

HUMOUR AS DRAMATIC AESTHETICS IN JAMES HENSHAW'S *DINNER FOR PROMOTION***Muotolu (Ekwosianya), Martha Chinonye****Department of Early Childhood Care and Education****Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe,****Anambra State, Nigeria****Email: ekwosianyam@gmail.com****Abstract**

Humour has been a powerful dramatic tool that can be used to connect with others, challenge societal norms, and provide entertainment. It could be seen as a fascinating instrument that is indispensable in the sense that it has some captivating effects on conflict resolution and healing in the process, it engages the audience positively, enhances social bonding as well as creating emotional connection. The study therefore investigates the essence of humour in James Ene's *Dinner for Promotion*. The objectives include espousing the writer's use of humour to achieve both satiric and comical effects. The study made use of both library and internet sources in its data collection and analyzed the collected data using the formalist theoretical framework. Findings include that the themes inherent in the work were structured to achieve both satiric and comic effects the work is all about. The study concludes that success of Henshaw's drama is largely dependent on humour through which the effects of satire and comic were heightened.

Keywords: Humour, Drama, Aesthetics, Satire and Comic**Introduction**

From antiquity and through history, literature has made and would continue to make indispensable impacts on the society. Its roles ranges from reflecting and projecting the people's aspiration for the future (Duvignand, 67 in Onwumere and Ugorji 2017), keeping the collective imagination of a society alive for communal social construction (Cudwell, 145 in Onwumere and Udorji, 2017), being the greatest tool in representing reality (Ezeigbo,10), being an important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, social conflicts, class struggle, and human conditions (Obi 487). As a work of art,

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literature presents the pleasant and unpleasant sides of life, the realities and the unrealities of human life. It is the duty of literature to “observe and to comment; to open individuals and their society for observation and understanding” (Ezeaku,2). Literature is a great discipline. It makes you understand the world in a holistic sense, perhaps as no other subject does. Sometimes literature can comfort you, calm you. I can open up the world to you. Even its numerous essence to you (Nwagbara, 3). Of a greater importance is the role of literature to invoke laughter and make a mockery of human follies. Literary artists especially dramatists employ humour as an instrument of creating both satiric and comical effects as they inquire into the inner minds and thoughts of their characters that resulted in certain behaviours they exhibit. Humour was also employed by the Elizabethan playwright: Ben Jonson in his Comedy of Humours, based on the ancient physiological theory of the four humours” that was still current in Johnson’s time. The humours were held to be the four primary fluids – blood, phlegm, choler or the melancholy – whose temperament was held to determine both a person’s physical condition and type of character. Johnson expounds this theory in the “Induction” to his play Every Man in His Humour (1598) and exemplifies the mode in his later comedies; often he identifies the ruling disposition of a humorous character by his or her name. The Johnsonian type of humours character appears in plays by other Elizabethans and remained influential in the comedies of manners by William Wycherley, Sir George Etherege, William Congreve and other dramatists of the English restoration.

The term humour refers to what is purely comic. It evokes sympathetic laughter which is an end in itself. Humour may also be ascribed to a comic utterance or to a comic appearance or mode of behaviour. It is the quality of being amusing or comical, or the ability to express or appreciate amusement of comicality, It is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be understood and expressed in various ways including wit, irony, satire, parody and slapstick. It is a powerful dramatic device used in literature, theatre, and film to achieve various effects and convey meaningful messages, By incorporating humour effectively, writers and creators can craft engaging stories, develop relatable characters, and convey meaningful messages that resonate with audiences. Humour serves various purposes including social bonding, stress relief, critique, and entertainment.

Drama is a form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue. Etymologically, drama is derived from two Greek related words, “dra-n” and dra-ontes”, respectively meaning action or doing and imitation from men doing things” (Eze, 2011), This is why Dryden in Nwabueze in defining in defining a play says that “a play is ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, reproducing the passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind”. By this, Dryden means that drama imitates and impersonates and must deal with actions of man, all aimed at instructing and entertaining a target audience. Drama is a kind of storytelling, but rather than being composed in prose. It tells its story by use of actions and dialogue. It portrays life through characters, as it educates and entertains. As a matter of fact, drama performs different functions in an attempt to perform its roles. Drama serves as instrument for socialization and cultural validation, a learning tool, a means of social criticism, a philosophical tool, a means of entertainment, a political weapon, a means of economic empowerment to mention but a few.

Aesthetics / Aestheticism is a term first used by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in his Latin treatise entitled *Aesthetica* (1750). He applied the term “aesthetica” to the arts, of which the aesthetic end is the perfection of sensuous cognition, as such: this is beauty.” In present usage, aesthetics designates the systematic study of all fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial. During the latter part of the eighteenth century in Europe, aesthetic movement was developed in opposition to the dominance of scientific thinking, and in defiance of the widespread indifference or hostility of the middle – class society of their time to any art that was not useful or did not teach moral values. French writers developed the view that a work of art is the supreme value among human products precisely because it is self-sufficient and has no use or moral aim outside its own being, The end of a work of art is simply to exist in its formal perception: that is to be beautiful and to be contemplated as an end to itself. A rallying cry of aestheticism became the phrase – art for art sake.

Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or

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indignation. It differs from the comic in that it evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides, that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even the entire human race. (Abrams, 285) Satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly; Alexander Pope, for example, remarked that “those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous.” Its frequent claim has been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a person is not responsible. Satire occurs as an incidental element within many works whose overall mode is not satiric – in a certain character or situation, or in an interpolated passage of ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or of contemporary society. But for some literary writings, verse or prose, the attempt to diminish a subject by ridicule is the primary organizing principle and these works constitute the formal genre labelled satires.

Comic is a literary technique that is designed to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern; we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily. A comic work is presented primarily for enjoyment as one sees in the puritanical Malvolio in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

The paper examines the use of humour in James Henshaw’s *Dinner for Promotion*. It explores the use of diverse humorous devices like disguise, pidgin, speech mannerism, mime, mistaken identity, as well as deceit to expose, attack and condemn the selfish attitudes of the characters. Again the author employs an artistic blend of this technique to explore certain ideas that recur in the work.

Theoretical Framework

The formalistic theory is used in the analyses of the literary corpora, since humour is used as a weapon to achieve both satiric and comic effects and the elements of humour are structured in the text to expose both the treachery and the follies of the characters. In the formalistic theory of literature, the reader judges the merits of a work as a finely crafted aesthetic whole. As the name

implies, formalism is an interpretative approach that emphasizes literary form and the study of literary devices within the text. Russian formalists advocated a scientific method for studying poetic language, to the exclusion of traditional psychological and cultural- historical approaches. As Erlich (in Nwahunanya 241) points out, “Formalism was intent upon delimiting literary scholarship from contagious disciplines such as psychology, sociology, intellectual history...” (241). According to Steiner (in Nwahunanya 242):

The two general principles that underlie formalism in literature are first, that literature or its features that distinguish it from other human activities must constitute the subject of inquiry of literary theory: and second, that literary fact has to be prioritized over the metaphysical commitments of literary criticism, whether philosophical, aesthetic, or psychological. (242)

The most prominent member of the formalist school, A. I. Richards evolved a method of engaging in a disinterested analysis of unsigned poems. He assumed that a poem has an ontological status of its own, that it is an object with certain autonomy. His approach is objectivist and explicatory. His is textual criticism through which he aims to fully appreciate a work without references to anything outside the work itself. This consideration of a literary work as an independent object originates from the reaction against nineteenth century positivist tendencies to reduce literary works to sociological, historical, or other kinds of documents, or to an expression of some sort of moral or political position. Also rejected is the usual attempt to reduce literary works by references to the author’s biography or psychology. The formalist approach is essentially aesthetic, and assumes that the literary artifact is an “...aesthetic object, capable of arousing aesthetic experience”. Such an aesthetic object interests... for its own qualities...”, and aesthetic experience which it arouses ‘is a form of contemplation, a loving attention to qualities and qualitative structure’. Wellek and Warren (in Nwahunanya, 205).

body of fixed meanings that cohere to form an organic whole in which all conflicts are artistically resolved. On the contrary, it is claimed, many literary texts consist of a diversity of dissonant voices, and these voices express not only the orthodox, but also the subordinated and subversive forces of an era in which the text was produced. Furthermore, what may seem to be

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the artistic resolution of a literary plot, yielding pleasure to the reader, is in fact deceptive, for it is an effect that serves to cover over the unresolved conflicts of power, class, gender, and diverse social groups that make up the tensions that underlie the surface meanings of a literary text.

Methodology

Area of the study

The study examines and explores instances of humour evident in James Eneh's *Dinner for Promotion* and the satiric and comical effects it has on the drama.

Sources of Data collection

The sources of data collection are secondary sources, which is mainly library based as well as internet resources. It also includes the study's primary source of data – *Dinner for Promotion*.

Method of Data collection

The study uses library based study for its data collection. This involves a review of the theoretical frameworks, a close study of the literary work, identifying and highlighting areas where humour was used to create both satiric and comic effects.

Method of Data analysis

The texts which form the literary corpora for the research are analyzed by identifying elements that are embedded in the body of the drama which are in line with the tenets of the formalist literary theory, which is the most appropriate and most relevant literary theory for the analysis of the data.

The Author and his Work

James Ene Henshaw, a Calabar born Nigerian playwright of Efik affiliation whose simple and popular plays treat various aspects of African culture and tradition. A physician by profession, Henshaw was educated at Christ the King College, Onitsha and received his medical degree from the National University of Ireland, Dublin, before taking up playwriting. One of his first plays *The*

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Jewels of the Shrine, published in the collection, *This is Our Chance: Plays from West Africa* (1957). His second collection, *Children of the Goddess, and other plays* (1964), treats such themes as the inefficiency of a local village court because of the drunkenness of its members and the struggle between local authorities and missionaries over the spread of Christianity in a 19th century Nigerian village. *Medicine for love* (1964) is a satire with a serious overtones on such matters as a politician's attempt to bribe his way into power and his difficulties with the three prospective wives sent to him by his relatives. The comedy - *Dinner for Promotion* centres on ambitious young man, a newly rich business man and a quarrelsome sister-in-law. *Enough is Enough* (1975), a Civil war play and a *Song to Mary Charles* (1984).

Data analysis and Presentation

James Ene Henshaw's *Dinner for Promotion* (1967) is a comedy. The study is significant largely because of the writer's use of humour as a dramatic aesthetics to achieve both satiric and comical effects. In the play, the writer uses humorous words and appearances to ridicule, deride, condemn, attack, lampoon, mimic, contempt and make caricature of the character's follies and foibles in their struggles to outwit and outsmart each other to attain a greater height. One sees a lot of deceit and errors depicted by the characters in the bid for one to outsmart the other. It is basically a story of two ambitious friends, Tikku and Seyil, whose main pre-occupation is to get to the top. But unfortunately there is only one position to be filled at the top, and neither of them can arrive there without stepping on the other's toes. The play also portrays the crafty nature of the two friends who out witted their selfish and defiant landlord and made it impossible for him to collect his rent. In the play again, the two friends Tikku and Seyil, betrayed the trust on each other and employed all kinds of crafty means in order to get promoted. The drama unfolds in mediases with the friends worried on how to pay the arrears owed their landlord and wish their employer Sipo Amalgamated will promote them to take care of their needs. In a flashback, the reader was let into the difficulties encountered by the friends and also the incident that led to the separation of Toru and her lover Koyeh.

Humour was employed as a dramatic tool that assigned some enduring aesthetic qualities to the play. These qualities could be explored from the points of how humour shapes plot,

characterization and audience experience. Through these effects humour has on these areas, the significance of humour on African drama would be laid bare.

Effect of Humour on Plot

The plot in Ene's *Dinner for Promotion* is not a simple one, neither is it straightforward. Rather it is a complex plot that involves flashbacks, which saw in the friendship of Toru and Koyeh, the beginning of Pamphilia and Madam Una's enmity which are carried into the present. Again, the storyline began at the middle of the event (in mediare). We are told that Seyil and Tikku have been owing arrears of rents to Mr Senka, (their landlord), and Toru made mention of Tikku's poor state and the fact that she alone has been shouldering her families' responsibilities. Again, the use of dream as a foreshadowing device was seen when Koyeh on depositing for the radio and the furniture warned Toru that if Tikku did not pay for them that he will take them back. Again, Mr Sipo made several utterances about the impossibility of the dinner being ready. The play/ drama is a play within a play, where the characters disguised themselves to deceive and create a false impression. In the text, Toru disguised as a nurse while Tikku and Seyil feigned ill only to deceive Mr Senka and once again evade the payment of their rent. Again, Koyeh impersonated the chairman of the committee for drainage and sewage while Tikku and Seyil disguised as ladies and Toru disguised as Koyeh's younger daughter. Mr Senka was tricked into giving a false charity despite the fact that he did not collect the rent he came for. The quorum swindled him of his money and made him sign a cheque for the imagined Good Ladies Organization". The writer's use of humour helped to lend a humorous as well as a comic effect to the storyline. The speech mannerism of Mr Senka (so to speak) made the entire plot humorous. In other words, the choice of words of the play, especially the use of pidgin, prided a humorous effect to the play.

The characters are humorous in their actions towards and against each other. In their bid to outwit each other, they displayed great betrayal of distrust, as well as deceit and disguise to achieve their selfish interest to the detriment of the other. Imagine Tikku deceiving Seyil into indulging in innocent abuse of Sharia's father and Koyeh misleading Mr Senka to believe he is a minister and again the stranger's behaviour towards the "talk talk thing". The characters appear comical

and humorous as they exhibit their traits which are satirized through humour. Some of the traits exhibited by the characters that are condemnable include vaulting ambition, selfishness, and deceit, betrayal, of trust, vengeance, and gullibility and so on. Seyil and Tikku's attitude of evading the payment of their rent made them disguise and deceive Mr Senka. Mr Senka on the other hand, portrayed so much insistence on collecting his rent in full without considering the poor state of his apartments that has a leaking roof. He was finally outwitted by his tenants and he end ups not receiving a dim. He will not let go of his rent but displayed an uncontrolled gullibility towards women but not without parting with a huge sum. Each of the characters has one flaw or the other that gave his game away and made a laughing stock out of him/her.

The audience could not but feel humorous by the actions and speeches of the characters, who have fully entertained them and helped in creating a long lasting suspense in t till they found out what the next line of action would be in this game of wits. The climax of the play was reached when the radio as well as the furniture was taken away. This incident aroused pity in the audience for Tikku and fear for what the future holds in stock for him concerning the targeted promotion, but through a device of *duex machina*, the dinner turned out to be a dinner for promotion for both Seyil and Tikku and for Pamphilia and Madam Una. Suddenly, the audience who felt pity for seyil, who was paid in his own coin, somehow became happy when he was re – considered for employment elsewhere. Here, humour was employed as a tool that shaped audience experience who were intrigued by the conflict of interest in the two major characters, and who were fully kept alive the suspense created them towards the denouement, where the conflict was amicably resolved. The audience saw comical characters who indulge in smart techniques and systems to outsmart and outwit each other in order to get to the top, though this was not without some serious hitches here and there, which serve as lessons to them. It is this elements and effects of humour in the plot arrangement, characters and audience experience that made the play comical and a comedy so to say.

A number of themes were espoused by the author in this play. The first that comes to mind is the theme of conflict of interest. Here the desire of Seyil and Tikku to get promoted is the bone of contention in the play. In the bid to achieve this, Seyil had to get to the top by using Sipo's

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flamboyant daughter Sharia, as an easy ladder. He does not mean well for her, for his selfish ambition made him to deceive her into fake love, where he plans to dump her after getting to his destination, unfortunately, Tikku's crafty sister persuades her brother to outwit and outsmart him by deceiving him into indulging in innocent insult and despise of Sharia's father (who is also his boss) with believe that this simple act of disrespect will shatter the so called relationship and when this happens, then Tikku has an easy chance to grab that opportunity to love Sharia and become promoted. This is evident from the text thus;

“This is my plan. No girl is prepared to be in love with a man who despises her parents” (p.35).

Again, the theme of deceit was judiciously explored in the play. Here the author made Seyil and Tikku through the help of Koyeh to engage in make believe acts in order to frustrate their defiant Landlord Mr. Senka from getting his rent. Here the author employed the techniques of play within a play and lots of improvisation to disguise the true identity of the characters. Thus when Mr. Senka came in and demanded his full rent, Seyil and Tikku, enter the sitting room disguised as old folks from the village and deceive Mr Senka who erroneously donated generously to their Good Ladies League. This is evident from the text thus;

“Take this cheque in appreciation of the good deeds which The Good Ladies League is doing. It is a wonderful day for me, to be in contact with very important people like you” (P.57).

As the drama unfolds further, Seyil realizing that he has been outwitted by Toru and Tikku, made a firm resolution to frustrate the dinner by consolidating his plans aimed at making the success of the party a complete failure. After so much fears and apprehension which Seyil obviously enjoys, his sins found him out, for the grand plan of his ill was revealed by the man he hired to disrupt the activities of the dinner.

Illusion and reality has also helped in building the structure of the play. The characters live in complete illusion of what the other is doing, for example Seyil had confided in Tikku of his plans to achieve his success not knowing that Tikku has his own plans too. Again during the party, while the dinner wouldn't be ready, Toru, Seyil, Mr. Sipo, his sister and wife get steadily worried over the turn out of the events. Seyil the master planner, pretends to commiserate with them but in earnest, he foils the dinner the more. This we could glean from the text as follows;

“Since my papa and mama born me, I no see this kind thing o! One person dey make dinner, another dey pay me make I go spoil gas, make I go put out electric, make I spoil everything” (p.91)

Again, there is the theme of generational gap conflict. This is evident in the text where Tikku and Toru's parents who represent the old generation believe that their children have no right to engage in a marital relationship without their fore knowledge and consent. Similarly, Mr Sipo sees Tikku and Seyil as irresponsible young men who run away from their responsibilities as men by shying away from paying their rent and other bills, and rather indulge easily in deceit to achieve their goals and objectives in life. We see this in the text as follows;

“You didn't pay for the radio, now you haven't even paid your rent. I can't accept a single excuse for his behaviour. When I was in his position, I made sure I paid my rent before anything else” (p.72)

Mistaken identity is another theme that keeps recurring in the text. The characters kept disguising their identity such that another does not know who is really who. This is the trick employed by Tikku and Seyil to evade paying their rent and all through, the writer uses this to achieve some humorous and comical effects which tend to reduce the seriousness of the incident and heighten the effect of satire. The author has used humour to a large extent to depict and satirize the follies of the characters. Other dramatic techniques employed by the author include use of pidgin, biblical allusion et cetera.

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Conclusion

It is obvious from the study that the success of Henshaw's *Dinner for Promotion* could be attributed to the use of humour to heighten the effect of satire, where the attitudes and behaviours of the characters are exposed and ridiculed. Again, the thematic preoccupations explored in this work were further made real through the heightened effect of humour.

Recommendations

1) Promotion of Ethical Values through Drama:

playwrights and educators should continue to use drama as a medium for promoting ethical values such as honesty, merit, and accountability. As seen in *Dinner for promotion*, humour can effectively expose corruption, deceit, and selfish ambition, thereby encouraging moral reflection in society.

2) Integration of Literary Texts in Civic and moral education

Educational institutions should incorporate plays like *Dinner for Promotion* into Curricula to enhance students' understanding of social issues such as corruption, generational conflict, and abuse of power. This will help learners develop critical thinking skills and foster responsible citizenship.

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