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Efua Theodora Sutherland

Edufa

United Kingdom (1967)

TAGS: African Traditions





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General information	
Title of the work	Edufa
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Ghana
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1967
First Edition Details	Efua Theodora Sutherland, *Edufa*. London: Longman Drumbeat Edition, 1967, 65 pp.
ISBN	0582642728
Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Chester Mbangchia, University of Yaoundé 1,mbangchia25@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



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Efua Theodora Sutherland , 1924 - 1996
(Author)

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

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

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Additional information

Summary

In her three-act play, Efua Sutherland, depicts the life of a traditional and influential Ghanaian man, Edufa, whose pride and stubbornness results in the death of his wife, Ampoma. Set in a little Ghanaian community, the story begins with a prologue that introduces characters and the dramatic events that will ensue. In the prologue, Edufa's sister, Abena, patiently sits in the courtyard, gathering dew in a black pot. As the prologue reveals, the dew she collects, along the water that she gets from the stream, is to perform tasks that she is not aware of. Her knowledge is limited to her in-law, Amphora's illness and her brother, Edufa's refusal to allow visitors in his courtyard.

The first act begins with Edufa and Seguwa, described as a motherly member of the household, who perform a ritual by burning incense and pouring water on herbs in a bathroom. The two performers are resolute on keeping the rationale for the ritual as a secret. Later, Edufa and his wife discuss about her malady: she is in ill-health and believes that her death is close, which death will make her leave her children and family behind. Her husband emboldens her and is incensed by the frustrating situation in his household.

At this level, Edufa's father, Kamkam, enters in furiousness and disdain towards his son. They quarrel and the untold truth about Ampoma's illness is revealed: years back, Edufa's death was announced by a diviner who told him that he could avert the situation, if someone could die in his place, by showing that he/she loved him. Edufa, with much love for his wife, knew that his wife could not die to save him. Equally, he hoped that his father would be the one to claim to love him the most. As Kamkam reveals further, Edufa gathered his family and set a joke as a trap. He asked who loved him and could die for him and Ampoma, his wife, after his father's refusal to die for Edufa, because of his materialism, revealed her willingness to die for Edufa. Edufa pleaded that she should change her mind but she insisted. From that time, she has lived under the spell of illness. Edufa pretends not to be privy to the whole design and refuses to submit himself to his father's counsel that he should look for solutions to the problems he has caused.

Act Two begins with a chorus that consists of women in the community. They praise-sing as they walk around the town to perform a traditional rite. Their watchwords are "to beat envious evil out of the

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house." They chant "We the orphans cry/our mother's dead." The song foreshadows of the impending danger in the play. Edufa does not want to receive them, as he proudly does all the time. Instead, he asks them to leave his house, without telling them the reason. His friend, Senchi, arrives and thinking that Edufa will be friendly as usual, invites the women to come and dine with them that evening. When he enquires about Ampoma, Edufa lies that she is feeling better. Here, the servant, Sam, arrives with a box with a charm to be burnt and medicine from the diviner. With the box, Edufa is sure that Ampoma's illness will be cured.

In the last act, the party is thrown and there is eating, drinking, singing and dancing. During the party, Edufa professes his profound endearment for Ampoma and offers her flowers. Ampoma, in return, gives him waist beads as a love token, although her incoherent speech, unusual fallings and trembling of hands show that a battle between life and death is going on in her. Edufa helps her up into room and the chorus hears of Seguwa's outburst about Ampoma's death. The play ends with Edufa, in a delusion, promising to rescue her from death while Senchi, his friend can do nothing to avert the situation, as he says all is "blank" (p. 61).

Analysis

Edufa bears resemblances to Euripedes' *Alcestis*, a classical Greek tragedy. Sutherland strikes an almost balance between the Greek play and hers. Based on that, the two plays converge and diverge at different levels, due to cultural differences and context. On the one hand, in both *Edufa* and *Alcestis*, the heroes, Edufa and Admetus respectively, look for ways for death to spare them, in order for a willing person to die on their places. Their wives, Ampoma and Alcestis respectively, become the victims. Also, Sutherland's characters cross-match. Euripides' Admetus is Edufa, both characters are of authority and hospitality in town; Alcestis is Ampoma, both are wives to the heroes of the two plays; Heracles, Admetus' friend is Edufa's friend Senchi, and the nurse in Alcestis is Seguwa, the matronly mother of Edufa's household. In both plays, the heroes quarrel with their fathers: Admetus conflicts with his father, Pheres, while Edufa quarrels with Kamkam, his father. Although they have different ways of quarrelling, the two concord on the same purpose: pushing the hero to avert his trap for someone to die in his place.

On the other hand, although both plays focus on the willingness of the

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heroes' wives to die for them, they differ on the elements of hope and certainty. Unlike in *Edufa*, where characters hope for the rescue of Ampoma, in *Alcestis*, all the characters are sure of Alcestis' death. Again, Sutherland transforms Euripedes' *Alcestis* from a tragicomedy to a tragedy. Hers is a tragedy as Ampoma dies at the end while Alcestis is rescued in *Alcestis*. Further, Heracles rescues the hero's wife in the original play while Edufa's friend, Senchi is unable to do anything to avert the tragic situation at the end. Conversely, Sutherland makes use of the chorus, through the introduction of the women of the town. They are different from the old men that constitute the chorus in *Alcestis*. Again, due to the communal living that characterises most African societies and the Akan, Efua Sutherland's Ghanaian members of the community, Sutherland makes her chorus emotional and they share the feelings of the ordinary people of the town, walk from one house to another to purify the homes of ills and even take part in the dramatic actions by participating as guests in Edufa's party. Sutherland, therefore, adapts Euripedes' *Alcestis* to suit African context. This contextualisation of the play and adoption of the structure of classical tragedy makes the play vital for secondary school programs.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Communication Death Relationships Sacrifice

Further Reading

Owusu, Martin, *Drama of the Gods: A Study of Seven African Plays*, Roxbury: Omenana, 1983.

Talbert, Linda Lee, "Alcestis and Edufa: The transitional individual", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 22 (1983): 183–190.

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Addenda	It was republished in *Crosswinds: An Anthology of Black Dramatists in the Diaspora* (Blacks in the Diaspora), edited by Howard William B. Branch and published by Indiana University Press (August 22, 1993).

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