



Exploring the dramatic techniques in the play *The Marriage of Anansewa*

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ABSTRACT

The stage is a picturesque representation of a dramatic act. Playwrights employ techniques to help directors in thrilling their stage performances. This study focuses on how the playwright uses dramatic techniques in projecting her message. Suspense and Humour are prominent dramatic techniques in Efua Sutherland's play *The Marriage of Anansewa*. These components are used by the playwright to amuse the audience, develop the plot, offer social criticism, and produce a distinctive fusion of contemporary drama and conventional storytelling. The study employed the relief and superiority theories to underpin the analysis through the qualitative research approach. The general atmosphere of the play foreshadows potential calamities, which heightens the dramatic tension. Sutherland skillfully manipulates the audience's emotions by combining amusement with an insightful examination of Ghanaian culture and human nature through the interaction of humour and suspense.

Keywords: Dramatic techniques, Humour, suspense, foreshadowing, *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Nkrumah (2013), Ghanaian authors have skilfully incorporated suspense and humour into their works, employing it as a potent technique to captivate readers and offer societal commentary with a hint of humour. In addition to entertaining readers, this blend of humour, suspense, and social commentary is a potent instrument for stimulating thought and starting discussions about the urgent problems Ghanaians face today. According to Nyarko (2018), humour and suspense play a crucial and important part in Ghana's literary and theatrical scene, serving not only to amuse but also to shed light on and question social conventions.

Authors and storytellers employ humour and suspense in several storytelling genres. Although definitions from psychology (Gerrig & Bernardo 1994; Comisky & Bryant 1982, Asante, 2018), entertainment theory and narratology all share characteristics, there isn't a single, comprehensive definition of suspense. According to these definitions, humour and suspense typically require the audience to be unclear about a specific outcome, whether that event is highly desirable or bad.

Opoku-Agyemang (2017) asserts that the use of humour and suspense in Ghanaian literature is a potent weapon for societal analysis and commentary in addition to providing depth and relatability. It demonstrates the tenacity and inventiveness of Ghanaian authors in tackling urgent problems while maintaining readers' interest and amusement. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Efua Sutherland skillfully combines suspense and comedy to amuse the audience while offering a biting social critique of materialism and the evolving institution of marriage in post-colonial Ghana.

The main idea, in which Ananse concurrently arranges his daughter's marriage to four distinct wealthy chiefs in order to profit financially, is absurd and hilarious. Ananse often uses humour and exaggeration in his discourse, such as when he bemoans the fact that Anansewa's typewriter's cost "nearly drove him to sell himself". A recurrent comic aspect is his theatrical self-pity, even for issues he caused. The spectator is still unsure whether Ananse can pull off his ruse, which chief will be deserving, and whether Anansewa will actually find a decent marriage or just fall prey to her father's avarice. The tension is satisfactorily resolved in the resolution, which reveals Chief-Who-Is-Chief's sincere regard for tradition and Anansewa. Efua Sutherland crafts an engaging story that makes her social commentary on greed and tradition easier to understand by incorporating humour and suspense as dramatic devices. The suspense element keeps



the audience fully immersed in the drama as it develops (Clare & Ortony, 1988). According to Adomako (2012), Ghanaian writers are adept at navigating cultural subtleties and capturing the distinctive spirit of Ghanaian society through brilliant wordplay, intelligent dialogue, and amusing situations. Humour and suspense in Ghanaian literature and theatre can amuse, educate, and inspire thought, whether in the form of satirical political criticism, comic depictions of everyday characters, or humorous anecdotes that illuminate cultural customs. It makes the stories more memorable and relatable by enhancing their depth and richness and strengthening the reader's bond with the characters.

In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, suspense sparks humour primarily through dramatic irony and the anticipation of how the cunning protagonist, Ananse, will escape the consequences of his own elaborate deceptions. The audience's knowledge of the true situation, contrasted with the characters' ignorance, creates continuous amusement. Humour and suspense are critical to dramatic plotting because they manage audience engagement, manipulate emotional pacing, and enhance thematic depth. A good drama combines suspense and humour to provide the audience with a well-rounded, captivating, and unforgettable experience. These components work together to provide the narrative a strong thematic effect and a lively rhythm. Against this background, this paper explores the two major dramatic techniques employed by the dramatist to drive the story's plot.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study examines how Efua T. Sutherland combines humour and suspense in *The Marriage of Anansewa* to sustain audience engagement and regulate dramatic tension. It focuses on how Ananse's deceptive schemes create uncertainty and anticipation, while comic dialogue, exaggeration, irony, and absurd situations provide temporary comic relief without resolving the underlying conflict. The study therefore distinguishes the tension-modulating function of humour from the uncertainty-generating and resolution-dependent function of suspense.

This fills the gap where most studies concentrate on themes rather than the technical aspects of the dramatic craft. This study will contribute to African drama scholarship by moving beyond what themes are present to how they are dramatically constructed, offering insights into Sutherland's experimental approach and the enduring relevance of traditional forms in modern theatre.

1.2 Research Question

How do humour and suspense interact in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* to regulate dramatic tension, sustain audience engagement, and shape the movement from conflict to resolution?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Relief theory

According to relief theory, laughter relieves stress and melancholy brought on by social pressures. It implies that when people laugh at humorous situations, they feel content and at ease, relieving stress, worry, and depression, which may have a favourable effect on their physical and mental well-being (Ko & Youn, 2011). Last but not least, incongruity theory focuses on how humans interpret and process suspense and humour. This hypothesis holds that the sense of dissonance can improve people's capacity to see problems, think optimistically, and participate in conversation (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, humour and suspense function through distinct but complementary dramatic processes. Sutherland uses suspense to sustain uncertainty about the consequences of Ananse's risky schemes, while humour temporarily moderates the resulting tension through comic deception, exaggeration and incongruity. For example, Ananse's fabricated report that the family cocoa farm has been set ablaze generates humour without resolving the threat posed by the four competing suitors. The suspense persists through Anansewa's staged death and is resolved only in Act Four, when Chief-Who-Is-Chief proves himself the appropriate husband and Anansewa returns to "life." Thus, humour does not release suspense in the strict theoretical sense; rather, it provides momentary comic relief while Sutherland deliberately postpones the resolution of the dramatic conflict.

By striking a balance between these two dramatic techniques, Sutherland creates a story that is both enjoyable and thought-provoking, utilising humour and suspense to make serious social criticism and cultural investigation approachable for a broad audience. To aid future research, this Relief theory seeks to locate and assess recent studies on humour and suspense as dramatic devices that also act as audience therapy. It discusses the viability and efficacy of multifaceted intervention as a psychological treatment. Thus, this theory is used to support the study's analysis.

2.1.2 Superiority theory

The superiority theory, which emphasises comedy, holds that individuals are constantly competing and searching for weaknesses in others. Laughing is the abrupt recognition of one's superiority. According to the hypothesis, viewing exaggerated expressions, humorous language, or amusing images makes people feel good and increases their sense of self-worth and self-efficacy (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). According to the superiority hypothesis of humour, individuals laugh at other people's tragedies or perceived shortcomings because it makes them feel better than them.



This theory underpins Efua T. Sutherland's play *The Marriage of Anansewa*, in which the cunning protagonist Ananse employs a scheme to "auction" his daughter Anansewa to the richest chief. By manipulating the powerful and wealthy chiefs for his own financial gain and to ensure a bright future for his daughter, Ananse feels superior to those who once denigrated his poverty. His ability to outsmart these high-status people with just his cunning and wit, a feature of traditional Ananse folktales, is what makes Ananse (and a participating audience) laugh.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Humour in Drama

Bloomfield (1980) recognised how humour is so culturally specific, which can make humour difficult. Martin and Dutrizac (2004) studied the relationship between the four styles of humour (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, self-defeating). Affiliative humour, according to Martin et al. (2003), is an interpersonal type of humour that entails using comedy (telling jokes, saying amusing things, or clever banter, for example) to entertain, relax, and strengthen relationships. Self-enhancing humour "involves a typically hilarious outlook on life, a predisposition to be constantly amused by the incongruities of life, and to maintain a humorous perspective even in the face of stress or of hardship" (Martin et al., 2003, p. 53). Intimacy, extraversion, and openness to new experiences are all positively connected with both affiliative and self-enhancing humour (Martin et al., 2003; Saraglou & Scariot, 2002). Positive interpersonal functioning and sensitivity to others are linked to both perspective-taking empathy and empathic concern (Davis, 1983). Since self-enhancing humour, affiliative humour, empathic concern, and perspective-taking empathy are all linked to positive interpersonal relationships, the first hypothesis was that affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour would be positively correlated with empathic concern and perspective-taking empathy. Additionally, the second hypothesis was that these two types of humour would be negatively correlated with personal distress, the kind of empathy where people would be so upset by another person's anxiety and negative feelings that they would psychologically distance themselves from that person. This is because people who are high in affiliative and self-enhancing humour tend to be high in intimacy, extraversion, and openness to experience and low in anxiety (Martin et al., 2003; Saraglou & Scariot, 2002). Humour is used by those with an affiliative humour style to get social or interpersonal rewards. To improve the quality of social relationships, they amuse others with comedy. Humour is used by those with a self-enhancing humour style to attain intrapersonal incentives, such as maintaining or improving positive psychological well-being and separating themselves from hardship. They keep a lighthearted attitude about life and use humour to deal with challenging situations. Therefore, coping sense of humour and self-enhancing humour are tightly associated (Cann et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2003).

Sarcasm, taunting, ridicule, derision, hostility, and disparaging humour are examples of aggressive humour, which is the propensity to use humour to degrade or attack other people. According to Martin et al. (2003) and Saraglou and Scariot (2002), people with high levels of this type of humour are typically hostile and unfriendly. According to the third hypothesis, aggressive humour would be negatively correlated with empathic concern, perspective-taking, and personal pain since these people's hostile attitude toward others would seem to prevent empathy for others. People who have an aggressive humour style use humour to manipulate or criticise others rather than to improve interpersonal connections. Without regard for the welfare of others, they make fun of and taunt them in order to prove their superiority (Martin et al., 2003). It should come as no surprise that the aggressive comedy style has been demonstrated to be harmful to relationships with others (e.g., Cann et al., 2011; Kuiper et al., 2010). Lastly, those with a self-defeating humour style make fun of their own flaws in an effort to win people over. Additionally, they employ comedy as a way to avoid facing issues and coping with unpleasant emotions (Stieger et al., 2011).

According to Martin et al. (2003, p. 54), self-defeating humour "involves excessively self-disparaging humour, attempts to amuse others by doing or saying funny things at one's expense as a means of ingratiating oneself or gaining approval, allowing oneself to be the 'butt' of others' humour, and laughing along with others when being ridiculed or disparaged." This type of humour is associated with high levels of shyness (Hampes, 2006), loneliness (Martin & Dutrizac, 2004; Hampes, 2010), anxious attachment (Kazarian & Martin, 2004), and anxiety (Martin et al., 2003), as well as low levels of intimacy and satisfaction from social support (Martin et al., 2003). The fourth hypothesis was that self-defeating humour would be negatively correlated with empathic concern and perspective-taking, which are linked to positive interpersonal functioning, because these people typically have bad interpersonal connections (Davis, 1983). The final hypothesis was that self-defeating humour would be positively connected with personal discomfort because people with high levels of self-defeating humour also tend to have high levels of worry.

2.2.2 Suspense in Drama

Suspense as a literary trope has evolved from early Gothic works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to the complex tensions of contemporary psychological thrillers (Zillmann, 1996). In literary narratives, suspense is a complicated emotional state characterized by feelings of doubt and anxiety around important plot points. Suspense, according to Carroll (2001), is fundamentally an emotional response brought on by uncertain outcomes that are significant to the audience as well as the characters. Two essential components



are necessary to effectively create suspense: emotional investment and uncertainty. Suspense was further divided into three categories by Kemertelidze and Manjavidze (2013): hidden, macro, and micro. While micro or secondary suspense is confined to certain scenes or episodes, macro suspense encompasses the entire plot, and hidden suspense often eludes less attentive readers.

According to Mikos (2013), suspense is a dramatic technique used in thrillers, horror, and detective fiction that is intended to arouse curiosity, anxiety, and excitement. According to Carroll (2001), suspense is fueled by expectation, hope for a positive result, and uncertainty about whether it will materialise. The significance of literary analysis is justified by Kemertelidze and Manjavidze's (2013) identification of essential elements of suspense, such as causation, foreshadowing, conflict, and escalation, which are deftly incorporated into the story through dramatic techniques.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study examines how Efua T. Sutherland combines humour and suspense in *The Marriage of Anansewa* to sustain audience engagement and regulate dramatic tension. It focuses on how Ananse's deceptive schemes create uncertainty and anticipation, while comic dialogue, exaggeration, irony, and absurd situations provide temporary comic relief without resolving the underlying conflict. The study therefore distinguishes the tension-modulating function of humour from the uncertainty-generating and resolution-dependent function of suspense. How do humour and suspense interact in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* to regulate dramatic tension, sustain audience engagement, and shape the movement from conflict to resolution?

This study adopts a qualitative literary research design using close reading and textual analysis to examine how humour and suspense operate in Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*. The play serves as the primary source of data, while relevant scholarly works on humour, suspense, and African drama provide secondary support. The analysis focuses purposively on episodes that clearly demonstrate *comic dialogue, exaggeration, deception, dramatic irony, uncertainty, delayed resolution, and threatened exposure*. Critical attention is given to Ananse's dealings with the four chiefs, Anansewa's staged death, suitors' reaction, and the final resolution involving Chief-Who-Is-Chief.

The selected passages are analysed according to three main categories: *humour, suspense, and resolution*. Humour is examined as a device that creates amusement and temporarily moderates tension, while suspense is analysed in terms of uncertainty, anticipation, concealment, and delayed resolution. Dramatic irony is also considered where the audience possesses information that some characters do not. The study does not quantify these devices; rather, it interprets their dramatic functions and how they interact to sustain audience interest and move the plot from conflict to resolution. Analytical credibility is strengthened by supporting interpretations with specific dialogue, stage directions, and dramatic incidents from the play.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 About the playwright

Efua Theodora Sutherland (often known as Efua Sutherland) was a pioneering Ghanaian playwright, dramatist, poet, educator, and cultural activist, widely regarded as one of the architects of modern African theatre. Born on 27 June 1924 in Cape Coast, Ghana, Sutherland played a foundational role in developing post-independence Ghanaian theatre by blending indigenous performance traditions with modern dramatic forms. She was a strong advocate for theatre rooted in African oral traditions, storytelling, music, dance, and ritual. Sutherland founded the Ghana Drama Studio in 1958, which became a crucial space for experimentation in African performance and later evolved into the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon. She also developed the concept of *Anansegoro*, a theatrical form inspired by Akan folktales and the trickster figure Ananse, which emphasised narration, audience participation, and communal storytelling. Beyond theatre, Efua Sutherland was a passionate children's rights advocate and contributed significantly to cultural policy in Ghana. She played a key role in the establishment of Ghana's National Theatre and influenced generations of African theatre practitioners and scholars. Efua Sutherland died on 21 January 1996, leaving a lasting legacy in African theatre, cultural education, and the preservation of indigenous performance practices. Efua Sutherland's play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, was first published in 1975, marking it as one of her most famous works, alongside *Foriwa* (1962) and *Edufa* (1967). It's a significant piece of Ghanaian theatre, adapting Akan storytelling for a modern audience. Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a comic play rooted in the Ghanaian Ananse storytelling tradition, which Sutherland develops into the dramatic form known as *Anansegoro*. Although the play is generally humorous, its humour is repeatedly accompanied by an atmosphere of uncertainty, anxiety and impending danger. Kweku Ananse's schemes place both himself and his daughter, Anansewa, in increasingly difficult situations. Consequently, the audience is made to anticipate possible exposure, disgrace, conflict and even disaster. The general atmosphere of the play therefore foreshadows potential calamities and heightens dramatic tension through *suspense, foreshadowing, dramatic irony, deception, characterisation, songs, ritual, contrast and the manipulation of death*.

Textual referencing note: Sutherland organises the play into four Acts without formally numbered scenes. Accordingly, the evidence below is identified by Act and dramatic episode rather than by invented scene numbers.

4.2 Ananse's Deception Creates an Atmosphere of Impending Trouble

One of the major ways Sutherland creates an atmosphere that foreshadows calamity is through **Ananse's deception**. At the beginning of the play, Ananse is presented as a financially struggling but highly cunning father. He decides to use his beautiful daughter, Anansewa, as the centre of an elaborate marriage scheme. He establishes contact with several wealthy chiefs and leads them to believe he has a special chance of marrying Anansewa.

Act One (Anansewa discovers the four-suitor scheme): "But why on earth four?"

Anansewa's startled question exposes the excessive scale of her father's plan. The number of suitors is itself a warning sign: one daughter cannot be legitimately committed to four chiefs. The audience therefore recognises, from Act One, that the clever scheme carries within it the possibility of exposure, conflict and humiliation.

Ananse sends Anansewa's photographs to the chiefs and encourages them to send money and gifts as part of the courtship process. Importantly, each chief believes that he is the preferred suitor. Ananse carefully words his messages so that he does not make an explicit commitment to any man he has purported to while still encouraging each one to continue investing in the relationship.

This behaviour immediately creates dramatic tension because the audience knows that the arrangement cannot continue indefinitely. The more gifts Ananse receives, the greater the possibility that his deception will be discovered. His temporary success therefore contains the seeds of a future calamity.

The dramatic atmosphere suggests that Ananse is constructing a trap for himself. What begins as a clever scheme for financial survival gradually develops into a dangerous situation involving powerful men. The audience begins to wonder: What will happen if the chiefs discover that they have all been deceived? Thus, Sutherland uses Ananse's greed and trickery as **foreshadowing**. His behaviour warns the audience that a crisis is inevitable.

4.3 The Multiplicity of Suitors Creates Suspense

The presence of several suitors also heightens tension in the play. Ananse does not merely deceive one man; he maintains relationships with several wealthy chiefs at the same time. Each suitor is encouraged to believe that his marriage proposal is progressing successfully. First, this situation is comedy. The audience enjoys Ananse's clever manipulation of the chiefs and his ability to extract gifts from them. However, underneath the comedy lies considerable danger.

The possibility that the chiefs may arrive at the same time or demand a definite answer produces suspense. Ironically, the audience knows something the suitors do not know: Anansewa has been promised, indirectly, to several men simultaneously. This creates dramatic irony and the audience's anxiety because they can see the danger developing before the characters notice it. Ananse appears confident, but the audience recognises that his position is becoming increasingly unstable.

The tension reaches a critical point when the suitors begin taking serious steps towards formalising the marriage. Their representatives prepare to come and claim Anansewa. At this stage, Ananse can no longer continue postponing his decision. The expected arrival of the marriage parties therefore foreshadows a potentially disastrous confrontation.

Act Two (Ananse receives a head-drink message: "What am I going to do?")

The question marks a sharp change from Ananse's earlier confidence to panic. His own words reveal that the profitable courtship scheme has become a dangerous trap. This reversal heightens suspense because the audience now sees that even the trickster is unsure how to escape the consequences of his deception.

4.4 The Threat of Exposure Foreshadows Social Calamity

The calamity anticipated in *The Marriage of Anansewa* does not involve physical death. Ananse faces the possibility of social disgrace, humiliation, loss of credibility and confrontation with powerful chiefs. If all the chiefs were to discover the truth, Ananse would be exposed as a fraud. His family could be disgraced, and Anansewa herself could suffer the consequences of a scheme her father designed.

The stakes are particularly high because Ananse manipulates recognised customs of marriage and courtship. Marriage in the social world of the play is not simply a private affair between two individuals; it involves families, representatives, customs and communal expectations. The audience therefore experiences tension because it knows that Ananse's cleverness may not be sufficient to save him when the chiefs finally demand fulfilment of his implied promises.

4.5 Anansewa's Position Increases the Sense of Danger

The characterisation of Anansewa also contributes to the atmosphere of anxiety. Although she participates in aspects of her father's plans, she is initially unaware of their implications. For example, she performs secretarial duties by helping to type correspondence connected with the courtship arrangements. Gradually, it becomes clear that she herself is the object of negotiation.



Her position makes the audience aware of the human consequences of Ananse's scheme. Ananse is not simply gambling with money; he is gambling with his daughter's future. This creates another possible calamity. Anansewa could end up being married to a man whom she does not love or respect simply because of her father's financial ambitions.

The emotional dimension of the plot becomes more noticeable when Anansewa develops a genuine interest in *Chief-Who-Is-Chief*. Her feelings complicate her father's original commercial treatment of the marriage arrangement. The question is no longer merely whether Ananse will make money. The audience also becomes concerned about whether Anansewa will eventually be united with a suitable husband.

4.6 The Announcement of Anansewa's "Death" Intensifies the Dramatic Tension

The most powerful example of an atmosphere foreshadowing calamity occurs when Ananse's scheme reaches a crisis. When it becomes impossible for him to continue deceiving all the suitors, Ananse invents an extraordinary solution: he announces that Anansewa has suddenly died. The strategy allows him to escape from the competing marriage claims. If Anansewa is dead, none of the chiefs can immediately demand to marry her. However, this solution introduces an even more dangerous level of deception.

Act Three (the competing chiefs are about to claim Anansewa: "Over my dead body.")

Anansewa's expression is dramatically ironic because Ananse immediately recognises in the idea of her "dead body" a possible solution to his crisis. What begins as an idiomatic protest therefore foreshadows the staged death that follows. Sutherland turns a casual expression into a structural clue, moving the action from comic courtship towards the solemn atmosphere of apparent death and funeral ritual.

Sutherland deliberately drives the play from the cheerful atmosphere associated with courtship, gifts and Ananse's comic trickery into the solemn atmosphere associated with death and funeral rites. The dramatic shift creates uncertainty. The audience knows that Anansewa is not actually dead, yet the characters connected with the chiefs are expected to believe that she is.

The false death therefore creates intense dramatic irony. The audience is placed in a privileged position: it knows the truth while many characters within the dramatic world do not. This knowledge generates tension because the audience begins to ask: What if Anansewa is discovered alive?

What if one of the chiefs demands to see the body?

What if the chiefs discover that the death is a trick?

How will Ananse explain Anansewa's later appearance?

Ananse's solution creates another potential calamity. The Funeral Atmosphere Creates a Powerful Contrast with Comedy. Sutherland further heightens tension by contrasting the predominantly comic tone with the solemnity of death and mourning. Much of the play presents Ananse as a comic trickster. His clever language, exaggerations and manipulation of situations entertain the audience. Yet the staged death introduces images and rituals normally associated with genuine human loss.

The change in atmosphere is dramatically significant. Death is no longer merely an abstract possibility; it enters the centre of the action. Even though the audience knows Anansewa is alive, the performance of mourning gives symbolic weight to the idea of calamity. The audience temporarily experiences the emotional atmosphere of a funeral while simultaneously knowing that the funeral itself is fraudulent.

As a result, Sutherland combines comedy with seriousness. The tension comes partly from the uncomfortable relationship between the two. The audience may laugh at Ananse's ingenuity while also recognising how dangerous and morally questionable his scheme has become.

4.7 The Responses of the Chiefs Sustain Suspense

Another dramatic technique Sutherland employs is the delayed revelation of the suitors' true characters. Anansewa's supposed death becomes a kind of test. The chiefs respond differently when informed that the young woman they intended to marry has died. Some of the suitors withdraw once the marriage is apparently impossible. Their reactions reveal that their commitment to Anansewa was limited. Chief-Who-Is-Chief, however, responds differently. Although he has not formally married Anansewa and therefore does not have to assume responsibility for her funeral, he demonstrates genuine concern and generosity. He is prepared to treat her death as a real personal loss and to support the funeral arrangements.

His response separates him morally from the other suitors. Yet before this becomes clear, the audience remains uncertain about how the chiefs will react. This delay in determining their reactions sustains suspense. Ananse's dangerous scheme unexpectedly becomes a mechanism through which the true character of the suitors is revealed.



4.8 Dramatic Irony Heightens the Tension

Dramatic irony operates throughout the play and is one of Sutherland's most effective techniques. The audience knows that Ananse is communicating with several chiefs, whereas each chief believes his own relationship with Anansewa is special. The audience also knows that Anansewa is alive when her death is announced.

This superior knowledge places the audience in constant anticipation. For instance, whenever Ananse speaks confidently about controlling the situation, the audience is aware that events could easily turn against him. His confidence itself can therefore become comic because the audience recognises how fragile his plans actually are. Dramatic irony consequently performs two functions: it produces *humour* and simultaneously generates *suspense*. The audience laughs because it knows the truth, but it is also anxious to discover whether the deception will succeed.

4.9 Songs and Anansegoro Conventions Comment on the Danger

Sutherland's use of *Anansegoro*, derived from traditional Ananse storytelling, also contributes to the dramatic atmosphere. The Storyteller and Players do not merely present events; they may comment on the action and involve the audience in interpreting what is happening. Musical interludes, commonly associated with *Mboguo*, interrupt or accompany the narrative and help establish mood.

The songs can reinforce, question or comment upon the behaviour of characters. Consequently, the audience is encouraged to reflect critically on Ananse's actions. This traditional narrative technique makes the audience almost a participant in Ananse's adventure. They understand his schemes, recognise the danger and anticipate the consequences. The Storyteller therefore helps sustain suspense by controlling how much information the audience receives and by directing attention towards significant developments in the plot.

4.10 Ananse's Character Is Itself a Source of Dramatic Tension

Characterisation is central to the creation of tension in the play.

Ananse embodies the familiar qualities of the traditional spider trickster: intelligence, cunning, adaptability, greed and resourcefulness. These qualities create two opposing expectations. On the one hand, the audience expects his greed and deception eventually to bring disaster upon him. On the other hand, because he is Ananse, the audience also expects him somehow to find an ingenious way out of difficulty.

4.11 Act-by-act support for Ananse's characterisation

Act One -Cunning and overconfidence: Ananse's decision to court four chiefs simultaneously demonstrates calculated intelligence, but Anansewa's question about "four" signals the danger in his plan. His cleverness therefore functions both as an advantage and as the origin of the conflict.

Act Two -Greed and mounting anxiety: the gifts initially validate Ananse's scheme and improve his circumstances, yet the head-drink messages transform material success into a threat. His anxious reaction exposes the point at which greed begins to overwhelm his control of events.

Act Three -Adaptability and risky improvisation: when all the chiefs move towards formalising the marriage, Ananse converts Anansewa's forceful refusal into the logic of a fake-death strategy. His resourcefulness saves him temporarily, but it also introduces a more serious deception that could collapse at any moment.

Act Four -Resourcefulness and comic recovery: after Chief-Who-Is-Chief distinguishes himself through genuine commitment, Ananse initiates the final reversal, and Anansewa returns to "life." Thus the same ingenuity that creates the crisis also produces its resolution.

4.12 Marriage and Death Function as Opposing Symbols

Sutherland also uses the symbolic opposition between marriage and death to heighten the dramatic effect. Marriage represents beginning, fertility, continuity and social union. Death represents ending, separation and loss. The whole play moves towards Anansewa's marriage, yet immediately before this goal is achieved, she must symbolically pass through "death." The movement can be represented as: courtship -crisis - symbolic death -restoration - marriage.

Anansewa's false death therefore functions almost like a transitional ritual. She symbolically disappears from the world of competing suitors and returns when the most suitable man has distinguished himself. This movement from apparent calamity to restoration reinforces the play's dramatic structure.

4.13 The "Resurrection" Provides the Comic Resolution

The atmosphere of potential tragedy does not ultimately produce a tragic ending. When Chief-Who-Is-Chief proves himself to be genuinely concerned, generous and responsible, Ananse finally has a way of resolving his dilemma. The other suitors are effectively eliminated, leaving the Chief as the preferred husband.

Anansewa can therefore "return" from death. Her supposed resurrection creates the final comic reversal. What appeared to be a funeral becomes part of the process leading towards marriage. Sutherland thus transforms an atmosphere of potential calamity into celebration. Nevertheless, the happy ending does not erase the dramatic tension



that preceded it. Rather, the resolution is satisfying precisely because the audience has watched Ananse come dangerously close to exposure and disgrace.

Act Four (Ananse invokes Anansewa's return): "Wake her."

The abrupt imperative condenses the final reversal of the play. The atmosphere has moved from anticipated calamity to restoration: the false death that protected Ananse from exposure can now be reversed once Chief-Who-Is-Chief has proved himself. The audience's accumulated tension is released through this comic "resurrection."

4.14 Synopsis of the play

The play revolves around Ananse, a cunning and financially struggling man, and his beautiful, educated daughter, Anansewa. Desperate to improve his social standing and financial security, Ananse hatches an audacious and risky scheme: he solicits marriage proposals from four wealthy and powerful chiefs simultaneously (representing North, South, East, and West). He sends them Anansewa's photograph and maintains correspondence, creating a lively competition among the suitors for his daughter's hand. Faced with the immediate need to choose one chief and dismiss the others without losing the accumulated wealth, Ananse devises his most dramatic ploy: he stages Anansewa's death. Anansewa, who is fully briefed on the deception, pretends to be dead (the "Dead-and-Alive"). Messengers from the four chiefs arrive one by one to pay their respects and offer funeral gifts. The chiefs' true character and depth of commitment are revealed by the quality and nature of their farewell offerings.

4.15 Exploration of humour in *The Marriage of Anansewa*

In very simple terms, humour means that which causes laughter. Humorous episodes abound in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. However, it should be mentioned that they serve a purpose. One strategy the author employs to keep us interested in the play is comedy. The "opening Act lines" of Ananse set the tone for the humorous techniques. On page 2,

Act One

ANANSE enters hastily, escaping from the rain outside. He is wearing a shabby raincoat and holding an umbrella. He shakes off the rain from the umbrella. He shakes his head like a troubled man.

ANANSE: While life is whipping you, rain also pours down to whip you some more. Whatever it was that man did wrong at the beginning of things must have been really awful for all of us to have to suffer so. [He calls] Anansewa-a! Where is that typewriter of yours? Bring it here. [Pause] I've been thinking, thinking and thinking, until my head is an earthquake. The world is really hard.

The lines above make use of Exaggeration. By this technique, Ananse frames his struggles in hyperbolic terms, immediately setting a tone of comedic suffering.

Some of Ananse's utterances produce humour in the play. For example, whilst telling Anansewa of the numerous palaces he went to select the four chiefs, he says the number four "covers North, South, East and West". This is an intriguing statement that will undoubtedly make the audience and readers in general chuckle because it is hilarious. The play's comic element may minimise the gravity of Ananse's actions at this point.

In Page 8:

Anansewa: "Oh father, there's cunning in your head. You are to be feared."

Ananse: [Flattered] "I'm glad you don't underestimate me."

This technique exposes the use of Ironic flattery where Ananse is pleased to be recognised for his deceitful "cunning." It is even evident in page 8 when Anansewa recounts how Ananse took his measurements

In page 21, the lines expose another important humorous technique.

(When he tears the telegram open, and reads it, he sinks into the chair with his eyes popping, and blows his cheeks).

ANANSE: Hey, fellow, blow me some breeze. (PROPERTY MAN turns the fan faster) What am I going to do? (He reads the telegram again aloud) 'Announcing messengers' arrival to conduct head-drink ceremony for Anansewa after two weeks stop greetings stop Chief Sapa.' Oh spirits, what shall I do? (Turning on PROPERTY MAN) Hey, haven't you any sympathy for a man hit by a storm? Cut off the breeze.

(He sits thinking with his jaws agape. PROPERTYMAN brings in a spider web screen and screens him off. [STORYTELLER approaches the web, stands in front of it and calls playfully to ANANSE])

STORYTELLER: Ananse, Ananse Ekuamoa, Man-is-cunning Ananse! His mind is far away. Ananse! George! George Kweku! Sir! He has retreated far, far away.

Whatever is it that could bring him back? A song?



(STORYTELLER, ANANSE and PLAYERS sing: MBOGUO)

Who is knocking? Who is knocking?
 It's me. It's me. To be sung in Twi
 Who is knocking? When I'm thinking?
 It's me. It's me.
 I'm ailing. I'm ailing.
 It's me. It's me.
 Stop disturbing. Stop disturbing.
 It's me. It's me.

ANANSE: Ah, my head! Who's that knocking to disturb me? (Calling PROPERTY MAN)
 Man, I need a headache pill. Don't you have any sympathy for a man struck by an
 earthquake of a headache? (PROPERTY MAN helps him to take a pill. Listen,
 man, it's become necessary for Anansewa to return home at once. Telephone
 Tarkwa, the Institute for Prospective Brides and say that at seven thirty tonight I
 will speak to Miss Christina Yamoah.

This technique demonstrates the use of Slapstick or better still Sudden reversal. His mood swings are instant and demanding, making his panic performative.

The attitude Ananse displays on reading Togbe Klu's arrival "to present the head-drink" on Anansewa is equally hilarious and humorous. We are aware that before the messenger arrives with the telegramme, Ananse was in a very happy mood. However, on reading the telegram, he frantically calls: "Christie, Christie!" and says "Christie, my head aches" when she asks: "George, what's wrong with you?". **Miss Christina Yamoah** is a fashionable woman who is **Ananse's lover and close helper**. She is not Anansewa's friend; rather, she is romantically interested in Ananse and hopes to become his wife eventually. Scholarly discussion of the play identifies her specifically as Ananse's lover. In fact, Ananse's abrupt behavioural shift, which ends with him demanding that his daughter's important outdoor ceremony be completely stopped, is hilarious. Because we, the audience, do not anticipate such a scenario, the hilarity here becomes meaningful.

Ananse's demand for his daughter to practice death is another amusing and entertaining scene. It is equally amusing how Anansewa is supposed to pass away. For example, he tells her to "open" her "eyes wide", which she obliges. She is also called upon to "stiffen" her limbs and she is to "do it properly" to appear dead. Accordingly, she stiffens herself with laughter. The controversy and confusion which erupt between father and daughter before she agrees to "die" is so humorous that we "can't laugh enough".

Interestingly, the Nanka episode is likewise funny and hilarious. In fact, Ananse begins the play's major joke, which is seen as regrettable with tears. These are the only things that make this humorous. The lies came next: "...enemies have set fire to our hope. Our cocoa farm", Ananse tells Aya and Ekuwa. It is hilarious how these elderly women respond to lies, insults, and desperation, among other things. The Storyteller is also engrossed in the humour due to the situation's amusing aspects: "...If this story of Ananse's were ending just here, I would laugh until my ribs protested".

4.16 Exploration of suspense in *The Marriage of Anansewa*

Suspense is the condition of wanting to know what will happen or expecting to happen in any work of literature. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the playwright creates a lot of suspense in the scheme of events. We are thrown into suspense by the contents of Ananse's letter being sent to the chiefs. At the beginning of the letter to Sapa, Ananse says: "The little affair about which we spoke seriously occupies my thought". He also continues: "...the way is open for you now to begin oiling the wheels of customs ...". And in the letter to Chief-Who-Is-Chief, Ananse concludes: "All is well with ... the object of your interest". Obviously, the references to "the little affair...", "oiling the wheel of customs", and "the object of interest" bring about suspense since we wonder what Ananse is referring to. In the process, therefore, the audience would want to know something relating to these references. Such a situation, then, brings about suspense at this part of the play.

Similarly, the "most lively competition" which Ananse says he has organised around Anansewa for the chiefs who are bidding for Anansewa also creates suspense here in the play. It goes without saying that it is unsafe and dangerous for a father to contact four suitors for just one daughter.

As a result, it seems that the theatre audience will be interested in learning about the competition's nature and how it can prevent the woman from taking such a big risk. The audience and the narrative as a whole experience the highest level of suspense because of this anticipation. No wonder, in this competition, Anansewa tells the father: "It's a very tangled affair".

Suspense is also created in the play by the gifts and money Ananse receives from the suitors. We already know that Ananse receives presents and money from the chiefs, so we will not go into great detail here. It is important to note,



though, that Ananse does not plan to give the daughter to every chief. Naturally, if Ananse fails the other three chiefs, we would want to know what will happen to him. In the event that the chiefs were disappointed, we would also need to know if Ananse would return the gifts. This move creates tension because the audience has a lot of unanswered questions about the matter.

Suspense is also created in the drama by Anansewa's fictitious death. Although we already know that Anansewa is still alive, the storyteller calls her since Ananse has requested her death: *"Dead-and-Alive"*. In fact, the speech and song which the Storyteller makes here make the suspense deeply profound. He asks the audience how Anansewa would be taken to the grave as she is not dead. He also questions how the deceit can be hidden so that it is not exposed and finally asks the audience if Ananse should *"cause her to vanish?"*. All these uncertainties brought about by the "death" of Anansewa are full of suspense as we would want to know what would happen to the "death" riddle as a whole.

In Act Four, pages 34 and 35 below,

ACT FOUR

(Players perform the Theme song or 'Who is that great weaver').

STORY TELLER: *Well, Anansegoro doesn't take long to grow. You were here, weren't you, when Ananse started drilling his daughter, Anansewa, in pretending dead? Very well. Time having passed, let me remind you that this is the day set by one of the four chiefs for his performance of the head-drink ceremony for Anansewa. Last night, everybody was asleep by the time the Methodist Church clock struck twelve o'clock. (PROP'MAN strikes this hour while STORYTELLER counts leaping numbers to reach 12). Suddenly, there was Mr George K. Ananse's voice screaming.*

VOICE OF ANANSE: *Come, somebody! Come to my aid! Ah, my only possession! I'm about to see disaster!*

STORYTELLER: *You hear that?*

VOICE OF ANANSE: *Alas! Anansewa! She has fainted! Something has descended on her! Where is everybody? Alas! Help! Help! People! People!*

STORYTELLER: *By the time people who heard this call arrived on the scene, there was Anansewa, lying as though she were dead. And then, you should have seen Ananse here.*

VOICE OF ANANSE: *Where are the doctors? Oh! Dispenser Hammond! Call in Dispenser Hammond! Ah! Ah! Ah!*

STORYTELLER: *Mr Ananse, he was by this time rolling on the ground, and striking his head violently against the wall, pum, pum, pum.*

(PROPERTY MAN produces the pum, pum, pum sound to help STORYTELLER)
Suddenly he springs up to stand at the door of the room in which his daughter lies, and invoking an oath, forbids anyone to touch his daughter. He declares that having been afflicted by a catastrophe of this dimension, he will do violence to himself should anyone come close to him. So that's how it has happened, that those who choose to believe it, believe that Anansewa is dead. But, as for a funeral of this nature, a funeral for the Dead-and-Alive, we will watch how it will be conducted this day.

(He takes castanets out of his pocket and accompanies himself in a song)

Oh, Dead-and-Alive, (To be sung in Twi)

Oh, Dead-and-Alive,

Anansewa e you're due for the grave.

Oh, Dead-and-Alive, how d'you get there?

Is she dead? Is she dead? Is she dead?

Therefore, Chief-Of-Sapaase e don't bother to come, oh, don't bother to come, because the object of your interest did not survive for you, did not survive for you

Ananse's voice screams: "Alas! Anansewa! She has fainted! Something has descended on her!" The subsequent scene details Ananse rolling on the ground and forbidding anyone to touch her. This is an indication of the use of Dramatic Irony or, better still, climax Building. The audience knows Anansewa is faking, but the extreme grief and theatrical prohibition raise the stakes, will they be found out?

And finally, the arrival of the suitors' emissaries also brings about suspense in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. We already know that Christie's assistance in creating the funeral atmosphere is a farce. We therefore question if the emissaries who file pass the "body" will fail to recognise such a significant scam. We, the audience, would also like to know if Anansewa is capable of carrying out the death role that has been thrust upon her. Finally, the audience would want to know if Chief-Who-Is-Chief will win Anansewa, even though it is obvious that he is her first choice. How is he



going to wed a "dead" woman if he wins the competition? Yes, there is a lot of suspense in these episodes. The study points out that one of the playwright's most successful strategies for maintaining the audience's interest in the play is suspense.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Efua Sutherland strategically deploys humour and suspense as central dramatic techniques in *The Marriage of Anansewa* to sustain audience engagement while advancing pointed social criticism. Through close textual analysis, the paper has demonstrated that these techniques are not merely decorative elements but structural devices that drive the plot, shape character development, and foreground the playwright's critique of materialism, greed, and the commodification of marriage in postcolonial Ghana.

Humour in the play emerges through exaggeration, irony, slapstick, and dramatic irony, particularly in Ananse's self-dramatisation and manipulative schemes. At the same time, superiority theory explains the audience's amusement at Ananse's cunning, as spectators momentarily share in his sense of intellectual triumph over powerful chiefs and rigid social hierarchies. This dual operation of humour creates a balance between entertainment and moral reflection.

Suspense, on the other hand, is carefully sustained through delayed revelations, ambiguous correspondence, the risky competition among suitors, and the dramatic ruse of Anansewa's "death." These moments of uncertainty heighten emotional investment and propel the narrative toward its resolution. The interplay between suspense and humour ensures that the audience remains intellectually alert and gradually emotionally engaged, uncovering the ethical implications of Ananse's actions.

Importantly, this study moves beyond thematic interpretation to foreground dramatic technique as a critical lens for understanding Sutherland's artistry. By blending indigenous Akan storytelling conventions with modern theatrical structure, Sutherland demonstrates how traditional performance forms can be reworked to address contemporary social realities. *The Marriage of Anansewa* thus stands as a significant example of African dramatic innovation, where technique becomes a vehicle for cultural continuity, critique, and creative experimentation.

In conclusion, Efua Sutherland's effective use of humour and suspense affirms her position as a master dramatist whose work continues to resonate within African theatre studies. Efua Sutherland's strategic use of humour and suspense demonstrates her skill in controlling audience response, sustaining dramatic tension, and advancing the plot in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Rather than serving merely as comic embellishment, humour frequently coexists with moments of uncertainty and impending danger, particularly in Ananse's multiple courtship schemes and Anansewa's staged death. This interplay between comic relief and suspense strengthens the dramatic effectiveness and illustrates Sutherland's accomplished handling of Anansegoro as a theatrical form. The play not only entertains but also challenges audiences to interrogate social values and human motivations, confirming the enduring relevance of indigenous narrative strategies in modern African drama.

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