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Myths, Traditions and Mothers of the Nation: Some thoughts on Efua Sutherland's Writing

Focusing in some detail on three of her plays, this paper addresses the work of Efua Theodora Sutherland, arguably one of Ghana's foremost literary figures, and one of Africa's most influential dramatists. Specifically, the paper proposes that in spite of a considerable body of critical work devoted to her writing, she remains surprisingly little known outside the specialist fields of African literature, and indeed even theatre. I will then seek to relate this assertion to her status as a woman writer in Africa, and to the challenges her conflation of traditional African cultural forms and Western dramaturgy create. Sutherland incorporates Greek theatre (*Edufa* overtly reworks Euripides' *Alcestis*) with African oral story telling, myths, folktales (*The Marriage of Anasewa* draws on *Anasegoro*, a Ghanaian dramatic form) and the printed word (the use of the bookshop in *Foriwa*) as the parts that give rise to a new culture, in a new Ghana. According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, through her writing, with its overt use of forms and traditions of yesteryear, Sutherland "comments on the present, showing that human nature has not changed; she is, however, determined to change the inhuman situation in Ghana and, by extension, the African world."¹ James Gibbs, in what remains possibly the most thorough scholarly note on her work and its autobiographical nature, has pointed out that from an early age Sutherland was exposed to the "Athenian

tradition,”² as a student in missionary institutions. Gibbs highlights the interface in her upbringing between these influences and those of her daily life in the Ghana of the twentieth century. After her return to Ghana, she became involved in the creation of a “Writers’ Society” (in 1957) which again thrived in “the mixture of cultures that had long flourished in towns near the coast, such as Cape Coast, Sekondi, and Takoradi.”³

Drawing on some of the above I want to relate her status as an African writer to a broader place her work might take up in the wider context of contemporary world writing. I suggest thus that she articulates in her work a provocative fusion of African and Western dramatic forms and narrative strategies that may, in some sense, reflect a very personal dimension of her experience as an African woman writer educated at Homerton College in Cambridge at a time when the number of women gaining a higher education remained limited. Sutherland arrived in Cambridge in 1947, and after a two year diploma went to complete a further year at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She returned to Ghana in 1950.⁴ Thus the paper pursues also the shifting nature of the criticism of her work, and the extent to which it hinges on both her gender and her condition as a Western educated Ghanaian. Ultimately, my discussion seeks to put forth some reasons for both the ambiguous reception her work continues to attract and the ambivalent status it enjoys.

A strong and charismatic figure, Sutherland could be said to remain one of the great literary enigmas in Ghanaian and African letters. Although not a prolific writer, her works created a considerable critical impression at the time of their publication, and strongly influenced the work of numerous other African playwrights. While the significance of her contribution to the creation of a culture of theatre production in postcolonial Ghana is today beginning to receive some recognition, by and large Sutherland continues to miss out on the acclaim bestowed on those of her compatriots whose own work might not have been possible without hers. Indeed, Anyidoho’s fairly

recent collection of essays, *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian, Literature, Theatre and Film*, offers an interesting case study. The collection devotes a number of essays to Sutherland's writing, and to an examination of her place as a writer in Africa, but the scope of those approaches remains surprisingly restrained. Anyidoho's remark, in the introduction to the collection, that her work has now been the focus of "due critical attention,"⁵ certainly seems to overstate the point. In fact, what the essays suggest is that the main issue with Sutherland is perhaps not so much a lack of critical interest in Sutherland's work, as the restricted analytical approaches her writing tends to attract. In addition to Anyidoho's words noted above, James Gibbs (2000), Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1992), Anne V. Adams (2000) and John K. Djisenu (2000)⁶ too have in recent years contributed to a re-evaluation of Sutherland's *oeuvre* as a whole. Furthermore, Sutherland's mark on the work of other Ghanaian writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Joe C. De Graft, and, indeed, Kofi Anyidoho himself, to mention but a few, now is widely acknowledged, not least by those authors themselves.

Clearly, then, it is wise not to overdo this dearth of critical attention on Sutherland's writing and work, not least because she is not alone here. To suggest that scholarly research on African women writers pales in comparison to the attention devoted to that of their male counterparts is not too far-fetched a proposition, especially when we consider the sheer weight of critical writing on a few authors, such as Achebe, Soyinka and Coetzee, for instance. Indeed, even more recent writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head, who all have benefited from the much stronger reputation African writing has since gained, attract only a small fraction of the criticism devoted to male writers of the same period, and of similar stature. Florence Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*,⁷ an influential study of African women's writing, more or less ignores Sutherland, despite an overt accent on gender in literature in Africa.

What makes Sutherland's case particularly ironic, as noted earlier, is that in her lifetime Sutherland wrote, directed and produced some of the most innovative works for the theatre to have emerged in Africa. In the context of an increasing focus on trans-cultural critical and theoretical paradigms, moreover, Sutherland's revolutionary fusion of African and Western European dramatic forms would seem designed to entice the critical skills of postcolonial critics. To borrow Patrick Chabal's words, spoken in his assessment of Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, Sutherland's work is "at once utterly modern in the Western sense but also fundamentally African in both inspiration and artistic sensibility."⁸ As I will show in this discussion, in her writing, and in her social and political activism, Sutherland brings together the contrasting, and very often conflicting worlds of pre- and post-colonial Africa in ways that truly reflect the notion of a cultural "contact zone" as proposed by Mary Louise Pratt.⁹

The difficulty with so much criticism of Sutherland's work is that it has privileged the Ghanaian nationalist dramaturge, and her unique place within the creation of a Ghanaian national culture largely as if she existed in a prelapsarian Africa and outside a gendered community. The prevailing view is that Sutherland was "essentially" African in her appeal to, and use of, local Ghanaian cultural traditions. The myth of the authentically African writer overlooks what in the plays is an obvious concern with transcultural dialogue, as Gibbs himself intimates. The fact that the issues she addressed could so clearly be seen to relate to a Ghanaian society in search of fixed nationalist points of reference meant that the broader meaning of her work was overlooked. The emphasis on Sutherland's work and its local(ised) context has in this sense served to stress the value and function of tradition and myth-making in the writer's contribution to a national(ist) culture; they have also worked to elide a raft of other ways in which the plays might be read, and in which the playwright's own place within Ghanaian and African letters may be considered. One might speculate here on the fact that most critics

of Sutherland's work tend to be male, a club I too now join. Thus, while I am conscious of the reductively essentialist risks inherent in my suggestion, it is significant that Anne V. Adams comes closest to producing one of the most original interpretations of Sutherland's work and of its historical and cultural contexts.

While I disagree with the way in which her reading of Sutherland's work struggles so enthusiastically to bring the texts' enormous complexity to a neat critical resolution, in "Revis(it)ing Ritual in Sutherland and Others" Adams provides some insightful and original remarks on aspects of Sutherland's writing practice. However, the focus on Sutherland "revis(it)ing of ritual," whilst an interesting take on the strategies the playwright adopts in her work, nevertheless fails to account fully for the works' ability to tap into local cultural traditions and their interaction with European cultural and political forms. One of the central aspects of any of her plays is the way in which they set out to comment on matters that were not exclusively African. As she puts it in a short Preface to *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), the play tells the story of "Everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination."¹⁰ My difficulty with Adams is that she seems determined to resolve the internal social, cultural and historical conflicts that Sutherland dwells on, and which the playwright herself seems to hesitate in closing off in ways that authenticate her work as that of an African playwright. She combines thus a sophisticated analytical approach with a somewhat simplistic critical practice.

I contend that criticism of Sutherland's work tends to underline the functional nature of her work, as a catalyst for profound changes in the Ghanaian cultural scene. As evidenced in Anyidoho's essay collection, there seems to be a template that the writer has to fit into, a rather narrow presupposition that Sutherland can only be concerned with salvaging the past rather than shaping the present. Anyidoho's view that Sutherland herself never entertained any ambition to be seen as a Ghanaian literary figurehead, an

issue reflected for him in her dedication to the development of a genuinely Ghanaian form of dramatic expression, seems in this sense a rather naive way of framing her. The founding by Sutherland of a theatre group in 1957, later to be absorbed into the University of Ghana as “The Drama Studio,” together with her involvement with a number of street-theatre projects, may help explain this view, and have led to her reputation being hailed largely as a “behind the scenes” operator. In this sense she is, as Ogunyemi suggests quite persuasively in the entry in *Twentieth-century Caribbean and Black African Writers*,¹¹ not unlike the figure of the Queen Mother in *Foriwa*. Like the Queen in her play, Sutherland too is seen as someone to whom the needs of the community always seem to precede her own. Perversely, though, this “mother of the nation” reading might in effect be seen as the kind of critical approach that has effectively contributed to a limited recognition of the subversive potential of Sutherland’s work, however unwittingly it does so. Hence my proposal that even a critic such as Adams, clearly attuned to some of the subtler aspects of Sutherland’s work, finds herself questing for a degree of closure, a way of explaining the playwright’s convoluted story lines. I wonder if the fact that Sutherland herself did not succumb to the trappings of fame in her lifetime might not more usefully be explained as a manifestation of the way in which she, as a Ghanaian woman writer, saw herself as a writer and a political activist in the newly independent nation. Rather than the meekly invisible actor Anyidoho imagines her to be, Sutherland’s actions reflected the degree of agency that is so clearly articulated through her life history.

This is partly the point Lloyd Brown makes in an excellent study of Sutherland as an African writer, “The African Woman as Writer.” In a reading of the play *Edufa*, and of the short story “New Life at Kyerefaso” Brown teases out the changing nature of Sutherland’s position as a woman writer in Ghana. Indeed, somewhat surprisingly in view of the title of his essay, one of its objectives is to raise awareness of the tendency

to generalise that both critics and writers adopt when dealing with African writing. Drawing on both these texts, Brown proposes that, “On the whole, Eflua Sutherland’s work both raises questions about the woman as victim and suggests possibilities of new relationships in her society.”¹² Brown develops this view with a brief analysis of two other writers, the Nigerian Flora Nwapa and Sutherland’s fellow Ghanaian, Ama Ata Aidoo. Specifically he suggests that what distinguishes Sutherland from the other two writers is a concern with what might be described as “an individualistic subjectivity.” In other words, her heroines are lacking in devotion to their communities. As I believe this paper shows, this is a view that I think the plays disabuse.

It is arguable that for Sutherland the artist is not actually an outsider to the society in which s/he operates but rather inextricable from it. A committed political and social activist, particularly in the field of mass education, her work reflected her profound dedication to the (re)making of contemporary Ghanaian culture. She explored in her plays also what are central issues for any postcolonial society—that is, both the task of recuperating the past and the need to look forward to a future that simultaneously rejects and reiterates the influences of the colonial encounter—but she did so without the rose-tinted perspective that characterised her contemporary male writers. This is clearly evident in the tightly structured *Foriwa*, a text that I think sets out much of Sutherland’s political and aesthetic project. *Foriwa* shows that while culture, tradition and ritual are inextricable from each other, the latter two matter only insofar as they retain the ability to provide a people with meaningful and reasonable parameters by which to live in community. Labaran’s character, combining a fusion of local and foreign knowledge, is in many ways an even closer reflection of Sutherland’s own experience than the Queen Mother. His commitment to change and progress is then a dimension of Sutherland, herself a Ghanaian woman educated abroad who chose to return to share her training and expertise with the community responsible for shaping her consciousness. *Foriwa*

explores a deepening of consciousness, as it were, insofar as Foriwa now begins to realise the importance of holding on to the past—to tradition and ritual—only to the extent that it, and they, have something to say about the present, and the future.

One of the most provocative levels of the play, and one that I believe has not been properly explored, is thus the critical reflection it casts on tradition. For her, culture is a “living thing” in the sense that in her plays she re/presents the lived experiences of the people as the source of their own interaction with the world. It is not static, and thus it cannot be excavated, albeit through the work of imagination, in the manner advocated by what might be termed an earlier “phase” of postcolonial African writers. As the Queen Mother remarks in *Foriwa* (1967), “custom was the fruit they picked from the living branches of life.”¹³ Sutherland’s stance resonates in this play, but also in *Edufa* and *The Marriage of Anansewa* with the view of nation and culture explored by both Frantz Fanon in “Notes on a National Culture” (1961), and by Amílcar Cabral (1969).¹⁴ Furthermore, it conveys their endorsement of a culture that combines the best of a multitude of cultural myths and traditions. Indeed, when Gay Willentz describes Sutherland’s work as “working towards the resolution of cultural conflicts by utilizing orature and literature as vehicles and for the revitalising *rural* communities,”¹⁵ I suspect that the emphasis is again on a romanticised view of what constitutes African society, and one that Sutherland herself does much to critique and unravel.

As an artist, she sees her role as no different from that of the manual worker tilling the fields, and through her dramaturgy Sutherland situates herself at the heart of a newly emerging culture. In the words of Labaran, in *Foriwa*, “a university degree is a devil of a thing if all it gives a man, is a passport to a life of respectability. I couldn’t permit myself to get caught in that.”¹⁶ His views reflect those of the Queen Mother, who remarks at one stage: “I choose to stay. I’m rooted here. I agreed to be mounted like a gorgeous sacrifice to tradition.”¹⁷ If we recall Ogunyemi, this posture is emblematic of

the author's own unique relationship with the place of her birth. In the play the Queen Mother has the option of agreeing to the demands of the likes of Sintim, thus accepting to be "destooled," but she knows that staying on is central to her ability to effect real change.¹⁸ At the conclusion of the play, it is Sintim who comes to accept that negotiation, compromise and dialogue will lead to a stronger community. Sutherland's relationship to her art resonates with Chinua Achebe's comments on the unique demands that a post-colonial context impose on the creative artist. As he puts it in "The Novelist as Teacher" (1965), "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."¹⁹

Ogunyemi's view that through her plays Sutherland seeks to change African society nevertheless overlooks the level at which the plays signify beyond national borders. As Gibbs rightly asserts, it is possible to read and make sense of *Edufa* without necessarily knowing about its connection to Euripides' work. The focus on broad themes, and the development of characters that, as she puts it in the short Preface to *The Marriage of Anansewa*, are to be read as conveying universal significance,²⁰ endow the plays with what I suggest is a "worldly subjectivity," rather than a simply or specifically Ghanaian one. Labaran's strength, and his influential function in the play are the result of his very mixed identity, a hybrid of the local and the foreign. As an agent of change, Labaran functions in the play, and in the village, as the force that re-energises by combining it with tools acquired elsewhere; in contrast, it is the elder Sintim, in his eyes the genuine guardian of local culture because he has never travelled outside the community, whom the play depicts as unable to understand the dimension of tradition in the creation and sustenance of a strong culture.

Sutherland is not opposed to local traditions, myths or folktales, or ashamed of them, but advocates a resignification of how they mean and function in a postcolonial society. This is perhaps best reflected in the fact that the Queen Mother reveals a desire that her own daughter should escape the fate she herself has had to endure, at least as conceived by the likes of Sintim. The move away from the village represents in part a shift away from the constraining ways of a local tradition. That at the time she voices both these opinions the Queen Mother is anticipating difficult conflicts with her own people, however, endows her words with a more complex and powerful layer of ambiguities. In other words, the Queen Mother's trepidation at allowing her daughter to go through what she herself has experienced must be placed within the context of an uncomfortable situation, and one in which she knows her condition as woman, if one on the seat of power, will inevitably work against her. Hence, as he begins a campaign to undermine her authority, and ultimately to oust her altogether, the elder Sintim comments: "How, when there are cocks here, should a hen be allowed to strut around in this manner, without getting her head pecked?"²¹ This is an aspect that I think deserves greater attention, much as I am conscious that it is simplistic to see Sutherland as a staunch feminist in contemporary terms.

Although we might agree that *Foriwa* articulates it in more extreme terms, one should note that in all of her works Sutherland puts forth an overtly egalitarian politics of gender. What to Brown appears as a weakness in *Edufa*—an ambivalence about her position in relation to, and about women's place in, postcolonial Ghanaian society—might be read as pivotal to Sutherland's political stance. Rather than a limitation, it speaks the recognition of the constraining discursive structures within which she lives and writes. Sutherland shows a fine appreciation of the place of women in her Ghanaian society, and—at the risk of universalising the local in ways that recent trends in critical theories of difference warn against—in most societies modelled on a patriarchal

paradigm more generally. In a move that anticipates much of the heat surrounding discussions of feminism in Africa, she does so without appealing to Manichean structures of pre- and post-colonial times. In this society colonialism is but one aspect of a complex set of cultural, political and historical relationships within which the writer exists. To this effect her work is much more subversive than if it were to “write back to” or “against” a colonial presence, since the task of change and remaking, that her works suggest is central to modern Ghanaian society, becomes solely the responsibility of all Ghanaians. Patriarchal discourses after all are not the property of any one race or state, as the work of writers as diverse as Buchi Emecheta, Virginia Woolf, Sashi Deshpande and Rigoberta Manchú make clear. In *Anansewa* the flaws in Ananse’s character are as much the product of his hubristic pride as they are a critique of a tradition in which women are “marketed” around for the benefit of family, community or ethnic group.²²

The Queen’s shift away from the village and the responsibilities her role in its social systems entail, constitutes thus less a rejection of local values than the articulation of the need for a new tradition, a tradition whose values reflect the concerns of a rapidly changing society. It is precisely this aspect that I think Anne V. Adams’ suggestive proposition, that in Sutherland’s work we witness a revising and a revisiting of ritual, fails to take into account. As I have noted, Adams seems much too concerned with neatly resolving Sutherland’s obvious unease with the masculinist, indeed patriarchal, nature of many Ghanaian rituals and tradition, when she reads the plays as *primarily* engaged in a revalorisation of local cultural traditions. For the problem—or at least the tricky itch—with tradition is that it is never natural, never innate in any society.

“Tradition,” in whatever sense one might opt to read it, is no more synonymous with African societies than modernity, in its various guises, is interchangeable with Europe. The difficulty a writer such as Sutherland poses to African and postcolonial critics relates to her refusal to be simply—simplistically?—Ghanaian, or African. More recent

writers such as the Mozambican Paulina Chiziane and the Zimbabwean Yvonne Vera have tended to attract criticism similarly preoccupied with their ability to perform to and conform with a social function, rather than with an artistic vision that might in effect be in conflict with the collective vision.

I want to stay with this focus on gender relations as a central part of Sutherland's work a little longer, and to stress that it is impossible to subsume it within the author's equally obvious allegiance to Ghanaian cultural identity; I am not suggesting that it is the only issue in her work. Rather, I want to propose that while generally not much attention is paid to her own condition as woman, Sutherland's continued low profile, both in her life-time and since her death in 1996, may be best explained precisely in terms of it. However influential her work on Ghanaian drama, and her truly remarkable contribution to the creation of conditions conducive to a genuinely Ghanaian dramaturgy, Sutherland also had to struggle with a system of power in which she, as a woman, necessarily occupied a position of subalternity. Critics such as Kumari Jayawardena, Dale Spender and Carolyn Cooper²³ have stressed time and again, writing about and in different cultural conditions, that nationalist politics have been by nature and definition masculinist, and in that sense inclined to silence concerns with gender. The exaggerated emphasis on Sutherland's Ghanaian roots that I have suggested characterises much critical engagement with her work appears to seek to contain the works' complex political messages. There is an unsettling emphasis on Sutherland as some kind of "salt of the earth" voice, immune to foreign influences, when her ability to look outwards is exactly what highlights the power of the local. At the risk of overstating the link, I want to highlight how writers of Sutherland's generation were exposed to an education that could not but have made them conversant with Western cultural ideas. Add to that the already noted reticence among African and Africanist critics to engage with feminism as an ideology or critical framework, and it becomes

clearer why Sutherland remains so easily seen as somehow a benign Mother of the Nation, policing rather than creating the discourses within which she exists.

Readings of Sutherland's work that tend to emphasise both the form of her work and her role within the literary and political spheres in contemporary Ghana, come very close to adopting a similarly reductive approach. For there can be no doubt that if Sutherland is partly revisiting a Ghanaian cultural tradition, she is also very consciously re-situating women within their *indigenous* society and tradition. Moreover, she does this not so much against a colonial model of gender relations, that is one in which women occupied "naturally" a position of subservience to both the colonial and the African male, but by exploring precisely the role of women within the setting of traditional African societies. In sum, if blame there is, it resides largely with an indigenous power structure in which the role accorded women is dependent on their cultural selves, whereas that of men derives essentially from their biology. In the society she depicts in her plays women are hailed into being largely as a result of their beauty and grace, thus of their ability to capture the attention of marriageable men through their charms. This contrast is most obvious in *The Marriage of Anansewa*, where, despite ultimately remaining in control insofar as she holds the thread of her father's web, Anansewa is seen always as the object of male-dominated discourses. A similar comment could be made in relation to Edufa's wife in the play of that title, or to Foriwa in the eponymous work. Sutherland's understated irony—of language, plot and characterisation—conveys what is arguably an authorial stance in the best sense of the notion. The following quotation, from *Foriwa*, illustrates this point:

Queen Mother: Every woman's lot is marriage.
Foriwa: So they say, rushing in.²⁴

Here, as in much of Sutherland's work, women are depicted as trapped between the desire for freedom, on the one hand, and the obligations of their condition as women as

cultural—traditional—constructs. Though Foriwa’s words contain a rather pointed irony, the fact that she, too, ultimately succumbs to Labaran’s charms may somehow appear to undermine the clarity of her views. That Labaran is both an outsider and an agent of change within what is depicted as a rather static, indeed, sterile community, however, means that Foriwa’s decision must be seen as a considered “taking sides” with the future. According to Ogunyemi, the relationship represents a “desired fusion of different parts of Ghana—Hausa and Akan, North and South—for the building of the nation.”²⁵ Much as I agree with his interpretation, it is also a rather conventional way of situating postcolonial writing in a nation-building context that very closely resembles Jameson’s sweeping, if provocative, generalisation that “all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical... they are to be read as what I call *national allegories*....”²⁶ Foriwa, it is worth recalling, has previously moved away from the village, and now lives in the city. As such she has stepped outside the mould of power relations to which her mother subscribes, by pursuing non-traditional knowledge. For she knows that while her mother is now the Queen, her hold on power is not only precarious, but in fact “simulated.” As a woman, and as Sintim’s words make clear, the Queen Mother cannot but be a surrogate power holder for a system of power relations within which she herself is but a pawn. The ideological model of gender relations that Sintim invokes is one that the Queen Mother herself is absolutely in no doubt she serves, and of which she is a subject.

Sutherland’s women demonstrate an ability both to perceive the limitations imposed by societal constructs of their gender, and to negotiate the way this is to be endured. In other words, in Sutherland women are *naturally* the agents of change,²⁷ not as a result of acquired education, as is the case with Labaran, the idealistic young Hausa man in *Foriwa*, but rather because of their awareness of the “constructedness of culture and tradition,” and more specifically, of the category of “woman” within those categories. When, in *Foriwa*, the Queen Mother speaks of a “tradition of the future,”²⁸

her words prefigure a tradition that will replace *other man-made* traditions with a more genuinely inclusive postcolonial Ghanaian tradition. As Ogunyemi has remarked,²⁹ it is perhaps indicative of the subversive potential of her work that Sutherland often took quite a long time putting her ideas to paper. As pointed out earlier, both Gibbs and Anyidoho note that her plays were frequently produced for the stage long before their publication, a delay that I would argue to be suggestive of the “work-in-progress” quality that is characteristic of her literary production. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, a short note explains that it was “published after productions of the play in Akan and in English by three different companies in Ghana...”³⁰ More than anyone else, Sutherland herself would seem to have had a clear perception of the inherently fluid nature of culture and tradition, and of the artist’s role in their creation. As an artist, she saw her creative potential simply as one of a range of elements necessary to the formulation of a Ghanaian culture.

Sutherland’s adoption of *Anansegoro*, a Ghanaian dramatic form developed most clearly in *The Marriage of Anansewa*, belongs therefore to this all-inclusive dimension of her work, one in which the artist borrows at random from a number of sources, reshaping and transforming those elements which s/he puts to work in his/her own practice. Gibbs quotes from a letter in which Sutherland refers to her decision, during her time in England, “to keep her eyes and ears ‘wide open’ and to ask many questions.”³¹ Indeed, it is interesting to see the trajectory the plays undertake, as it were, moving increasingly towards a more overt association with local cultural forms, as a reflection of this “intention.” Simplistic as it will seem, it is possible to suggest that in a sense the writer grows increasingly confident in her own ability to tune in to the local. The constant play of mirrors Sutherland’s works offer between the old and the new, the closed nature of so many traditions and rituals, and the multiple possibilities for new beginnings, becomes thus perhaps the most significant sign of Sutherland’s commitment

to Ghana, to a present that is solidly rooted in the past but consciously and actively looking forward.

Notes

¹ Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Efua Theodora Sutherland," in Bernth Lindfors and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Twentieth-century Caribbean and Black African writers* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 285.

² James Gibbs, "Efua Theodora Sutherland," in C. Brian Cox, ed., *African Writers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; London: Simon and Schuster Prentice Hall International, 1997, 833-849), 834.

³ *Ibid.*, 836.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Kofi Anyidoho, "National Identity and the Language of Metaphor" in Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs, eds., *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian, Literature, Theatre and Film* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, 2000), 20.

⁶ Ogunyemi; Adams, Anne V.. "Revis(it)ing Ritual in Sutherland and Others" in Anyidoho and Gibbs, 85-94; John K. Djisenu, "The Art of narrative Drama in Ghana," in Anyidoho and Gibbs, 37-41.

⁷ Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸ Patrick Chabal, "The African crisis: context and interpretation," in Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger, eds., *Postcolonial Identities in Africa* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996), 41.

⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰ Efua Theodora Sutherland, *The Marriage of Anansewa: A Storytelling Drama* (London: Longman, 1975), v.

¹¹ Ogunyemi, 285.

¹² Lloyd Brown, "The African Woman as Writer" (*Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9.3, 1975), 497.

¹³ Efua Theodora Sutherland, *Foriwa: a play* (Accra, Ghana: State Publishing Corp., 1967), Act 1, Scene 5, 25.

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: selected texts*, trans. and ed. Richard Handyside (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969) and *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, trans. Michael Wolfers (London: Heinemann Educational, 1980).

¹⁵ Gibbs, 840, my emphasis.

¹⁶ Sutherland, *Foriwa*, Act 3, Scene 2, 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Act 1, Scene 2, 8.

¹⁸ The stool is a particularly significant symbol of power in the Akan form of government, closely associated with royal power, though also with the power of the head of the family (the stools that correspond to each of these spheres are set apart by both their colour and denomination). To occupy the stool is to be enthroned as a political leader; conversely, to be "destooled" corresponds to being deposed, removed from power. See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti of the Gold Coast" in Daryll Forde, ed., *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African People* (London: Oxford University Press).

¹⁹ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*. London: Heinemann, 1975), 45.

²⁰ Sutherland, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, v.

²¹ Sutherland, *Foriwa*, 39.

²² See Ogunyemi.

²³ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986);

Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Sutherland, *Foriwa*, Act 1, Scene 2, 7.

²⁵ Ogunyemi, 286.

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (*Social Text*, Fall 1986, 65-88), 69.

²⁷ See Gibbs, 837.

²⁸ Sutherland, *Foriwa*, Act 1, Scene 1, 7.

²⁹ Ogunyemi, 285.

³⁰ Sutherland, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, x.

³¹ Gibbs, 835.