

## SATIRE AND RESISTANCE IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIAN DRAMA: A LITERARY STUDY OF CHUKWUMA ANYANWU'S *WRATH OF THE GODS*

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### Abstract

*This paper examines Chukwuma Anyanwu's Wrath of the Gods (2025) as a postcolonial satire that critiques authoritarianism in post-independence African societies. Drawing on the works of Fanon, Ngũgĩ, Frye, Bakhtin, and Bhabha, the study explores how the play employs indigenous aesthetics, performative irony, and orature to subvert hegemonic power and colonial residue. Fanon's theory of postcolonial disillusionment frames the character of King Agu I as a representation of recycled colonial repression and elite betrayal of the masses. Ngũgĩ's emphasis on cultural resistance underscores Anyanwu's strategic use of African orality, ritual, and proverbs, which embed the play within African epistemological traditions despite its English medium. Satirical techniques, defined by Frye as tools that expose societal vices through ridicule and exaggeration, are central to the play's political commentary and comedic structure. The play also aligns with the satirical traditions of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, further grounding it in local dramatic heritage. Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque is enacted in the inversion of social hierarchies through communal storytelling and public ridicule of the king. Bhabha's "Third Space" theory elucidates the hybrid aesthetic of the play, where colonial language and indigenous performance intersect to resist both external domination and internal tyranny. Using a qualitative research design and close textual analysis, the paper argues that Wrath of the Gods reclaims performance as a powerful site for political resistance and postcolonial critique.*

**Keywords:** satire, postcolonial drama, resistance, Nigerian theatre, carnivalesque, orature, Chukwuma Anyanwu

### Introduction

Theatre in postcolonial Africa has historically served as a critical platform for interrogating authority, articulating communal anxieties, and reclaiming narrative agency. As a form of resistance, drama enables the reimagining of power relations within the sociopolitical space, exposing contradictions and abuses embedded in the postcolonial condition. Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) aligns with this tradition by deploying satire as a performative and ideological tool against autocratic leadership. The play is set in a fictional Igbo-speaking community and dramatizes the excesses of a despotic king, the complicity of his subjects, and the eventual stirrings of popular resistance.

The use of English; a colonial language, in the play positions *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) within the discourse of modern European literatures as they intersect with African experience. Scholars like Ngũgĩ (1986) have long argued for the decolonization of African literature through a return to indigenous languages; however, others such as Achebe (1975) contend that the appropriation of English can serve as a strategic weapon for African self-articulation. Anyanwu's use of English is infused with oral traditions, proverbs, songs, and community rituals, creating a linguistic hybridity that mirrors what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the "third space"—a zone of cultural negotiation and resistance.

Satire, in the tradition of African drama, has been powerfully employed by playwrights such as Soyinka (*A Play of Giants*, *Kongi's Harvest*) and Osofisan (*Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*) to expose political decay and ridicule state oppression. These playwrights, much like Anyanwu, embody what Bakhtin (1981) calls the "carnavalesque"—a literary mode that subverts hierarchies through humor, inversion, and exaggeration. *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) fits squarely into this aesthetic framework, using laughter to destabilize power and imagination to articulate freedom.

This paper argues that *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) is a postcolonial satire which critiques tyranny and blind loyalty while advocating for communal awareness and resistance. The primary aim of this study is to examine how Anyanwu uses satire; through characterisation, orality, and performative irony, to challenge the abuse of power and stimulate political consciousness in postcolonial Nigeria. Drawing from postcolonial theory, African performance criticism, and literary stylistics, the paper analyzes how the fusion of indigenous aesthetics with modern European dramatic form serves as a vehicle for ideological subversion. In totality, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations around postcolonial drama in African literature written in English and its role in sociopolitical discourse.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in textual analysis and literary criticism. Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) serves as the primary text for close reading, focusing on how satire critiques power, reveals social contradictions, and promotes resistance within a postcolonial African context.

Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the analysis examines dialogue, characterization, setting, and language, with particular attention to orality, folklore, and dramatic structure as both stylistic devices and cultural markers. The study is framed by postcolonial theory, drawing on Fanon, Ngũgĩ, Bhabha, and Bakhtin, alongside African dramatic criticism from Soyinka and Osofisan.

This hermeneutic approach prioritizes interpretation over empirical data, emphasizing cultural context and theoretical engagement to explore the ideological and aesthetic layers of the play.

### Theoretical Framework

This study draws on postcolonial theory and literary satire to interpret *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) as a critique of authoritarianism in postcolonial Africa. Fanon (1963) argues that post-independence elites often replicate colonial oppression, a dynamic evident in King Agu I's symbolic deification and repression. Ngũgĩ (1986) advocates cultural resistance through indigenous aesthetics; though Anyanwu writes in English, his use of orality, ritual, and proverbs roots the play in African epistemologies, creating a hybrid form of critique.

Satire is central to this resistance. Frye (1957) defines it as literature that “ridicules the vices and follies of its time,” a function Anyanwu fulfills by exposing societal dysfunction through irony and exaggeration; projecting traditions seen in Soyinka and Osofisan. Bakhtin’s (1984) concept of the carnivalesque; the inversion of hierarchy through folk humor; is embodied in the play’s storytelling scenes and communal ridicule of the king, which momentarily destabilize his power.

Bhabha’s (1994) “Third Space” further explains the play’s hybrid aesthetic, where colonial language and indigenous orature intersect to challenge both Western authority and local despotism. Together, these models frame *Wrath of the Gods* as a postcolonial satire that uses performance, parody, and cultural memory to subvert hegemonic power.

### Review of Relevant Literature

Satire in Nigerian theatre serves as both artistic expression and political resistance, critiquing corruption, oppression, and societal decay. Pius (2013) identifies satire as a pedagogical tool that recovers collective memory against the erasure of state violence. Olusola (2017) emphasizes its role as historical and ethical commentary, where humor functions as critique rather than mere amusement. Soyinka’s *The Man Died* blends philosophical lyricism and political irony; Ossai-Uloku (2025) notes it “expose[s] the absurdities of political power, corruption, and oppression” (p. 24). Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* parodies political ambition through Okediran’s absurd transformation; as Nwachukwu (2015) observes, it “destabilizes the audience’s trust in the ruling class” (p. 58).

Ossai-Uloku (2025) affirms that satire in Nigerian drama “serves as a vehicle for political dissent” (p. 25). Ademola (2018) underscores the dramatization of systemic corruption, not just individual vice. Onwueme (2019) traces satire’s evolution from colonial critique to postcolonial disillusionment. In *Wrath of the Gods*, King Agu I’s tyranny and the people’s ritual complicity echo this lineage. Ugwu and Eze (2022) call satire “a performance of public memory against the amnesia of authority” (p. 38), seen in the chorus “Kerere Nwankeze.” Umar and Yahuza (2023) assert that “ritualized lamentation becomes a coded political discourse” (p. 113), while Egbunike (2019) notes orality “revives a collective consciousness” ignored by written history (p. 58).

Umeh (2024) describes satire as “performative and polyphonic” (p. 89), seen in the symbolic exit of Azuka and Agumma. Chukwuma (2024) views refusal as the beginning of resistance (p. 142), a sentiment echoed in Ike and Makinde’s (2020) “theatre of disappearance” (p. 215). The grotesque is central; Eze and Olayinka (2021) state that exaggeration “reduces [power] to its illogical core” (p. 188), and Okoye and Nwachukwu (2023) label this “comic insurgency” (p. 60). Religious parody, as Arohunmolase and Oyedokun (2022) suggest, mocks divine-right leadership by stripping sacred titles of reverence (p. 91).

Ogundele and Babajide (2021) frame “satiric lamentation” as a convergence of grief and ridicule. Onyema and Gyang (2022) position the playwright as “griot, oracle, and clown” (p. 121), while Ndukwe (2023) shows folk narrative as counter-history (p. 160). Oladipo and Ismail (2023) describe satire as “a dialogic genre where humour and horror meet” (p. 204). Aluko and Temitope (2020) relate Rotimi’s Lejoka-Brown to Nigeria’s militarized politics; his belief that “Politics is war” (p. 33) and his insult “baby monkey” reflect the rhetoric of real-life campaigns. His replacement by Sikira is, for them, a lesson in political accountability.

Alabi (2021) distinguishes Horatian wit from Juvenalian severity, calling satire a blend of “humor and aggression” (p. 145). His framework suits *Wrath of the Gods*, where King Agu I’s threats

expose tyranny through ridicule. Finally, Agoma (2025) situates satire in stand-up comedy, stating that “the stand-up comedian’s art... serves the same purpose as the storyteller’s art” (p. 62). Collectively, these scholars affirm that Nigerian theatrical satire—whether in traditional drama or modern media—remains a resilient tool for sociopolitical critique, communal memory, and ideological resistance.

### **Textual Analysis of Satire, Power, and the Postcolonial Condition**

Chukwuma Anyanwu’s *Wrath of the Gods* (2025) exemplifies how satire in Nigerian postcolonial drama can function not only as entertainment but as a sharp tool for resistance against tyranny and socio-political absurdity. As a literary form, satire allows the playwright to expose the grotesque nature of autocratic power while empowering the subaltern with tools of laughter, mockery, and symbolic defiance. Set in a fictional Nigerian village, the play critiques both the dictator and the docile citizenry, dramatizing the consequences of complicity and the radical possibilities of dissent. Rooted in African oral tradition but performed through the modern medium of English-language drama, *Wrath of the Gods* embodies a postcolonial hybridity that Bhabha (1994) describes as the “third space” — a space in which meaning is negotiated and resistance is reimagined.

The play opens with ceremonial pomp but quickly exposes the grotesque power dynamics at its core. The initial appearance of King Agu I to his subjects does not reflect humility, but megalomania. His declaration foreshadows the central satire of inflated self-worship:

I am the Agu I of Ohiagu, the only king who stands to address his people while the people sit! (Anyanwu, 2025, p. 40)

This ironic boast, delivered in a tone of false modesty, presents the leader as sacred and untouchable. The king’s performance of leadership relies on a ritualized abuse of tradition, which Fanon (1963) criticizes as the tendency of postcolonial rulers to mimic colonial authority, rather than dismantle it. Far from serving his people, King Agu I exploits them.

The king’s decrees are chilling in their audacity, however, Anyanwu renders them comically absurd. One particularly disturbing mandate, announced by the Town Crier, fuses satire with horror:

Any woman who fails to report by 7pm... must serve the king in the inner chamber for two days as a compensation... If you are a married man... your wife... will warm the king’s bed for two nights in succession... The king owns you and you own nothing! (p. 41)

Here, satire performs its dual function: to ridicule and to resist. The exaggeration borders on the grotesque; a tactic Bakhtin (1984) associates with the carnivalesque, where social norms are inverted to expose their absurdity. Though the pronouncement elicits laughter, it unearths disturbing truths about the abuse of power and the normalization of injustice in postcolonial societies.

Satirical performance intensifies in the communal storytelling scene, where villagers participate in a contest to explain the death of Nwankeze. The tale unfolds with increasingly irrational logic:

The rat did not kill him; the cat did not kill him; the gun did not kill him; the elephant did not kill him... the breadfruit fell on him and he died. (p. 36)

The repetition and communal chant — “Kerere Nwankeze!” — parody the way oppressive regimes build narratives around myth, blame, and misdirection. It also illustrates Frye’s (1957) insight that satire exaggerates moral absurdity to prompt social awareness. Anyanwu uses the tale not just for comic relief, but to reflect how collective reasoning can become dangerously incoherent when truth is buried under layers of deference and fear.

Azuka and Agumma, two physically impaired but mentally astute characters, emerge as critical voices of wisdom and subtle rebellion. Azuka, the blind man, resists fatalism:

We can’t just stay here and wait for death... We cannot claim to have life as it were. (p. 44)

Their humorous exchanges, such as Agumma’s line;

You most likely look like a toad! (61)

blend comedy with critique. As figures from the margins, they reflect Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1986) insistence that resistance often emerges from the spaces society deems peripheral. By choosing to leave the village in the final act, these two characters embody what Bhabha (1994) describes as a refusal to be fixed in binary positions of submission or protest. Their silent walk away is an act of self-liberation.

As the play progresses, resistance begins to swell among the villagers. Icheku’s call for confrontation marks a turning point:

He does not have enough guardrooms to hold us... Let us match right away! (p. 50)

However, the tension of living under constant surveillance remains palpable, as Ngozi cautions:

His ears and eyes are everywhere. (p. 49)

These moments dramatize the psychology of postcolonial fear. As Fanon (1963) argues, colonization wounds not only the body but the mind, creating a subject who both hates and fears freedom.

The satirical climax arrives when Ogbonna mockingly deifies the king:

Let him be everything, the beginning and the end! (p. 49)

This line ridicules the divine-right rhetoric often employed by authoritarian rulers. It echoes Bhabha’s (1994) notion of mimicry, where the colonized subject or postcolonial elite imitates colonial grandeur until the performance becomes ridiculous; exposing the fragility of authority behind the spectacle.

Anyanwu grounds this satire in deeply African performance traditions. The dirge “Uwa ozuru onye yee?” (“For whom is the world contented?”) recurs throughout the play as a song of existential mourning. It gives voice to the villagers’ suffering, contrasting sharply with self-glorification of King Agu I:

I am the tiger that devours without blinking; I am the king that watches his people with one eye! (p. 65)

The contrast between the people’s sorrow and the king’s bluster illustrates the fractured nature of power in postcolonial settings. Ngũgĩ (1986) would identify the people’s chant as a decolonial aesthetic; a reclaimed space where oral tradition becomes a form of resistance.

The final betrayal in the play comes not through brutality but through anticlimax. After promising access to his royal farms, the king deceives the people once again:

They went with joy... and you won't believe it. The farms were as empty of crops as a desert! (p. 71)

This twist is a classic satirical maneuver — it unveils false hope as a tool of control. Bhabha's (1994) concept of ambivalence is at work here: the ruler promises reform but delivers emptiness, sustaining power by manipulating belief rather than enforcing law.

The final line of threat;

We will show you what earthquakes look like! (p. 72)

reflects the desperation of collapsing authority. Like Bakhtin's grotesque kings, King Agu I becomes a caricature of his former self: comical, menacing, and impotent. Power, once unshakable, is now a scream into a void.

Azuka and Agumma's quiet exit from the stage becomes the ultimate act of resistance — not through violence or revolt, but through disengagement. Their choice not to return is a silent revolution, a refusal to be subjects in a broken drama. In the postcolonial Nigerian theatre that Anyanwu stages, the most powerful resistance may come not in shouting but in walking away.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study show that Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Wrath of the Gods* employs satire to critique both tyrannical leadership and the passive complicity of the masses in postcolonial Nigeria. The grotesque portrayal of King Agu I exposes the absurdity of autocratic power, while comic chants and lamentations articulate communal suffering and subversive resistance. The silent departure of Azuka and Agumma functions as symbolic protest, emphasizing disengagement as a legitimate form of revolt. Drawing on Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Bhabha's third space, the play demonstrates that resistance can be encoded in irony, parody, and silence rather than overt confrontation. Anyanwu's hybrid use of English and indigenous performance forms reflects the fractured identity of the postcolonial subject and dramatizes the internal conflict between tradition and inherited colonial authority. Finally, the study concludes that *Wrath of the Gods* exemplifies how satire in Nigerian drama transcends humor to embody deep political and cultural critique, reaffirming the power of theatre as a space for collective reflection and ideological subversion.

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