes gives the impression of being fearful of eclecticism.

Finally, an irreverent attitude to Brecht's work is encouraged by his own attitude to the writings of others and by the moral of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*:

That what there is shall belong to those that are good for it,
Thus the children to the maternal, that they may thrive;
The carriages to the good drivers, that they may be driven well;
And the valley to the waterers, that it shall bear fruit.

The production was mounted on the impressive flight of steps leading to the dining-room of Mensah Sarbah Hall on 11th and 12th December 1969. The cast-list included veterans of productions and a number of new faces: Defie Agyarko, Christian Fasinte, Prosper Adamaley, Peter Nti, Patience Dowuona-Hammond, Esther Bodza Lumor, Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, Maxwell Lamptey, Francis Yartey, Josephine Zagbede, John Afolabi, Irene Rawlings, Cecelia Amponsah, C.E. Quampah, Genevieve Nasser, James Gibbs, and Suzi Akuetteh. Music was provided by Mitch Strumf and Gill Gordon. Messrs Asiedu, in the Porters' Lodge, and Turkson, in the English Department Office, provided invaluable support.

Writing with more élan than in his previous foray into dramatic criticism, A.P. Acheampong began his review in the first issue of a new campus publication, *The Forum*:

Of Brecht has blazed a trail. It was a magnificent introduction to Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) – to his works, to his spirit of experimentation, to his concern for the progress of theatrical art as an instrument for ennobling and enriching man's life. Brecht concludes his essay 'On

Experimental Theatre' by asking 'How can the unfree, ignorant man of our century, with his thirst for freedom and his hunger for knowledge, how can the tortured and heroic, abused and ingenuous, changeable and world-changing man of this great and ghastly century obtain his own theatre which will help him to master the world and himself?' The *Of Brecht* production was an instance of the attempt to answer this question.⁴

Acheampong went on to find opportunities to praise the production. He wrote: "The substance of the extracts was powerfully brought home on the stage" and "The transitions from the poems to the plays and from one play to the other were smooth and brisk." He concluded:

Considering the novelties in the production and the success of the two performances, I think *Of Brecht* is a producer's masterpiece.

At which point, it is only fair to point out that Acheampong, as readers may have guessed, was a student in the Modern Drama course that I was teaching – and marking.

Incidentally, in retrospect the show and the staging may have been influential. A little more than twenty years after this production. Ben-Abdallah, by then a seasoned playwright and an office-holder in the government led by J.J. Rawlings, was able to call on vast resources to mount a production to entertain delegates attending a summit of Non-Aligned Nations. For the occasion, he chose to return to Brecht, and transformed *The Good Woman of Setzuan* into *The Land of a Million Magicians*. He chose to put his version on in the Arts Centre, where he, essentially, recreated the flight of steps we had used for *Of Brecht*. Incidentally, *pace* Kerr, Ben-Abdallah was not involved on the production side in 1969.

The Legion Road Theatre

At this point, thinking of Kerr's paragraph, it is convenient to say a few words about a group called the Legion Road Theatre, which was beginning to make a name for itself at this time. Among the students in the School of Music and Drama and their friends were several ambitious young performers who wanted to take plays to schools and colleges. The group included Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, who had had considerable experience

⁴ P.A. Acheampong, "Of Brecht," *The Forum* (Legon) 1.1 (March 1970): 5–6.

of school and college drama, and was a student in the diploma course offered in the School of Music and Drama. He had taken leading roles in *The Interlopers* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and under his leadership scenes from *Macbeth* had been performed at schools in Accra. Against great odds and despite numerous betrayals, he established a working relationship with a small company of fellow students.

I encouraged him to extend the group's repertoire to include some of Soyinka's poetry and to put on *The Fall*, by "Obotunde Ijimere," who, at that time, I believed to be a Nigerian playwright. When I later discovered that "Obotunde Ijimere" was a *nom de plume* for Ulli Beier, I did not change my opinion about the play – a pidgin-English dramatization of parts of *Genesis* with many allusions to the Yoruba world-view and ample opportunity for dance and spectacle. With great zeal and some assistance from me, Ben-Abdallah cast, costumed, blocked, and rehearsed the play. I recall happy hours spent in and around the flat I occupied in Mensah Sarbah Hall, with Gill Gordon, Ceclia Amponsah, and Ben-Abdallah, making masks, and in Commonwealth Hall amphitheatre attending rehearsals. In March 1970, *The Fall* formed part of a double-bill with Eugène Ionesco's *The Leader* mounted by the Legon 7, in which Ben-Abdallah played the eponymous hero.

The Leader

Ionesco's play had been put on at Legon in the early 1960s, but I felt it was worth doing again, since it offered an introduction to the Theatre of the Absurd and made a political comment which it was appropriate to repeat at the beginning of the 1970s.

Once again the Open-Air Theatre of Commonwealth Hall was the venue, and once again the apron that had served so well for *Frimpong and Lucy* was installed. For the occasion, I designed a set that made use, once again, of tie-dye cloth – this time suspended from frames made of wa-wa, a very light wood. I recall making a lorry trip up to the Akuapem Ridge with Ben-Abdallah to purchase the wood.

I understood that some nervous members of the audience had walked out of the previous production of *The Leader*. The director, George Lawson, recorded their fear that if they hadn't done so it might be have been assumed that they agreed with parallels which could be drawn between the (headless) leader in the play and the Ghanaian head of state – Kwame Nkrumah, then well into his personality-cult phase.

No such reactions occurred in the very different political climate which obtained in the country during March 1970. The production, while well-received, did not provoke either a walk out or any written reviews. The photographs and memories of those who were in it or who saw it are the only records of a colourful and hard-hitting piece.

The Fall went on to establish itself in the repertoire of the Legon Road Theatre and was presented, using the Legon 7's set and in a sense 'in affiliation with' the group, on a circuit from Keta to Busua. Meanwhile, the Legon 7 was preparing another production, *Couples*, and looking towards its second end-of-year tour.

Couples

The text of *Couples* consisted, logically enough, of scenes between men and women. I intended (see Niven above) to present audiences with "some serious comic work," extend the range of the fare on the theatrical menu at Legon, and provide audiences with a thematically cohesive selection of scenes. Fragmenting the programme in this way would also enable me, I hoped, to rehearse effectively: so long as the two principals in each scene turned up, some work could be done.

A word should be said at this point about the wider theatrical context in which I was working. I have already had occasion to mention concert parties, and these were flourishing, providing popular entertainment and political commentaries in whatever suitable spaces they could find in the densely populated parts of Accra and on tour in towns and villages. The International Drama Group was putting on polished and ambitious productions – for example, they did *Arms and the Man* (Shaw) and *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Edward Bond). Saka Acquaye's Dumas Choir was giving occasional performances of the much-revived but still-popular *Lost Fishermen*. Down the road from Legon, at Achimota, a tradition of Molière and Gilbert and Sullivan productions was being maintained, while in other schools there was a fair range of experimentation, from *She Stoops to Conquer* to plays about the Second World War. At the Arts Centre and Drama Studio, stalwarts of the Ghanaian theatre, including George Andoh Wilson, Evans Oma Hunter, and Efua Sutherland, were labouring to establish and extend a repertoire. I particularly recall productions of *Kongi's Harvest*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *Foriwa* associated with the three directors I have just mentioned. The Freelance Players, a group made up of those who had studied drama at Legon, were active in town.

On campus, however, theatrical delights were few, the most exciting evening being provided by Ola Rotimi’s Ori Olokun players, who travelled from Nigeria to thrill student audiences with *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. While this evidence was being provided of neighbouring theatrical enterprise, the theatre specialists on campus were surprisingly unproductive. The School of Music and Drama was going through a difficult time. Joe de Graft, who had worked tirelessly to build up the School, was under pressure and, indeed, was soon to depart for Kenya. J. Scott-Kennedy, while huffing and puffing about a cultural revolution in the pages of the *Legon Observer*, was singularly failing to foster any kind of theatrical excitement. Students at the School did put on some plays, including *The Jewels of the Shrine* (Henshaw) and Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero*, but there was, as was clear from the number of drama students who became involved in Legon 7 productions, an abundance of under-exploited talent and enthusiasm. For further insight into Scott-Kennedy’s approach, the reader is invited to read “closely and critically” his book entitled *In Search of African Theatre*.

Feeling that my position in the English Department obliged me to expose students to a wider range of theatrical experiences than was immediately available, I cast and rehearsed three scenes. One was from *The School for Scandal* by Sheridan (“The Teazles”), one from *The Lesson* by Ionesco, and the third from *Murderous Angels* by Conor Cruise O’Brien. Each scene featured a man and a woman, and together they made up the aforementioned *Couples*. In the event, the Ionesco was never performed, because the actress involved fell ill, and the Sheridan was not put on until we reached Cape Coast.

End-of-Year Tour 1970

The programme for the end-of-year tour was as follows:

Sat. 20 June	Winneba: Specialist Training College	<i>The Fall</i> <i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> (from <i>Of Brecht</i>)
Mon. 22 June	Legon: The Auditorium, School of Administration	<i>Couples</i> <i>Frimpong and Lucy</i> <i>The Fall</i>
Tue. 23 June	Cape Coast: The Auditorium, Science Lecture Block	<i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> (from <i>Of Brecht</i>) <i>The Fall</i>

Wed. 24 June	Cape Coast: Auditorium, Science Lecture Block	<i>The Teazles</i> <i>Frimpong and Lucy</i>
Thu. 25 June	Kumasi: The Great Hall, Univ. of Science and Tech.	<i>The Fall</i> <i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>
Fri. 26 June	Kumasi: Wesley College	<i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> <i>The Fall</i>
Sat. 27 June	Kumasi: Wesley College	<i>The Teazles</i> <i>Frimpong and Lucy</i>

From this it can be seen that productions from the very early days of the Legon 7, *Frimpong and Lucy*, from the middle (*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was taken out of *Of Brecht*), and from the end (*The Teazles* from Sheridan’s play) were brought together. The bus normally used by Efua Sutherland’s Kusum Agoromba was hired and the tour went ahead despite, I wrote soon after it was over, “numerous difficulties, some criminal instances of lack of co-operation and many mechanical failures.” I added: “The sheer irresponsibility of some members of the company was balanced by the sensitivity and good sense of others, and all the shows were performed in the right place, on the right day, at almost the right time.”

Unfortunately, we only had full houses on the 20th and the 27th, and on both occasions the halls we were using were small. As a result, the tour was financially disastrous, but by any other criteria it represented a success. The number of productions toured, of performers, and of towns and cities visited constituted a vast increase over the previous year. Even more encouraging was the fact that the existence of the Legon Road Theatre and the production of *The Fall* meant that within the tour there was a group ready to move on. This represented a sign of growth for the future.

Conclusion

Looking back more over than a quarter of a century, one sees the ambitions and preconceptions of a twenty-six-year-old drawing on his experience and reading, and there is much that I would do differently now. The programme I embarked on was the product of my experience and of my thinking at the time. While at university in Bristol, I had acted in *Fulgens and Lucrece* and had taken part in an evening of Brecht’s poems and plays. As a postgraduate student at American University, Washington DC, I had read what African plays I could get hold of and had developed an admiration for the work of Wole Soyinka. On a visit to London, I had picked up texts, such as *The Fall*, in Dillon’s University Bookshop – at

that time a treasure-house for those interested in African writing. And, once at Legon, I found myself living in a student hall of residence without, initially, a workload that included my real interest – drama. Looking beyond the Legon 7, I would put on record that, after two fulfilling years in Ghana, I returned to Bristol, where I did an M.Litt. thesis on “Drama and Nationalism.” From Bristol I applied for a post in the English Department at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, which carried with it particular responsibility for drama work in the university. I have no doubt that what I was able to tell the interview panel about my work in Ghana convinced them that I would be a suitable appointee for the vacancy. But what happened there is part of another story. At this juncture I will just quote two more sentences from David Kerr, who was a member of staff in the English Department, in Malawi, when I joined it:

[James Gibbs’s] experience with the Legon Road Theatre contributed much to the injection of energy he gave to the University of Malawi Travelling Theatre, which had been started in 1970, and which Gibbs took control of in 1971. Two of Gibbs’ earliest productions in Malawi were former ‘hits’ from the Legon Road Theatre.⁵

In fact, I arrived in Malawi in 1972, and the first production I put on consisted of *Ten Short Plays*. These included *The Trial of Lucullus*, which I had done in Ghana, and “The Beginning,” which I wrote myself but which, at the risk of making an unwarranted assumption, I suspect Kerr confused with *The Fall*. In arranging that initial programme, particularly in the complex dealings it involved with the Censorship Board, I was hugely indebted to David Kerr. But all that very definitely is ‘another story’, and is part of his sustained and courageous opposition to Hastings Banda’s tyrannical rule in the “Warm Heart of Africa.”

I now want to return to the situation in Ghana, to make a few general comments, and to point out where some of the loose ends are lying. I recognize that I was fortunate, at Legon towards the end of the 1960s, to find students who were prepared to work together and to juggle the many responsibilities they had in order to fulfil their commitment to productions. Some of them I have unfortunately lost touch with; several of them remain close friends.

⁵ Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 139.

Since ending my contact with VSO, I have visited Ghana on many occasions. I spent January to August 1994 as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Ghana, teaching in both the Department of English and the School of Performing Arts – the mask behind which the School of Music and Dance currently operates. On arrival, I found that I was working with Ben-Abdallah, who had by that time returned to a university post after holding cabinet-level political offices. In the Dance Section was G.K. Botwe–Asamoah, while in town, at the newly-built National Theatre, Nii Yartey was directing the National Dance Ensemble. Other ex-members of the Legon 7, including Peter Kweku Nti, were involved in productions put on by the International Drama Group. I was able to introduce students to a very accessible Soyinka text, *Childe Internationale*, that had not made the jump from Nigeria to Ghana despite having been written thirty years earlier. And I had experience as a participant observer in an acting role when Yorkshire Television arrived to make a film.

It was no surprise that I should return to Ghana. It was, after all the home of my wife, the mother of our two children, Patience Addo, an actress, a teacher, a research, a published playwright, an experienced woman of the theatre, who had been deeply involved in the Legon 7. She was and remains a tower of strength.

11 Victim of the Third World War

Filmmaking in Ghana:
The Dying of the Light (1994)¹

The Cocktail Party

“I SUSPECT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DAY regretted letting in the people who made *Cobra Verde*. This project will be quite different – it shows the real problems of Africa.” The government referred to in this snatch of cocktail-party chit-chat is the government of Ghana; *Cobra Verde* a somewhat sensational film; “This project,” Yorkshire Television’s (YTV’s) *The Dying of the Light*; and the “problems” referred to those that have ripped Liberia and Somalia apart.

During the period of filming *Sean Devereux* (later re-titled with a phrase from a Dylan Thomas poem: “Rage, rage against the dying of the light”) in Ghana, there was a military coup in the Gambia, Nigeria was pushed to the brink of chaos by a general strike, and scenes of unspeakable horror from Rwanda filled television screens. Sadly, promoters of the *Devereux* film can be grimly confident that when their show hits the screens – and it is to be part of ITV’s examination of the arms trade, violence and refugees in Africa – the debate about the role of international “peace-keeping” groups will be in the news.

¹ This was written as an anecdotal account providing background to YTV’s production of *The Dying of the Light* – “a tragic casualty of truth in the third world war” – on 16 November 1994, as part of a week-long television programme focusing on the impact of the arms trade.

The Rumours

On the fringes of a film project – around the sprocket-holes of the rejected footage on the editing-room floor – rumours circulate. The Ghana project was no exception. Word had it that *Sean Devereux* was YTV's major drama project for the year. A 'docudrama', it was said by some to have a budget of £2.5 million – and, by others more credulous, to have a budget of £22 million. That would roughly make sense if one had converted into Ghanaian cedis at last autumn's rate of 1,000 to the £, but, the speaker insisted, it was 22 million "pounds sterling." Such is the nature of rumour in a country where it has been defiantly asserted: "As for rumours, we will monger!"

Shot as a high-quality production, feature-film standard rather than TV fodder, *Sean Devereux* is a serious study of a remarkable young man, first teacher then aid-worker, whose death at the hand of a boy soldier in Somalia raised questions about the role of international organizations.

Originally, it seems, all the African filming was going to be done in Kenya – a substitute for both Liberia and Somalia. But the advantages of Ghana were pressed by those with local contacts. Politically fairly stable, with relatively extensive resources for filmmaking, and part of the same sub-region as Liberia, Ghana had much to offer. "Come and look at possible locations, meet the friendly, cooperative people, assess the film-industry's infrastructure." Influential people did. The rest followed.

The Soldiers

The approval of the Ghanaian government was apparent from the ministerial-level representation at the cocktail party already referred to which launched the filming of the project around the middle of July 1994. Its support was rubbed in daily while shooting lasted by the presence of a military detachment at each location.

The word on the set was that President J.J. Rawlings might look in on the shooting. In a country painfully relearning the ways of democracy after years under a military regime, dropping the presidential name seems to have opened a few doors, and kept them open. The cast knew the sub-text: "These guys have access to the top. No messing."

Soldiers, relaxed and friendly, were around all the time, watching the filming, chatting with cast, crew and children. When required, they also took part: sporting shoulder-flashes or arm-bands from Wardrobe, they put

in uniformed appearances on set, imitating “the action of the tiger” and adjusting their clothes so that hints of individuality – with the accompanying suggestions of indiscipline – became apparent. As their trucks rumbled down dirt roads with guns and rocket-launchers at the ready, it was easy for those backed up against the bush to be frightened.

The Ghana Film Corporation

Official blessing was also indicated by the involvement of the Ghana Film Corporation (GFC): YTV established offices in GFC’s Kanda Estate buildings, where “the” cocktail party was held. On location, the GFC crane was the most distinctive feature of a unit which also included GFC buses newly equipped for use by Wardrobe and Make-Up. A new, quieter £25,000 generator hummed purposefully away on the back of a truck.

The refurbished buses and the generator have been bequeathed to the GFC and will make productive life easier for Ghanaian film-crews. The presents came with hints or “hopes” that further Anglo-Ghanaian projects could be put together, and they were seen as proof that YTV had the interests of the country at heart. YTV certainly did well out of Ghana; let’s hope their promises of further, more crisply negotiated, projects were not just eyewash.

Some of those from GFC – I like to think of them as grips, gaffers, best boys, and gofers – working with YTV compared *Sean* with the other major projects they had been involved in during careers which, in certain cases, began in the mid-1950s. There were men who had worked on films such as, well, the spectacular *Cobra Verde* and *Contact* – a study of corruption. For them, YTV’s project offered the satisfaction of putting skills into action.

They also had a chance to earn ‘off-station’ allowances – though, at 10,000 cedis (about £10.00) a day, these were standard rather than generous. Inevitably, rates of pay at GFC have not kept pace with inflation, and, as one senior technician said, “If you think of the money, you will cry.”

The Crew

For one reason or another, thinking of money prompted a few tears around the set. If you are a member of a technicians’ union in the “originating country,” going to a film-set in Africa, like going into the Ark, is an

activity for twosomes, and, in this case, the crew was largely UK-re-cruited. (“The Yanks,” I was told, “can’t do this kind of thing.”)

YTV’s crew, Lighting, Props, Wardrobe, Make-Up and such like came in twos, and, no doubt, on terms arrived at by two-person union negotiation teams. They hit Ghana in the middle of July 1994 well-prepared: jungle boots were *de rigueur* and safari-jackets a popular option. It was Indiana Jones out of Jurassic Park, and all brand-new.

The Locals

Good-will that stopped only a little short of inestimable was shown to this group and their project by Ghanaians and the local expatriate community – though few of those involved had more than a very vague idea about what sort of film was being made. This was despite the fact that “release forms” the actors were asked to sign – sometimes only after they had finished shooting – carried the following:

I agree to participate in the production of the above mentioned film the nature and composition of which has been fully explained to me....

Let’s face it: the “nature and composition” of such a film are hardly ever fully known in the shooting stage, let alone “fully explained.” In fact, scripts were at a premium, and directorial changes were made on location – indeed, whole scenes were rethought or, because of shortage of time, even dropped. No doubt many more decisions were made far away from Africa – in an editing room.

Screen-tests were held at the Ghana Film Studios and the School of Performing Arts, Legon. Those cast were invited to a session at which they were measured for costumes and where they expected to be briefed by the director about, among other things, the financial terms on which they were going to be working. The measuring went ahead, but briefing did not take place because of sickness – and this meant that shooting began with a sadly ill-informed company of actors. When comparisons of terms were subsequently made, glaring and unexplained discrepancies became apparent; this inevitably bred resentment.

Bontrase

Before filming started in the village of Bontrase, west of Accra and off the Cape Coast road, the local rumour-mill started turning out the story that white interest in the area had been prompted by the discovery of gold, or perhaps diamonds. This was inevitably amended when the location prospectors were followed by the film-crew: photographs, not minerals or precious stones, were wanted – and photographs were taken.

The bizarre behaviour expected of foreigners was demonstrated from early on by the changes that were made: a mural, which incorporated a map of Africa with Liberia and the town of Tappita picked out, was painted on one wall of the school. Other school buildings were put to new uses: some rooms were taken over by “catering” and furnished with white-clothed tables, in the centre of which were placed a trio of bottles proclaiming the national origin of the crew. The bottles bore the legends “HP,” “Heinz,” and, smallest but not least, “Lee & Perrins.” The promise of the bottles was fulfilled and the menu, prepared by SSI, an Accra-based company with a British manager, included such British contributions to international cuisine as toad-in-the-hole and shepherds’ pie.

Residents of Bontrase watched as the convoy of varied vehicles – including military lorries, the generator truck, “UN” Nissan Patrols, a first-aid “Pod,” and Costume and Wardrobe buses, arrived for the shoot. When filming began, bystanders observed the action from a distance, glimpsing fragments of scenes through windows, and watching people behave oddly not once but over and over and over again. (The director, Peter Kosminsky, was meticulous; retakes were the order of the day.)

Normal village life was suspended, traffic halted, and, for some shots, locals decorously arranged as figures on the road, waiting patiently as Kosminsky gave instructions to his *okyeame*, or spokesman, Chris Le Grys, and while Chris linked with *his okyeame*, George Annan, who translated from English into Fanti.

School was cancelled for the period of filming. Some pupils, dressed in new green and white uniforms, took their places in class with the cast, children who had been selected as a result of screen-testing in Accra. As might be expected, there were considerable differences in ‘life-styles’, in free-time activities, in experiences and expectations, between the local schoolchildren and those who had been bussed in. When not on set, the

Accra children passed a Game Boy from hand to hand, and strutted their stuff in enviable trainers.

For the cameras, the class acted and reacted while George Asprey (Sean) delivered a lesson on the flags of Africa. A conjuror, he produced silken flags from unlikely places and asked the children to identify them – and, because of the cameras and the director’s quest for quality, he went through the process many times.

Flag lesson over, there was more exposition from a staff-room scene shot later in the day in which Sean learned from Hassan Kiawu (Henry Nartey) some of the background to the mounting tension. The lead-in to the scene was provided by two white Fathers, Larry and John, and by John’s attempt to repair the staff-room fridge. A simple enough episode and hardly one to set alarm-bells ringing, but a moment in which the expatriates began to emerge as the doers while the African staff were confined almost exclusively to sitting and reading in the background. The fact that the script is by a writer called Hossein Amini should not blind one to the possibility that the white teachers might feel uncomfortably pushed to the fore and that misleading impressions might be being conveyed.

In an outdoor scene, Terry (James Geddas), a UN-worker, drove up to the school, inspected the bullet-holes in the door of his four-wheel drive vehicle, and bounced into the staff-room. This was re-shot many times, and before each take the tyre-marks of the previous attempt were, of course, carefully obliterated; a small detail, but one that impressed on-lookers.

In the ‘next’ scene, the teachers from the village school, intrigued and apparently happy to be involved, once more played (almost) themselves. They assembled in their (real) staff-room, which had been specially furnished for the shoot, to hear Terry making the case for immediate evacuation as the violence of civil war approached.

In response to a comment from the forthright Sean, Terry said:

Sean, let me explain how a civil war works in this part of the world. One side goes into a village with its guns blazing. The other side gets scared of the noise and runs away. There’s never any fighting between the soldiers, there’s just massacres of civilians who get left behind.

Some of those assembled nodded sagely, Sean learned something, and others, concerned about the direction of the text, remembered the old saying, “there’s no blazing away without bullets.”

In a subsequent scene, the African teachers sat with their schoolchildren under some trees and ate a “refugee meal” while a “white father” ensured that all was well. Intrigued onlookers got a reasonable view of this event and were surprised to see the schoolchildren sitting on the ground. When representation was made to those arranging the scene that African schoolchildren might squat rather than sit, word came back that that was what had happened – and that facts were sacred.

This statement was followed by ‘a middleman’s’ comment that “If Europeans see the children squatting, they will think they are urinating.” Really? *En masse*? While holding plates of rice and stew?

It will be interesting to see if the scene looks as embarrassing as it felt for the children and for the priest (played by James Gibbs) who was required to pass among them. Apart from the unlikely behaviour of the children, it seemed far too ‘Son of Schweitzer-ish’.

For a few days, Bontrase was the setting for lively action and, all being well, it will be seen – as Tappita – by millions throughout the world. The word on the set was that, presumably to show their appreciation for the use of the village as a location and to compensate for the disruption caused, YTV was going to repaint the school.

So far so good; but there were plenty of walls that needed painting, and gratitude or recompense might have extended to providing blackboards – the absence of which offered eloquent testimony to the limited facilities of the school. Perhaps the exotic birds of passage could contribute out of the 2.5 to the rebuilding of the crumbling building used normally for the Junior Secondary School which was pressed into service by YTV as an extension of Wardrobe and as a temporary Green Room.

The local schoolteachers who worked till late into the night were naturally curious about what would happen to the settee and armchairs which had suddenly appeared in their staff-room – would they be donated to the institution or would they vanish as mysteriously as the whole caravanserai had arrived?

For two days, anything seemed possible. In a village in which car-batteries power television sets, a TV crew had, thanks to a powerful (quieter) generator, to floodlights and reflective screens, transformed night into artificial day. Inevitably, locals wondered whether there would be any lasting change: whether there was anything more permanent for the deprived, but helpful, community. Would anything be left behind or was it all a bit like – well, a bit like Sean’s conjuring tricks? There was plenty of

time for actors to ponder the question: "What is a fair price for a film company to pay to deck the television screens of the world with the painful realities of poverty and deprivation?"

From Bontrase to Ojobi

From Bontrase the crew moved on to Ojobi for a night shoot. Word spread through Ojobi that the foreigners had come to put on a play, and such was indeed the case – though the production was so fragmentary, and the fragments were so often reshot, that interest inevitably diminished as midnight approached and passed.

"Sean's Biblical epic" – presumably a production that was put on before the civil war affected the school at Tappita – was mounted against an eloquently crumbling 'storey-house' and jumped, or so it appeared, from the beginning to the end of Christ's life. It moved from a Nativity sequence, with descending cardboard angels, to a representation of the Flagellation in which boys dressed as Roman soldiers 'lashed' a cross-bearing Christ with strips of red cloth.

Those who had some idea of Sean's life and death discussed the scene, and pointed out that it, presumably, foreshadowed the young man's own death. The people of Ojobi observed from a less privileged position; they watched the location crew move in, set up, and work through the night. Some of them were occasionally called in to provide an audience for the Nativity/Passion play, and when they did so they stood. Sean had, it seemed, devoted his attention to arranging stage-effects (the descending cut-out angels, for example), rather than to obtaining seats for his audience. Even "his headmaster" stood!

Perhaps I do *Sean*, or the ingenious designer Mike Povey, an injustice by being surprised – perhaps this was recognition of the long tradition of promenade productions in Africa. Perhaps it was a deliberate combination of that custom with notions about raised acting areas and changeable scenery. Perhaps.

Understandably, the number of people available to swell the audience began to dwindle in the early hours of the morning. When the call went up at around 2.00 am for "Some more to fill in on that side, George," there was a slower and thinner movement than there had been earlier: it was reported that some were tired and wanted to go home. This elicited the reply: "Would Mr Cedi help?"

The issue was a genuine one and it returned again and again: initial interest and good-will, preparedness to participate in what looked intriguing and diverting, gave way to fatigue, and to irritation that so much standing around was required. In Ojobi, as elsewhere, cash provided incentives.

The discontent will, probably, not appear on the screen. Thanks to the skill of the lighting crew, the eye of the cameraman (the gentle Nic Knowland), and the artistic concern of the director, the scene should look magnificent. Shot against the crumbling “storey-house” and the heavily textured mud walls of adjoining buildings, the light from the oil-lamps could prompt comparisons with Rembrandt’s nativities and the Dedo-lights will enable the Flagellation sequence to recall Caravaggio. Critics may have to dig into their vocabulary bags and pull out words such as *chiaroscuro* to do the scene justice.

Dawn found the cast and crew stumbling towards their vehicles. For those flown in, it was back to the luxury of the Golden Tulip Hotel, and a rest day; for some of those who had become involved in the project unaware that filming might be done at night, it was off to work.

Salmand near Nkroful

Unscrambling the story-line and sorting it out from the factors that affected the order in which scenes were shot is not easy, particularly for someone like me who was in only a few scenes. But it seems that the sequence on the road out of Tappita will – perhaps give or take some flashbacks – follow shortly after Terry’s staff-room address. The “refugees on the road” were filmed at Salmand, north of Nkroful, on 28 July, and the choice of location meant that crew and some cast members stayed in Takoradi. “No,” the holders of the purse strings informed enquirers late on in the proceedings, “we don’t pay for days spent travelling. Only those on which shooting actually takes place.”

The pattern was by this time fairly familiar to those who had been involved in the ‘Tappita School Scenes’: the early call, the procession of some twenty “film/press” and military vehicles, the invasion of a village, and establishment of a base on the football pitch. While the cast, crew, and caterers took over school buildings, the director made use of local people – in this instance as refugees.

The ‘call sheet’, prepared by the assistant director Chris Le Grys and set out with military precision, indicated that four scenes would be shot

and that the following would be required for the filming: the crew, Sean, Terry, two priests, two nuns, ten of the identified schoolchildren, Mrs Roberts and her son, 150 villagers, and 100 soldiers.

Most of those in the cast who had been transported to Salmand found themselves at various points in the procession of refugees taking the ‘bush road’ from Tappita to Monrovia. Long shots seemed to be the order of the day, and no doubt some fine images of trailing crowds burdened with possessions (look out for the red television-set) and of schoolchildren accompanied by nuns and priests were secured. In contrast to the head-loaded villagers, these had, to their own surprise, apparently left their school without so much as a rucksack, a bottle of water, or a first-aid kit.

Later, the director, worried and surprised, was heard to make the observation: “The people from the school aren’t carrying anything.” The remark did not inspire confidence that enough thought had been given to the scene. But, by this stage, there was no feeling that comments, observations or suggestions from the cast would get through to the director.

Despite their lack of luggage, the priests and nuns were subsequently filmed handing out water to thirsty refugees. Hassan, the Liberian teacher, is in there with them, but I suspect the impression of white-clad, white-skinned ministrants to the multitude will come across most strongly. The discomfort of British and American actors at the prominence given to them will not be apparent. (In fact, it was not present at all, since the scene was not used.)

Water Shortage

Nothing takes place without a context and this ‘watering-station’ sequence was shot, most significantly, just after a showdown between Grace Omaboe (chaperon for the Accra children and a well-known Ghanaian television actress) and the man in charge of catering. After being refugees for the morning – walking up and down on the open road carrying possessions for several hours – many of the villagers were extremely thirsty.

In response to requests for water, the Accra-based caterer provided a couple of bottles of water from ‘his’ water-tanker. Ms Omaboe asked for cups. At this point, and thinking of the allocation for plastic cups, the caterer pleaded that he had to “think of (his) budget.” Ms Omaboe pointed out that the villagers had been taking part in the filming all morning, that they were not going to be paid, and that they were “not beasts.” With an

exceedingly bad grace, and after an acutely embarrassing delay, the caterer eventually produced some plastic cups.

The reference to the fact that the villagers were not going to be paid was an interesting one: the rumour machine produced the information that the Chief of Salmand had been given 40,000 cedis (around £40) to provide extras – 150 were required, according to the call sheet; substantially more, in fact, turned up. It would be interesting to know what benefit the community – which helped to create an important sequence – gained from the day’s work.

The showdown over cups was striking enough, but it was not the end of the incident: there was an abrupt intervention in the handing-round of the water-bottles because an assistant director mistakenly thought they were filled with imported mineral water at 2,000 cedis a time and attempted to intercept them! The gesture was typical: acutely embarrassing. Incidentally, the lucky villagers were those who got to keep the empty plastic bottles.

With this scene fresh in their minds, and with genuinely thirsty refugees moving past them, the “white fathers” and nuns at the “watering station” were acutely aware of the contractions in the position in which they found themselves. The motto seemed to be: “Only give when the camera is rolling.”

Morale among the “refugees” fell during the afternoon: they were not sure where they were supposed to be, felt neglected by those who were supposed to be marshalling them, and began to be infected by a sense of confusion. This must be part of any refugee’s experience, but we were only ‘acting’ as refugees! Confidence in the professionalism of the crew sank.

Monrovia – At Last

For scenes set in Monrovia, the British Council, Accra, was transformed for a weekend into the UN compound. The use of the Council’s premises indicated that the cooperation shown by the villagers was shared by some members of the expatriate community – though I hope the British taxpayer’s representative negotiated an appropriate fee.

The Sean Devereux story was familiar to some, and created a ‘feel-good factor’. Sean showed what, given the chance, a determined chap with a sense of justice could do – in Liberia at least. Furthermore, there

was a positive international element: the UN angle had, it was said, attracted UN funding and the word was what there was a tie-in with the events marking the UN's first half-century. The film was therefore a 'good thing' – practically a charitable institution in its own right.

Father John

For the American actor who played Father John, the issues raised by the filming were particularly poignant, since he had been working in Liberia when fighting started. While in that war-torn country, he had been largely confined to the Embassy compound (his place of work), unlike the character he played: a priest who has spent time up-country, a headmaster suddenly asked to evacuate his pupils and compelled – shades of *The Inn of the Seventh Happiness* – to lead them to safety.

He knew what the real UN compound looked like before and after. He could sort out the different Liberian wars and he could provide information for members of the cast and crew about key 'players' in the Liberian nightmare such as Master-Sergeant Doe and Charles Taylor.

Mr Bean

Other locally recruited white performers became involved, knowing far less about the background or the project, and for quite specific reasons. A couple of Norwegian students taking courses at the University of Ghana were intrigued by the 'Mr Bean Connection':

"Do you know Mr Bean?"

"Of course. He is very popular in Norway."

"Well, the director of the film, Peter Kosminsky, looks just like him."

"Really!"

"Yes – in fact, one of the crew said that he was Rowan Atkinson's room-mate at Cambridge and the subject of close observation."

"The original Mr Bean! I must see him!"

"The difference is that this guy is meticulous with a purpose. He knows exactly what he wants and he has a very high reputation. For example, he made a film about the Falklands War that won prizes, and a docudrama about the killings in Gibraltar."

On set, all treated the director with professional respect: his was the guiding spirit, his yea was our yea and his nay was our nay. When he was

dissatisfied, everyone went through the shot again; when he was happy, all were overjoyed, and went on to the next scene. He was committed, polite.

However ... there were occasions when it was possible to believe one was caught up in a sketch with the incompetent Mr Bean. Bean as film director, obsessively attempting to record a particular episode, oblivious of the chaos around him, lacking some of the personal skills that inspire confidence, ill-informed about, say, how children eat, how African school-teachers behave, what people carry when they flee from violence. There were occasions when one felt trapped in a sitcom that could go on for ever.

The Actors

For those more interested in acting than in English comedians, the involvement with “Sean Devereux” proved an ambiguous adventure. “I need European journalists and some Israeli mercenaries,” Matthew Baker, third assistant director, had said, and efforts were made to secure them. A couple of visiting Germans, professional actors, and in the country partly to study music and dance, were invited to the Golden Tulip.

When discussing the roles they might be asked to play, the voice of experience prompted them to enquire about remuneration. “I’m ashamed to say this,” was the reply, “but I can only offer you the basic rate. It’s a lot for Ghanaians but nothing for Europeans: 15,000 a day.” Pause. Calculation: about £15. Not many Deutsch Marks. ‘We wouldn’t do it in Germany, but’

Not everybody took the pittance and let the camera roll. A French lecturer at the university, who was invited to take the part of a journalist “with a strong foreign accent,” withdrew once he had seen the script. He said: “I can’t ask such a stupid question.”

The Drama Students

There were other causes of dissent – some of these focused on payment and treatment. Drama students recruited at Legon’s School of Performing Arts were told that they were to be paid 15,000 cedis to be guests in a party scene, but found that the offer had been reduced to 3,000. The focus of their displeasure was, inevitably, Matthew Baker, who subsequently said he had nearly been “lynched” before the original figure was reinstated.

There was also dissent over food, about who was going to get the kenkey and fish provided for the multitude, and who was going to be invited to the white-clothed tables with the bottles of Lea & Perrins. On this occasion the main dish was steak-and-kidney pie.

Liberal and Other Noises

The cast and crew made on the whole, the expected, postcolonial noises. Thinking of the promise to paint school buildings, one offered: “It’s good to be giving something back after years of taking.” But the conduct of the locally based caterer – already described – probably made a deeper impact. He had to “think about his budget.” As for the bottle grabber...

Which of the many possible voices will predominate in Kosminsky’s *Sean Devereux*? I am sure that something of Sean’s vitality and passionate concern will come through in Amini’s text and Asprey’s performance, in Knowland’s lens work and Kosminsky’s direction. From the glimpses I caught of him, Sean looked set to emerge as an all-round good guy, a *Boy’s Own Paper* hero in whom W.E.G. Henty’s Englishman in Africa may live again. I’m sure, however, that there will be differences – there were rumours of a certain love-interest in the Monrovia scenes – but the question is: just how different a view of Africa, Africans, and Europeans in Africa will be presented? What story about the continent, and the white man in it, will the camera tell?

Those questions will be answered when ITV screen the film on 16 November at 8.00 pm. But for those who were involved there are other stories, including “YTV in Ghana,” a tale about how a UK-based operation moved into a West African country and made a film. This tale will involve both ups and downs, good memories and bad; Ghana certainly contributed greatly to the film, it provided ‘gold’ in the form of marvellous locations and cooperative people, many of them trained specialists. And YTV certainly spent a considerable sum of money in the country.

It is part of the magic of film that though we know there are dozens of people just out of shot we ‘willingly suspend our disbelief’ and enter into the spirit of the convention: we ‘just look at the pictures’. The very nature of Sean Devereux’s work and the circumstances of his death make one acutely conscious of those working just ‘out of shot’ – the manipulators, the fixers, the fishers in troubled waters, the arms salesmen. CNN zeroes in on aid-workers doing their bit in crowded refugee camps and on medics

in blood-spattered hospitals; it doesn't lead the news with pictures of men wearing dark glasses flogging land-mines to brutal warmongers in smoke-filled hotel rooms.

The programme also comes with its own context, its own crew. It is, inevitably, caught up in contradictions.

AFTERWORD

The TV slot was filled, the brief moment of rage against the dying of the light was savoured. Footage of priests in the staff-room and at the watering-station finished up on the cutting-room floor, and that was no bad thing. The whole was regarded as another feather in Kosminsky's cap. Various C.V.s looked stronger ("Hmm this guy handled a crowd of 5,000 in Tema!")

Word came in from Kenya, where the Somali sequence had been shot. Apparently the crew had erected a mock-up of a first-aid station, only to find that a queue of patients formed early in the morning. As actors explained to the sick and dying that they had no medical skills, the lines of the hopeful lengthened. A cruel joke, or an opportunity to return and make a real contribution?

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Documents

Various documents have been consulted in preparing these essays. For example, in writing on Efua Sutherland, I had access to the following:

Programme for the Special Congregation for the Conferment of Honorary Degrees, University of Ghana, 29 November 1991.

Order of Service for Dedication of Honorary Degree, 29 November 1991.

Order of Service for “Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service,” 9 February 1996.

Efua Theodora Sutherland

A Bibliography of Primary Materials, with a Checklist of Secondary Sources

THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRIMARY MATERIALS is arranged generically; items are listed in order of first publication in full or in extract form. Sutherland wrote many poems that remain unpublished; manuscript material of this sort has not been listed. Reprints and anthologizations are not exhaustive. The listing of secondary materials covers items published up to the end of 2006.

Primary materials

1 Selected poems

“Mumunde My Mumunde,” “An Ashanti Story,” “Little Wild Flowers,” “It happened,” in *An Anthology of West African Verse*, ed. Olumbe Bessir (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1957): 7, 13–16, 22–23, 42–47.

“The Redeemed,” “Once Upon a Time,” “The Dedication,” “Song of the Fishing Ghosts,” in *Messages: Poems from Ghana*, ed. Kofi Awoonor & G. Adalaimorty (London: Heinemann, 1971): 158–69.

“Song of the Fishing Ghosts,” “Our Songs Are About It,” in *Ghanaian Writing as Seen by Her Own Writers as well as by German Authors*, ed. A. Kayper-Mensah & Horst Wolff (Tübingen: Erdmann, 1972): 127–28.

2 Short stories

“New Life in Kyerefaso,” in *An African Treasury*, ed. Langston Hughes (New York: Crown, 1960): 111–17. Frequently anthologized.

“Samantaase Village,” *Okyeame* 1.1 (1961): 53–58.

“Obaatan Kesewa” [children’s story] (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1967), 12 pages.

Obaatan Kesewa (Accra: Bureau of Ghanaian Languages, 1967), 11 pages.

3 Letters, essays, articles, booklets

“Letter from Homerton College, August 1949” [as Theodora Morgue], in *S. Monica Calling*, a pamphlet produced by the Order of the Holy Paraclete, c.1949: 25–26.

The Roadmakers [a pictorial essay for children] (Accra: Ghana Information Service, 1960; London: Newman Neame, 1963).

Playtime in Africa [with photographs by Willis E. Bell] (London: Brown, Knight & Truscott, 1960; New York: Atheneum, 1962), 62 pages.

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“Theatre in Ghana,” in *Ghana Welcomes You*, ed. Janice Nebill (Accra: Orientation to Ghana Committee, 1969): 83–87.

The Original Bob: The Story of Bob Johnson – Ghana’s Ace Comedian (Accra: Anowuo, 1970). 25 pages.

“A Proposal for a historical drama festival in Cape Coast” (1980; expanded in 1991 into plans for PANAFEST, a Pan African Historical Theatre Festival).

Sutherland, Efu. “Memorandum to the Chairman and Members of the PNDC on the subject of future action for the development of Ghana’s potential in dramatic art” (unpublished, 21 March 1987).

4 Plays

Edufa [performed at the Drama Studio, Accra, November 1962] (London: Longmans, 1967), 62 pages. An extract appeared in *Okyeame* 3.1 (December 1966): 47–49. Full text in *Plays from Black Africa*, ed. Frederic M. Litto (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968): 209–71, and in *Crosswinds: An Anthology*

of *Black Dramatists*, ed. William B. Branch (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993). Republished together with *The Marriage of Anansewa* (Harlow: Longman, 1987).

Foriwa [performed at the Drama Studio, Accra, March 1962] (Accra–Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 67 pages. Extract published in *Okyeame* 2.1 (1965): 40–48.

You Swore An Oath [one-act play subtitled “*anasegoro*”], *Présence Africaine* 22.50 (1964): 231–47.

Vulture! Vulture! Two Rhythm Plays [with photographs by Willis Bell and music arranged by Kwasi Baiden] (Accra: Ghana Publishing House, 1968), 32 pages.

The Marriage of Anansewa (London: Longman, 1975), 82 pages. Extract published, as translation “from the original Fante,” in *Okyeame* 4.2 (1969): 63–69. Includes “Foreword” by the author. Republished together with *Edufa* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987).

Children of the Man-Made Lake. Printed in the present issue of *Matatu*, 75–96.

Unpublished plays (some of them adaptations) include the following:

Ananse and the Dwarf Brigade.

Nyamekye.

Odasani (adaptation of *Everyman*).

The Pineapple Child.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee [after Lewis Carroll].

Wohyee Me Bo.

5 Translations

“Poem in Praise of Osei Tutu from Traditional Apae” [translation from Twi, collected by J.H. Nketia], *Okyeame* 2.1 (1964): 21–22.

“Nyankora,” “Nea Ohwehwe Annya” [translations of poems by Patience Addo], *Okyeame* 4.1 (1968): 17, 19.

“Apetepirew,” “The Tree-Felling Knife,” “Good-Hearted Drunk, I’m Suffering” [translations of poems by Kwa Mensah], *Okyeame* 4.2 (June 1969): 49–51.

6 As editor

Edited with George Awoonor–Williams et al. *Okyeame* 2.1 (1965), and subsequent issues, including *Okyeame* 4.1 (December 1968) and 4.2 (1969).

Editorial support etc. for Ellen Greer Sangster et al. *Talent for Tomorrow: An Anthology of Creative Writing from the Training Colleges and Secondary*

Schools of Ghana (Tema: Ghana Publishing House, 1966). Others in series (1968, 1970, 1971, 1972) dropped “Training Colleges” from titles.

7 Film

“Araba: The Village Story” [film, 1966–67; see *L’Afrique Littéraire et Artistique* 20 (1971): 257].

8 Interviews

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