



A Critical Survey of Cultural Perspectives in the Drama of James Ene Henshaw, 1924-2003

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ABSTRACT

A critical evaluation of the beginnings of Nigerian literary drama in English is still shrouded in controversy as most conventional critics and drama historians pitch it with the Onitsha Market literature, among which they mischievously include the works of James Ene Henshaw, who they consider only as a transitional bridge to the serious literary drama of Wole Soyinka. It's difficult to say what literary criteria have been used to arrive at such misleading conclusion because as Perrine rightly notes, the value of any literature lies in the depiction of "human truth other than fidelity to fact" or mere artiness. This critique, based on the dramatic oeuvre of James Ene Henshaw, evaluates a range of significant cultural perspectives that have engaged the medical doctor/dramatist's literary life. These themes include issues of cultural engineering and development, and problems that arise from these cultural approaches like cultural relativism, Prometheanism or ethnocentrism, and post-colonial multiculturalism. These have remained central to the critical problems of global cultural engineering towards a culturally adjusted world threatened with the tensions of globalization. The typical post-colonial Buridan's Ass syndrome of cultural maladjustment as exhibited in the Nigerian (African) elite is also an ongoing malady besetting the Nigerian nation state with resultant tragic dimensions for our primordial and civic cultural spheres and national question. This critique shows that the greatest contribution maybe that James Ene Henshaw has made to drama and theatre, beyond providing prototypical models of African drama and criticism, is the cultural thematic relevance and postmodern inter-disciplinary, inter-cultural discourse and dialogue, that the study of his oeuvre engenders.

Keywords: Dramatic criticism, Cultural Studies, James Ene Henshaw, Nigerian Drama.

INTRODUCTION

In the same sense that drama is the content of theatre, culture remains the spirit and essence of all drama and theatre because it is through this that a

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given text can be spiritually, spatially and temporally situated. What remains of a dramatic performance when the coloured plumage is stripped off is the kernel or bone of the issues *interrogated* in the performance. A reading of the dramatic corpus of James Ene Henshaw reveals a cultural milieu within which he writes as well as his perspectives of the mechanism and postures for cultural engineering, the supreme calling of drama and theatre in society. This study also raises the question of relevance and the contribution of Ene Henshaw's drama and theatre to the overall tapestry of drama and theatre in Nigeria.

In other words, to what extent does a playwright go to be accounted a serious contributor to the drama and theatre of his culture? Rightly or otherwise James Ene Henshaw is often cited by some *conventional* critics as the bridge between the coarse prototypical drama of the Onitsha market literature species; and the serious contemporary drama which Yemi Ogunbiyi dates from 1960 with the birth of Wole Soyinka's *1960 Masks* (27). The enduring value of Onitsha market drama according to Ogunbiyi lies in their cultural-historical value (26). Cyprian Ekwensi, foremost Nigerian novelist, describes Onitsha market literature sub-genre as romanticized pulp literature, "cheaply produced, inexpensive to purchase (often) read and forgotten" (42).

But these critics have tendentiously overlooked the fertilizing or manuring role that Onitsha market literature has provided for the development of what is now referred to as contemporary Nigerian literature. But they have with some contradiction, consistently chosen to finger the rudimentary if not crude magic realism of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* as the Homeresque classic watershed for most Nigerian literature of Yoruba cultural expression. However, Ogunbiyi concludes that Henshaw's contributions to our theatre lie "ultimately in the area of example - the example of simple plays, simple characterization, of uncomplicated plot and even predictable resolutions" (27); as well as the stimulation of and satisfaction of the demand for local play texts in the classroom. Henshaw's plays, Ogunbiyi continues, therefore contained very little enduring artistic qualities. This makes one wonder whether artistic simplicity is no longer a virtue in literary aesthetics. After all, the simple style of the Holy Bible has remained an epitome of good literary style. Even Aristotle has not said otherwise in his *Poetics*.

But the question that remains unanswered is whether an inartistically simple style can be a purveyor of a culturally relevant content. Does the simplicity of the Bible disrobe the Holy Book of its grand stature as a book for all ages? Or does Euripides' simple style diminish the cultural relevance of his works to his time like democracy, women's rights, etc, which have continued to remain the issues of our times? Are the issues raised in James Henshaw's drama and theatre simply read and forgotten, or do they linger like the taste of bitter leaf in the mouth after the meal?

Cultural Themes

The themes in Ene Henshaw's plays are as varied as his plays are many but these plays are held together by a common purpose; which remains his very important contribution to cultural discourse and cultural engineering of our contemporary society. In a tradition earlier perfected by Bernard Shaw, James Ene Henshaw prefaces his plays with much intellectual pugilism which, without explaining his plays, go a long way to illuminate the central questions the plays attempt to grapple with, as well as the vexing issues of the day.

If Ene Henshaw's plays carry the birth marks of 'English bedroom comedies' (Ogunbiyi 27) and the constricting stylistics of neo-classical drama, it will be understandable to any historical mind that this typicized pre-colonial and colonial-African drama and theatre. As Henshaw himself puts it, most other plays of this period had no relationship with the problems that faced the African audience, hence- there (was) nevertheless a need for plays to be written and produced in the African's own surroundings and with characters familiar to the ordinary African (Henshaw (a) 5).

He also saw the problem of cultural erosion prevalent in all developing countries, a trend exacerbated today by globalization, and therefore saw the need to "preserve good traditions, and at the same time to graft upon them, where appropriate, the best from other countries" (5). From this premise, Henshaw launched his premier salvo in 1956 with *This is Our Chance*, containing also "The Jewels of The Shrine" and "A Man of Character". These plays addressed the imperative for intra-cultural dialogue among Africans as a prerequisite for any other meaningful inter-cultural dialogue or engineering. These issues include cultural xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and exclusivity in *This Is Our Chance*; the celebration of African timeless values of respect for elders and hard work in "The Jewels of the Shrine"; and, moral rectitude in "A Man of Character"; and, "Magic in the Blood".

There is also *Children of the Goddess* which is a fine treatise on Inculturation as well as a question on the validity of universal cultural values and European Prometheanism. This cultural theme is further explored, though later but back in historical time, in *A Song to Mary Charles*. In *Medicine for Love*, Ene Henshaw puts the spot light on the eternal problem of the Nigerian elite caught at the crossroad of cultural traditions, a problem which has continued to dog the cultural fortune of our nation today, with the befuddling love-hate relationship that cultural globalization has wrought on third world cultures. As will be seen later in this analysis, this Buridan's Ass Syndrome is also a reflection of the average Nigerian elite caught in the labyrinth of primordial and civic cultures.

In *Dinner for Promotion*, Ene Henshaw, takes a swipe at the new 'un African' ways of the modern urban African life of boardroom politics, 'sex-ploitation', and their impact on human relationships. Neo-Marxist critics would see in this the dialectics of capitalist system of exploitation and modern slavery which has been occasioned by the high primitive acquisition

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tendency in our contemporary society. Also introduced into this play is the issue of language and its engineering through *creolization*. Reminiscent of the style of Oscar Wilde's art for art sake, the playwright also subtly addresses the problem of the Nigerian (African) writer in a form that is supposedly alien thus obliquely presaging the on-going Prospero-Caliban language controversy.

One also perceives in the works of Ene Henshaw a silver lining that is suggestive of the values of multi-culturalism, a postmodern value, even though it is highly threatened by certain assimilationist innuendoes in some of the plays under examination.

Cultural Attitudes and Perspectives

It suffices to say that culture is, "a way of life *developed* and *shared* by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation" (*my emphases*) (Tubbs and Moss 401). This developed way of life includes what Edward B. Taylor had earlier identified as knowledge, beliefs, law, art, morals, custom, language and any other capabilities and habits imbibed by man as a member of a changing community. In other words culture in its true sense has material and philosophical dimensions covering politics, economy, the arts, belief systems and technology as against the popular philistine understanding of culture as ritual and ceremonial dance.

Culture, said to be stronger than life and stronger than death, can be acquired, developed, shared and transmitted beyond time. These characteristics - make it imperative for the artist - who is seen as the shaper, and engineer of society - to engage in a conscious cultural engineering in the society of his time or forever lose his vision and calling. Like Zulu Sofola, Cyprian Ekwensi considers it "impossible for the writer in our society to be writing literature just for the sake of art" (44). According to Frantz Fanon, a writer from a colonized culture who writes for his people "ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (187). These postures attest to the cultural engineering duty of the writer in the theatre tradition; and especially taking cognizance of Ene Henshaw's broad spectrum of cultural vision as shown in his plays.

Henshaw's plays, written somehow in the Shavian tradition of the problem play, were and are an 'invitation to action' towards solving these identified problems in the society. These problems are from all indications, still the problems of our time, hence the timelessness of the thematic concerns of this man who is often considered a 'bridge' between Onitsha market literature and the serious drama of early independence drama and theatre. Henshaw himself condemns what he calls the "literature of explanation and apologetics" which had become a common feature of most colonial literature of his time. According to him, such literature -

invariably surrounds such creative works of art with the aura of an apologia. But African writers have no reason to devote their

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literature to apologetics, as the tendency is to make the writing negative (Henshaw 6).

Henshaw concludes in a tone characteristic of postmodern aesthetics of celebration of difference and individualism that, “it is far more important today for African writers to explain Africans to each other than to Europeans or Americans” (6).

Generally, the cultural perspectives, mechanism and postures which, in my opinion, have been adopted and highlighted by James Ene Henshaw in the entire *oeuvre* of his plays include: Cultural Prometheanism and Enculturation; Cultural Relativism, and Inculturation; and Multi-Culturalism. These concepts have been given voice in the manner he articulates the issues of traditional African values in contact with Western values, in the issues of slave trade, colonial religion and inculturation; the Nigerian elite dilemma and his behavior as well as some elements of multiculturalism and cultural syncretism. These will be further examined individually.

Cultural Prometheanism and Inculturation

The god Prometheus in Greek mythology (cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*) stole fire technology from the Olympian abode in order to save starving and freezing humanity on earth. Western civilization, from colonial history has always presented itself as the model for all cultures, civilizations and modernization. This is based on their assumption of cultural superiority. This has become controversial in today’s development thinking (Touraine 445). The attitude whereby other civilizations (in Africa) were nothing but Conradian ‘heart of darkness’ and as Lorraine Hansberry makes Beneatha say (in Act I Sc.2 of *A Raisin in the Sun*) – “All anyone seems to know about when it comes to Africa is Tarzan”: cannibalism, twin-killing and heathenism etc. The debates in *A Song to Mary Charles* and *Children of the Goddess* are typical of western messianic thinking which informed western education and the Christianization missions to Africa.

This ethnocentric approach to culture is built upon presumptions of cultural superiority, ‘holier than thou’ disposition through which the West has assigned a universal value to their own culture at the expense of other cultures. Even though this attitude stems from ignorance, cultural bigotry and ethnocentrism, it is, like modern day cultural globalization, driven on the wheels of capital; and on what some cultural scholars would call elements of objective or universal culture. Sister Mary Charles needs money and papal approval to travel to Nigeria, just like the Reverend Donald and his wife in *Children of the Goddess*. Dominant cultures are not necessarily more popular or better cultures but are given dominance due to the force of capital.

The presentation of this aspect of culture in Ene Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance* shows that side by side with cultural Prometheanism is what one would call cultural positivism. Against the ‘don’t culture’ stance of the traditional die-hard Ajugo, who says –

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Dare anyone say that I have failed in my duty to defend the tradition of this village against new and interested ideas? (38).

Bambulu asserts:

... let no one, therefore cast him off. But let us receive from him these virtues which we so badly need and which we lack. The world outside moves fast, my Lord, and we must move with it (38).

Chief Damba had earlier rhetorically questioned –

But is this the price of education that our children should dislike what their fathers love, and place high values on what we loathe. Perhaps it is the will of our Fathers' spirits that it must be (31).

However, at the end of the play, education and modernity win out against tradition and ethnocentrism. In the same way, reminiscent of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, the traditional values of respect for old age and hard work are upheld against the 'modernistic' Ojima and Arob in 'The Jewels of the Shrine'. Stranger, an outsider who has obviously seen better places upbraids the lazy, disrespectful young men.

... Shame on you, young men, who believe that because you can read and write you need not respect old age as your forefathers did! Shame on healthy young men like you, who leave the land to go to waste because they will not dirty their hands with work (58).

The positive culture here refers to these aspects of any culture that are generally accepted as desirable; such as hard work, honesty, education, and benevolent technology like vaccine development and computer, etc. Dinesh D'Souza affirms that as an Indian, he has grown up to appreciate western cultural notions of democracy, human dignity, equal rights and the English language, and "much of what I am and believe today has evolved out of the benefits I received from the colonialism that injured my grandfather" (4). Just the same manner Muhammed Ali enthused after the bouting visit to Zaire – "Thank God my grandfather got on that boat" (D'Souza 3) that took him into slavery. If there are some positive values or aspects of a given culture, then it follows for Henshaw, that Prometheanism can also be justified in cultural engineering. What remains is how cultural engineers or development personnel can objectively determine what aspects of a given culture contain objective positive values that can be used as paradigms for other cultures. But as far as Alain Touraine is concerned, it is unacceptable "to assign a universal value to the history of certain countries ... because there is no evidence of the gradual formation of a universal model of civilization to which countries conform as they enter the modern world" (443). The position of postmodernism also supports Touraine's assertion.

Cultural Relativism and Inculturation

It was Edward B. Taylor's definition of culture that first legitimized the notions of similarity between culture and civilization and the fact that there were different cultures and different civilizations. This faulted the earlier ethnocentric ideas of Europe about other (African) cultures (Thompson). Cultural relativism admits the presence of positive values in every culture; and that civilization is not necessarily Eurocentric. This strengthens Shagbaor Wegh's classification of culture, in his *Inculturation*, into objective and subjective cultures. Objective culture is the outsider's view of a given culture which is always analytical, comparative and all encompassing. This is unlike subjective culture which is the participant's or insider's (often more) emotional and sentient experience of culture (9). This objective approach to understanding culture explains why the colonial masters never could comprehend African cultures.

The Relativist approach to culture or its engineering does not condemn or criticize what it does not comprehend but it only seeks to understand the other man's culture. Most often, the approach to cultural 'grafting' is what Wegh calls 'inculturation', a process whereby positive aspects of one culture are engrafted or adopted from a dominant culture to a host culture in a mutually enriching manner. A ready example is the manner in which the Catholic Church in Africa has Africanized its liturgy, music, songs and worship style to suit African cultural temperament. This is opposed to the ram-rod style of enculturation which is assimilationist and hostile to the host or recessive culture.

There is a ubiquitous presence of the stranger or outsider in many of Henshaw's plays, viz: *Bambulu*, *Stranger in 'Jewels of the Shrine'*, *'A Man of Character'*, and *Dinner for Promotion*; and, *Medicine Man* in *Medicine for Love*. There are also actual stranger elements from Europe in *A Song for Mary Charles* and *Children of the Goddess*. Through these strangers, Henshaw uses a big stick and as it were, clubbers to death what he considers undesirable aspects of African culture like in *Companion for a Chief*; or, 'inculturates' the finer aspects of both dominant and recessive cultures into a new third culture as in *Children of the Goddess*.

In *A Song to Mary Charles*, Sister Mary Charles talks of developing an indigenous 'native' African order of sisterhood with a unique habit that is African (Act II Sc.V). In a schoolroom typical of end of year concerts, the pupils render an Efik version of the Christian litanies familiar to Catholic faithful, the *ASE*, to send off Sister Mary Charles and welcome the new 'native sisterhood. One of the neophytes had proposed a real Efik cuisine for the Irish Reverend. Henshaw goes back to cite the off-forgotten sites of African civilization long before civilization reached Europe or before Columbus even 'encountered' America (Act I, Sc. III). The cultural engineering in this play, unlike in *Companion for a Chief*, is not that of homogenization but a careful selection, and blending of the finer aspects of both cultures to create a better one.

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In *Children of the Goddess*, the Reverend McPhail and his wife have taken utmost care to leave behind the metonymic gun of the European merchant ships in preference for the Bible (129). With true missionary long-suffering, they pray for rain, like Elijah on Mt. Carmel, and wait out for the traditional customary ritual to be proved ineffectual – to make their missionary truth self-evident.

Children of the Goddess presents one of the best models of cultural configuration in colonial drama. The play seems to bear out D'Souza's assertion that slavery existed in every culture and, "(w)hat is uniquely western is not slavery, but abolition and that the movement to end slavery developed only in Western civilization" (2). The veracity of this statement though depends on the specie of slavery in question because modern forms of slavery are being perfected with the idolized tyranny of capital.

This brings us to the issue of Multiculturalism as an underlying adjunct to Cultural Relativism. D'Souza describes multiculturalism in specific terms as the 'browning of America' or by extension, the browning of any other culture of the world; a rebuttal of the feeling of cultural superiority or inferiority; a rainbow or confetti culture as now exists in South Africa or immigrant United States. Katharyne Mitchell considers it as culture in terms of "mobility rather than boundedness, of plural identities rather than those fixed in place" (220). She traces the emergence of multiculturalism to the development of new forms of flexible production, financial deregulation, and vast movements of people, capital and goods across international borders. In other words, multiculturalism is an enhanced product of globalization. The 'live and let live' attitude of this postmodern phenomenon is a function according to D'Souza, of constitutionally enshrined and guaranteed rights due to globalism. While Mitchell warns that to reclaim its true meaning, it is more important to examine its praxis instead of heralding it in the abstract because of its *capitalocentric* ring, since –

it is possible to recognize sites of resistance as well as sites of control.. When examining *who* is saying *what* and *why* about multiculturalism; one can identify the ways in which representations are made and appropriations are occurring (245).

The above observation however, does not disrobe multiculturalism of its inherent merit. Postmodern ethnic studies consider it the way out of our tension-weary world since it has potentials to open up new spaces for dialogue and sharing of experience over the barriers of class, race, gender, nationality and language (Dirlik 21 – 45).

But since multiculturalism stresses the *genius loci* as the centre of action, as well as particularization and difference instead of homogenization, Ene Henshaw's position somehow becomes controversial. The critical objective eye of the poet which censors the traditions and cultural practices in the world of his plays produces an admixture of various cultural positions. The contradiction increases when one notices for instance, that *This is our Chance* is placed under a series of 'plays from West Africa' as if West Africa

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were a homogeneous cultural region. This homogenization again suffers a contradiction when one looks at his array of characters; their names do not come from one cultural locale but truly cut across West Africa or whatever fictive region he writes from. This is applicable to almost all the plays under consideration. But on the whole, the 'outsider' element prevalent in all the plays and the xenophiliac relationships and atmosphere is supportive of the multicultural settings and perspective.

The Dilemma of Nigerian (African) Elite

Ewia Ekunyah, the public man and political elite in *Medicine for Love*, superciliously asks his Auntie D. who suggests that Medicine Man be invited into the house –

People of my standing do not deal with medicine men. What would the Church Committee say if they ever heard that I sent for a medicine man? (33).

We are informed in a previous scene that Ekunyah asked the question with a pretended shock. This line reveals the psychological state of mind of the protagonist of this play, typical Nigerian elite, who according to Henshaw is caught between three problems:

The third and by far his most important personal problem is whether to employ the methods dictated to him by his reason, education and religion to solve his domestic and public problems or to employ traditional methods... (Preface, *Medicine for Love* 7).

Henshaw wonders where the crux of the problem lies, taking into consideration the unique acuteness of the African situation when juxtaposed with the resident European, or the immigrant American in the United States who not only celebrates the American national day "but also the national days of their ancestral nations, and meticulously keep the ancestral superstitions" (12).

For the African elite, the playwright is in a quandary and somehow believes that the problem lies with traditionalism and its demands on the African elite:

With the African one is tempted to pause and wonder if this conflict actually lies in the impact of African and European thought and methods, or simply in the fact that the present-day African is finding it increasingly irksome to fit bed-rock traditionalism into his everyday concept of a newer Africa (Preface, *Medicine for Love* 13)

Even though Henshaw appears to treat African culture and tradition with some degree of cynicism, probably because of his medical training, the dilemma of the African elite in his "black skin, white mind" complex runs very deep. This is because culture and traditionalism provide the guardian

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spirit and ethos for the participant in such a way that where this 'spirit' is unheeded it becomes an obsession with schizophrenic dimensions.

Peter P. Ekeh (8–12) articulates this phenomenon as a conflict between the demand of the 'primordial culture' and that of the 'civic culture'. The primordial culture, according to him is kin-group specific and built around the 'notional' and 'substantive' concepts of ethnic groups. This type of culture is pre-colonial and based on tribe and carries the tribal ethos and controls. The civic culture on the other hand is a colonial contact culture which contains social formations, ideas, values and institutions that arise from the Nigerian nation state. Civic culture is therefore western, modern and urban based.

The typical educated Nigerian elite is therefore caught between a love-hate relationship for his primordial culture. He has to participate in the traditional culture for completeness, like Ekunyah marrying traditional wives or taking chieftaincy titles or patronizing juju priests. Failure to do these carries some sanctions. But participation in the civic, public culture is voluntary but more attractive in the sense that it has no moral sanctions, and only offers 'opportunities and benefits'. These benefits come with the acceptance of western (colonial) education, religion, values (like democracy etc). Therefore Ewia Ekunyah necessarily must embrace Christianity, marry traditional wives, and contest for political office, etc. and necessarily live through the stress of this Buridan's Ass syndrome. The consequences for participation or non-conformity are many as the Chaplain in *Medicine for Love* puts it –

My dear Ekunyah, I have just returned from an ecclesiastical assignment to learn of your tragedy; your mental state poor, your houses sold, your harem scattered, and what grieves me most is that you arrived at all this misfortune by sacrificing your honour, respect, principles and education to the whims of a juju priest (85).

It is noteworthy that Ekunyah had earlier queried the Chaplain who wanted to help him out of the problem –

I gave you no authority to go about seeking husbands for any of my wives (72)

This implies that Ekunyah is comfortable in the two cultural realms. The cultural implications of this phenomenon are many and injurious to our national civic or public sphere. Apart from such personal indications like Professors and war Generals fighting for traditional chieftaincy titles and having the *other woman*, there are such national malaise like ethnicism, corruption, nepotism, public deceit and looting of public funds and capital. Toru tells Tiku in *Dinner for Promotion* –

You have no integrity to lose until you climb to the top. And once at the top, who cares what you do, as you will always have the means to silence your critics (34).

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Corruption, like William Blake puts it in 'The Sick Rose', has eaten even into the bed of love. Auntie D., an acculturated society woman in *Medicine for Love* advises Ekunyah –

And even if I were young, you know that for many of us, the older the husband the better. It's the same old story; love or security, romance or prestige. There is no sensible woman who wouldn't choose security and prestige and throw romance into the dustbin any day (96).

And the culturally maladjusted elite stink with flashy indulgence and the rot of primitive acquisition: Bonga in this play represents this tribe.

BONGA: Well, yes. I suppose champagne will do (*He stretches himself to the full*) champagne, champagne from morning till night. Oh, we VIPs are simply suffering.

The political career of Ekunyah is a study in the behavior of our political elite; a conflict that arises from imbibing an alien democratic culture in the public sphere. The naïve Ekunyah asks his Personal Assistant.

But why pay them my money to come and sing my name to me and deceive me? (61).

He wonders what he'll gain from public office after selling his property to fund the campaign and he is reassured that among other things,

... You will gain instant popularity if you sneeze, it will be reported in the newspapers. If you cough, it will be broadcast to the world. Gramophone recordings will be made in your name. And you can always get your local people to name streets after you (64).

Talking about the dividends of democracy; media panegyrics, deceit, abuse of office and corruption of the mass media, etc.

The condition of the African elite who groans under the yoke of this cultural malaise and complex is at best tragic. Henshaw thinks all that we should take away from culture and tradition is 'personality' and we should not allow traditionalism to drag us back (14). But it surely goes beyond this as the foregoing analysis has shown. In the African 'personality' that culture and tradition give us is embedded the ethos and spirit of our being. The best way forward may lie in coming to terms with this reality by giving primacy to the 'African Culture' as the sole essence of our being, within an ever-changing environment.

Culture is always forged anew in struggle, and within any given culture, there is always a 'culture of accommodation' and a 'culture of resistance' (Jeyifo 24). This dynamism gives culture the inbuilt ingredient for change and readjustment. The evolution of a distinct West African Pidgin English is a case in point. Pidgin English is a contact language which has grown out of a given cultural space. This *creolized* language, like the ever living Onitsha market literature, placed West Africa in an advantage position in the development of African drama and theatre. The 'elite dilemma' also created a language dilemma within the African writer.

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Henshaw poses the question that has been asked for the umpteenth time- Can the African writer successfully employ a foreign language such as English to transmit what have been described as the 'thought processes' or the 'thought habits' of his subjects and himself to the audience? (Preface, *Dinner for Promotion* 10).

Drawing on the recommendations of a conference of African writers in Kampala Uganda in 1962, Henshaw is of the opinion that the African writer, like Amos Tutuola did, should not be afraid to 'do violence' to the English language since the beauty of English lies in its dynamism for modification, adaptation and local colour. Concluding, Henshaw posits that the first path for the African writer is "to write not only about the African but for him and to him".

After all, the primary aim of the African writer in English or French should not be the advancement of those languages but rather... the advancement of all that is noble and good in African thought and traditions (16).

Similar concerns have been expressed by other African writers like Kobina Sekyi in *The Blinkards*. Ngugi has continued to insist that African writers have to draw inspiration from their mother tongue because it is only through this first language that one can access the centre of man's culture and creativity since it is language, above everything else that bears the seeds which reproduce and perpetuate culture (1-11). Femi Osofisan re-echoes this when he states that "a nation without a knowledge of its past is like a tree without roots. I had to turn away from Europe and begin a search for my own indigenous roots" (41). This makes much sense even in postmodern thinking especially with the neo-colonialism of globalization; the emphasis should be on the strengthening of the local colour as part of the global big picture, if our cultures have to withstand the exacerbation of homogeneity.

CONCLUSION

This critical survey of Ene Henshaw's perspectives of culture and its engineering in his drama has at least shown that most of his plays were designed to address specific cultural problems, they still reflect a high degree of social reality. The timeless value of these plays lies in their direct and symbolic cultural content not necessarily in their artiness. For like Laurence Perrine puts it, the true value of any literary work or fictive representation lies in "human truth other than fidelity to fact" or artiness (qtd. Betiang 108). Even the other tedious historical plays like *Enough is Enough* and *A Song to Mary Charles* reflect this truth.

It is also obvious that the cultural themes that Henshaw grapples with in his drama and theatre are the problems of cultural configuration and development, problems that arise out of such approaches to culture like

relativism, Prometheanism or ethnocentrism, and multiculturalism. These issues are all central to the vexing problems of cultural engineering, a culturally adjusted world that is being threatened with the tensions of globalization. The typical syndrome of cultural maladjustment as shown or exhibited in the Nigerian (African) elite is also an ongoing malady besetting the Nigerian nation state with resultant tragic dimensions for our primordial and civic cultural spheres and national question.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that James Ene Henshaw has made to drama and theatre studies is the example he has displayed in the case of interdisciplinary dialogue. Postmodernism has emerged with its emphasis on decompartmentalization of knowledge; and the hope for a better world through the creation of cultural spaces that facilitate interdisciplinary and intercultural discourse and dialogue. A medical doctor 'dilettante', who has himself been involved in actual cultural engineering in state's cultural centres, in addition to his dramaturgy, remains an all-time shining example for the philistinism of high-brow elite in our public corridors of power.

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