Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Dramaturgies of Corruption in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*

Cynthia Adaeze ONUEGWUNWOKE
Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts,
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State.
Email: cynthia.onuegwunwoke@alvanikoku.edu.ng
&
Godfrey Ngozi OGBONNA
Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts,
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State.

Abstract
This study examined how satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict function as an integrated dramaturgical system for encoding political critique *in A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze. Adopting a qualitative, text-driven analytical design grounded in the sociological approach to literature and informed by postcolonial and Marxist perspectives, the study analysed selected excerpts from the play through close reading and dramaturgical interpretation. The findings demonstrates that satire operated as a mechanism of ideological delegitimation, exposing the contradictions between institutional authority and corrupt practice, while symbolism, particularly the central vulture metaphor, provides a coherent framework for representing systemic predation and institutional decay. Dramatic conflict functions as the structural engine of the play, staging the antagonism between integrity and entrenched corruption and driving the narrative toward a revolutionary climax. The study further showed that these elements did not operate independently but converged to produce a unified mode of social critique embedded in the formal architecture of the text. By foregrounding the interplay of dramaturgical strategies, the study extended existing scholarship beyond thematic analysis and demonstrated that political meaning in Nigerian drama is constructed through the interaction of artistic form and socio-political context.
Keywords: Dramaturgy, Dramatic conflict, Political satire, Symbolism, Nigerian drama

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Introduction

Drama in postcolonial Africa has persistently functioned as a critical medium for interrogating the structures of power, governance, and social inequality that shape everyday life. Within the Nigerian literary tradition, theatre has been particularly central to this project, offering a performative space in which the contradictions of political leadership, institutional fragility, and civic disillusionment are rendered visible and contestable. Scholars have consistently observed that Nigerian drama does not merely reflect social reality but actively intervenes in it, exposing the mechanisms through which power is exercised and misused (Aniago, 2017, p. 68; Anyanwu, 2024, p. 3). This interventionist orientation has sustained a long tradition of politically engaged theatre, from the works of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi to contemporary dramatists who continue to interrogate the failures of postcolonial governance. Within this tradition, corruption has emerged as a dominant thematic and structural concern. Rather than being treated as an isolated moral aberration, corruption is widely represented in Nigerian drama as a systemic condition embedded within institutional and cultural frameworks. As Ezeugo (2021, p. 1) notes, "political actors frequently manipulate democratic structures for personal gain, producing a pattern of governance in which public institutions are appropriated for private enrichment". This systemic understanding aligns with Frantz Fanon's postcolonial critique, which argues that post-independence African states often reproduce colonial structures of domination, with indigenous elites assuming exploitative roles within ostensibly democratic systems. In literary representations, this condition is frequently mediated through satire, symbolism, and conflict, key dramaturgical strategies for encoding social critique.

Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* constitutes a significant intervention within this discourse. Set within a legislative assembly that unmistakably mirrors the Nigerian political environment, the play offers a sustained critique of institutional corruption, elite opportunism, and the erosion of democratic values. Existing scholarship has examined the play primarily from thematic and sociological perspectives (Aniago, 2017; Okonkwo, 2023, p. 24; Affiah, 2012, p. 378), but has tended to treat satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict as discrete analytical categories rather than as interdependent elements within a unified dramaturgical system. This gap reflects a broader methodological limitation in the study of Nigerian political drama. The discipline of dramatic analysis has privileged the what of political plays over the how, the specific formal mechanisms through which meanings are constructed and made available to audiences. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that in Nwabueze's play, form and ideology are mutually constitutive, and that the play's critical power derives precisely from the convergence of its dramaturgical strategies.

Literature Review

Existing studies on *A Parliament of Vultures* have focused predominantly on thematic representations of corruption and leadership failure, with limited attention paid to the integrated interaction of satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict as interconnected dramaturgical mechanisms. Aniago (2017) offers a valuable reading of the play's treatment of political culture but concentrates primarily on its sociological referents rather than its dramatic architecture. Anyachonkeya (2011) acknowledges the purposeful deployment of language in the play without pursuing a systematic analysis of the dramatic strategies that shape its satirical effect. Okonkwo (2023) situates the play within the tradition of politically corrective satire and identifies its

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

ambition to awaken the consciousness of its audience, yet provides no account of the dramaturgical mechanisms through which that awakening is achieved. Affiah (2012) and Afolayan (2018) both offer productive readings, the former recognising the play's hilarious satirical exposure of legislative failure, the latter framing its characterisation within Marxist class analysis, but neither addresses the structural integration of the play's formal elements. These contributions share a common tendency: they treat satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict as discrete thematic registers rather than as interdependent elements within a unified formal system. The consequence is that the structural logic through which the play's critical force is generated has remained underexamined. Specifically, no existing study has theorised how the convergence of these three dramaturgical elements produces an integrated mode of political critique that operates at the level of the play's formal architecture rather than merely at the level of its subject matter. This study addresses that gap by examining the dramaturgical interplay of satire, symbolism, and conflict in Nwabueze's play, demonstrating that political meaning here is produced through the dynamic interaction of artistic form and socio-political context.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, text-driven analytical design grounded in interpretive literary criticism and informed by the sociological, postcolonial, and Marxist traditions. The primary data source was the play's text itself, with purposive sampling used to select dramaturgically significant excerpts, specifically, scenes depicting parliamentary proceedings and institutional processes, interactions among corrupt political actors, moments of ideological confrontation between opposing character positions, and segments foregrounding symbolic representation, particularly the vulture metaphor and its associated imagery. The analytical procedure followed a systematic four-stage approach: relevant scenes and dialogue were extracted and organised according to three core dramaturgical categories (satire, symbolism, and conflict); recurring structural and thematic patterns were identified across these categories; the interaction between the three elements was traced across the full length of the text; and the identified patterns were interpreted in relation to their ideological and socio-political implications, drawing on the study's theoretical framework. This approach moves beyond thematic reading to address the structural architecture of the play as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the sociological approach to literature as its primary theoretical lens in reading Nwabueze's play as both a product of and a critical response to specific social and historical conditions. The sociological approach, as articulated within the tradition of Marxist aesthetics and postcolonial literary theory, insists that literary texts are not produced in a social vacuum but are shaped by, and in turn help to shape, the ideological formations of their historical moment. This framework is particularly well suited to the analysis of political drama, where the relationship between artistic form and social critique is often explicit and deliberate.

Marxist aesthetic theory provides one foundational pillar of this framework. Afolayan (2018) productively employs Marxist aesthetics in his reading of *A Parliament of Vultures*, regarding the corrupt parliamentarians as a bourgeois class exploiting the masses through their control of state institutions (p. 215). This class-based reading is indispensable because it foregrounds the structural rather than individual nature of the corruption depicted: the problem is not simply that certain individuals are morally deficient, but that a ruling class has successfully entrenched its

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

exploitation of public resources within the very architecture of the democratic process. Marxist theory further illuminates the ideological function of the play's language through the following elements: the formulaic utterances, the hollow ceremonies of parliamentary procedure, and the ritualistic endorsements of corrupt resolutions. All of this reflects what Marxist critics would describe as ideological mystification, the process by which the forms of legitimate governance are deployed to conceal and legitimise illegitimate practice.

Postcolonial theory, particularly as developed by Frantz Fanon, provides the second theoretical pillar. In The Wretched of the Earth (1963), Fanon argues that the leaders of postcolonial African states frequently reproduce the exploitative structures of colonial governance, merely replacing the colonial master with a native elite that behaves no differently. The parliament in Nwabueze's play enacts precisely this Fanonian scenario: the legislature, designed to represent and protect the people, has been captured by individuals whose only interest is self-enrichment. Fanon's further argument, that systemic oppression inevitably generates the conditions for violent rupture when all legitimate channels of reform have been exhausted provides the theoretical grounding for the play's revolutionary denouement. Anyachonkeya describes the play as a satire that dramatically unveils the regrettable scope of corruption and hypocrisy polarising the political atmosphere in postcolonial Africa (as cited in Aniago, 2017, p. 125), thereby confirming the Fanonian influence on Nwabueze's vision.

The concept of satire requires its own theoretical grounding within this framework. Drawing on Thrall and Addison, Okonkwo (2023) clarifies that "satire uses humour and wit with the aim that human institutions may be improved, distinguishing it from mere invective or sarcasm" (p. 25). Satire is thus a form of purposeful social engagement: it ridicules not for the pleasure of ridicule alone but to expose, diagnose, and ultimately correct. This corrective dimension is essential to understanding Nwabueze's project. Dramatic satire, moreover, carries a public force that prose satire does not: performed before a collective audience, dramatic satire creates the conditions for shared recognition, shared laughter, and shared critical awareness. As Ezeugo (2021, p. 1) observes, "Dramatic art as a close observer of society discloses to the ignorant masses the impending dangers created by unscrupulous politicians and suggests ways of reformation". This public, civic dimension of dramatic satire is fully exploited by Nwabueze. Taken together, these theoretical frameworks, Marxist aesthetics, Fanonian postcolonial critique, and the theory of corrective satire enable one to read the play's formal elements not merely as artistic choices but as ideologically charged strategies. The satirical mode, the symbolic architecture, and the conflict structure are not transparent vehicles for a pre-given political argument but are themselves the substance of that argument: they produce meaning, not merely convey it.

A Brief on *A Parliament of Vultures*

This play is set in an unnamed but unmistakably Nigerian legislative assembly. As Aniago (2017) notes, "the play's story is manifestly situated within the Nigerian polity" (p. 70). The central characters fall into two opposing camps: on one side, the corrupt parliamentarians, Chief Habamero, the Speaker of the House; Madam Omeaku, an illiterate former street vendor elevated to Parliamentary Secretary; Mr. Brown, a scheming and morally dissolute parliamentarian; and Rev. Jossy, whose assumed clerical title cloaks his criminal dealings; on the other, Dr. Parkers, a principled and internationally recognised academic-politician, and Mr. Otobo, the legitimate

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Parliamentary Secretary, who represents the conscience of the legislature. The corrupt faction systematically manoeuvres to seize total parliamentary control: backdating meeting notices to exclude Dr. Parkers and Otobo from key decisions, approving extravagant expenditures without scrutiny, and using Nkechi, Madam Omeaku's daughter to seduce and compromise Otobo, stealing critical parliamentary files from him. When the corrupt faction finally deploys the police to arrest and silence its opponents, a number of the university students and militant youths storm the legislature, arrest the parliamentarians, and tie them up. As Okonkwo (2023) observes, "the playwright in this closing act suggests that revolution is the surest solution to the nation's governance crisis" (p. 33), this, notwithstanding that the study reads this resolution as a structural consequence of institutional breakdown rather than a prescriptive political endorsement.

Satire as Dramaturgical Weapon

Satire is the dominant mode of *A Parliament of Vultures*, and it operates at multiple, interlocking levels: the naming of characters, the construction of dialogue, the staging of parliamentary proceedings, and the overall ironic framing of the legislative institution as a site of absurdity and moral bankruptcy. Nwabueze's satire is not gentle or equivocal; it is sharp, direct, and unapologetically corrective, exploiting the public nature of dramatic performance to maximise the critical impact of its exposure. The satirical construction of Madam Omeaku is perhaps the play's most sustained and devastating achievement. Her characterisation operates through a sustained dramatic irony: she occupies the office of Parliamentary Secretary, a position requiring literacy, competence, and administrative responsibility, yet is manifestly incapable of performing the basic functions of the office. Her appointment is thus a grotesque parody of institutional process, foregrounding the collapse of meritocracy as a governing principle. In parliament, her inability to read and write minutes properly is played up for both comedy and horror simultaneously: the audience laughs at the absurdity while recognising its referent in documented Nigerian political realities. Aniago et al. (2021, p. 58) describe how Madam Omeaku, who through connaivance with a sleazy political gang rose from an illiterate, low-class street-side food-and-liquor vendor to a profligate parliamentarian. This becomes the play's epitome of the vulture metaphor. When Mr. Otobo remarks that the selfish, hypocritical fools were more interested in what they could get than in the person who would deliver the goods, and that this was how Madam Omeaku was brought into parliament through the manoeuvres of Mr. Brown (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 39), he articulates the logic of the corrupt electoral system the play satirises: competence is irrelevant; compliance is the only qualification that matters.

Nwabueze's play also attacks gender as a dimension of political corruption. His depiction of Madam Omeaku as a corrupt parliamentarian who openly humiliates her husband and uses her daughter as a political instrument reflects an insightful commentary on the relationship between gender, power, and public life. When she tells her husband, "Is that how you talk to an Honourable member of parliament?" (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 13), her contempt for the domestic sphere is presented as both a symptom and an emblem of the broader contempt of the political class for the common citizen. While this aspect of the play invites feminist critical interrogation, its satirical function is clear: Nwabueze uses Madam Omeaku to demonstrate that the corruption he attacks is systemic and not confined to any single demography. The satirical target is the system that produces and rewards such figures, not the individual alone. Parliamentary procedure itself becomes a primary vehicle of satire. The legislature, ideally the site of rational deliberation

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

and democratic representation, is transformed into a marketplace of self-interest in which decisions are not debated but predetermined by the corrupt faction and rubber-stamped by a compliant majority. When Chief Habamero presents the brand-new Honda Accord for Nkechi and announces "Approved?", and the assembled chorus responds "All. Approved!" (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 28), the scene is both comic and damning. The language of democratic deliberation, the formal question and collective response is stripped of all genuine content and reduced to a ritual of legitimation of theft. This is what may be described as the discursive erosion of democracy: institutional language retains its procedural form but loses its substantive function entirely. Satire here operates at the level of discourse itself, revealing how language becomes complicit in sustaining corrupt systems.

Religion does not escape the satirical barb. Rev. Jossy's assumed clerical identity represents the playwright's satirical treatment of the instrumentalisation of religious authority in Nigerian politics. Okonkwo (2023) notes that "Jossy agreed with the other corrupt parliamentarians to take the title of a reverend so that their deceitful acts would be considered holy" (p. 30). This is a sharp satirical thrust at the deployment of religious identity as political camouflage, a practice widely documented in postcolonial Nigerian political culture. The satirical construction of Rev. Jossy thus extends the play's critique beyond the legislative institution to encompass the broader cultural landscape in which religion, like democratic procedure, is hollowed out and repurposed as an instrument of legitimation for corrupt power. Taken together, these satirical strategies produce a cumulative critique that is both targeted and systemic. The play attacks specific individuals, Habamero, Madam Omeaku, Brown, Rev. Jossy while simultaneously exposing the institutional and cultural conditions that enable their ascent and entrenchment. Satirical characterisation functions as ideological exposure: exaggerated embodiments of political vice rendered with comic ferocity, systematically undermine the credibility of the institutions they represent and invite the audience to recognise the social realities behind the satirical presentations.

The Architecture of Symbolism

If satire is the dominant mode of the play, symbolism is its structural architecture. The play's symbolic system operates on several interconnected levels: the governing metaphor of the vulture, the contrasting symbolic roles of its characters, the symbolic significance of space and setting, and the symbolic import of the play's climactic action. Together, these elements form a coherent symbolic framework that organises and intensifies the play's critique across all fronts.

The vulture metaphor is the play's most pervasive and resonant symbol. In many African cultural traditions, the vulture is associated with carrion, death, and opportunism: it does not create; it feeds on what others have built or what has already decayed. These attributes are precisely those of the corrupt parliamentarians: they do not generate wealth or serve the public interest; they consume public resources, exploit institutional weakness, and thrive on the decay of democratic governance. As Aniago et al. (2021, p. 57) observe, the metaphor captures the dynamics of self-aggrandisement and institutional failure that characterise the political landscape depicted in the play. Nwabueze makes the metaphor explicit in one of the play's most dramatically powerful moments, when Mr. Omeaku confronts the corrupt parliamentarians gathered in his house: "Do you know what you people are? You are vultures! This is a parliament of vultures. Eating my nation to death, leaving nothing for the masses to quench their thirst" (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 31).

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

This speech is the symbolic heart of the play: it names the metaphor explicitly, connects it directly to its national consequences, and delivers it through the voice of an ordinary citizen whose marginality, (Mr. Omeaku is a retired teacher), makes his moral authority all the more poignant. The metaphor does not merely describe; it indicts.

The vulture symbol functions not only as a descriptive label but also as a conceptual framework through which the entire political system is interpreted and judged. Every act of the corrupt faction, the approval of unjustified allowances, the framing of Dr. Parkers, the seduction and compromise of Otobo, the deployment of police against legitimate opponents is depicted clearly as an instance of vulturine predation. The metaphor thus transforms individual acts of corruption into manifestations of a broader systemic condition, giving the play's critique a structural coherence that transcends any single scene or character. The title itself, *A Parliament of Vultures*, announces this framework from the outset, priming the audience to read every subsequent action through the lens of predation and decay. The characters of Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo function as counter-symbols to the vultures. They represent the values of integrity, intellectual rigour, and genuine public service that the corrupt majority has displaced. As Okonkwo (2023) observes, "Dr. Parkers and Otobo have good intentions in the parliament but are frustrated when the corrupt parliamentarians discover that their continued membership will be a hindrance to their exploitative agenda" (p. 29). Their systematic marginalisation, framing, and eventual arrest at Habamero's instigation symbolise the structural hostility of corrupt institutions to the principled individuals within them. The play does not suggest that good people do not exist within the political system; rather, it argues that the system has been so thoroughly corrupted that it actively identifies and expels integrity as a threat.

Madam Omeaku's trajectory carries its own rich symbolic charge. Her rapid ascent from street vendor to parliamentarian, with houses in choice areas, expensive cars, and overseas holidays acquired within a single year of legislative service, including her humiliation of her husband, symbolises the obscene gap between the enrichment of the political class and the impoverishment of those who serve the state honestly. The Honda Accord approved for her daughter Nkechi extends this symbolic logic of aberration into the domestic and familial sphere: the next generation is being inducted into a system of predation before it has the chance to develop an independent moral identity. Corruption, Nwabueze suggests, is not merely an institutional pathology but a cultural inheritance. The legislative chamber itself carries profound symbolic weight. The legislature is, by constitutional design, the most direct institutional expression of popular sovereignty: the place where the will of the people is supposed to be translated into law. By making this institution the site of the play's most outrageous acts of corruption, Nwabueze performs a devastating symbolic inversion. The space that should represent the people has become the space in which the people are most thoroughly excluded and exploited. This spatial symbolism is architectural in its precision: the very institution designed to protect the public commons has become its most organised and well-resourced predator.

Dramatic Conflict and the Structure of the Play

The dramatic conflict at the centre of *A Parliament of Vultures* is the struggle between integrity and corruption, embodied in the opposition between Dr. Parkers and the corrupt parliamentary majority led by Chief Habamero. This conflict is not merely a personal antagonism but a

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

representation of the broader structural antagonism between ethical governance and institutionalised self-interest. Understanding the architecture of this conflict is essential to appreciating Nwabueze's dramaturgical design. The conflict is established at the opening acts of the play without ambiguity. Dr. Parkers enters the parliament with a clear mandate to promote good governance, protect public funds, and resist the machinations of the corrupt majority. The corrupt faction, meanwhile, has equally clear objectives: to seize control of all parliamentary committees, particularly the Purchasing Committee, to channel public funds into their own pockets, and to neutralise any opposition. Chief Habamero articulates the corrupt faction's strategy with chilling clarity when he tells his co-conspirators: "With this method, we can control parliamentary decisions, and deal with Dr. Parkers and his group. Idiot. He doesn't know that the place for academics is in the university. And when we incapacitate him, Mr. Otobo, his accomplice, is reduced to nothing" (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 30). This statement, with its contempt for intellectual merit and its frank acknowledgement of conspiratorial purpose sets the stage for the epic dramatic confrontation of the play.

The conflict escalates through a series of carefully choreographed institutional manoeuvres that constitute the play's central dramatic action. The corrupt faction backdates the time of parliamentary meetings and changes venues so that Dr. Parkers and Otobo are excluded from key decisions. They deploy Nkechi to seduce Otobo and steal critical parliamentary files, removing his administrative leverage. They nominate and approve Madam Omeaku as Parliamentary Secretary, simultaneously rewarding a loyal ally and ensuring that the official record of their activities will never be accurately maintained. Each of these manoeuvres is both a plot development and a dramatic illustration of the systemic nature of institutional corruption. It does not operate through individual bad acts alone but through the patient, deliberate subversion of legitimate processes. As Ezeugo (2021, p. 1) observes, "such practices reflect the broader realities of governance in which democratic structures are manipulated to serve elite interests, a reality that Nwabueze renders with forensic precision in dramatic form".

The character of Mr. Omeaku, Madam Omeaku's long-suffering retired teacher husband, introduces a crucial domestic subplot that both complicates and deepens the central political conflict. His outrage, expressed most memorably in his denunciation of the parliamentarians as vultures eating the nation to death, humanises the play's political critique by grounding it in the lived experience of an ordinary citizen. Through Mr. Omeaku, Nwabueze demonstrates that corruption in public life does not remain confined to its institutional sites but corrodes the fabric of domestic and familial relationships. Okonkwo (2023) observes that "the playwright shows how when the character of one of the spouses becomes abysmally unbearable, it seriously affects the other" (p. 28). Mr. Omeaku's descent into alcoholism as a response to his wife's political transformation is a poignant symbol of the collateral damage of political corruption: lives ruined not by direct political violence but by the slow erosion of dignity, purpose, and domestic meaning.

The climax of the dramatic conflict arrives when the corrupt faction overreaches itself fatally. The deployment of the police to arrest and silence Dr. Parkers and Otobo represents the final abandonment of any pretence to legality, the transition from institutional manipulation to overt coercive violence. It is this act that triggers the revolutionary response of the students and

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

militant youths. Nwabueze structures his play so dexterously that the revolution appears not as an act of irrational violence but as the logical, structurally inevitable consequence of the systematic exhaustion of all legitimate alternatives. The dramatic structure thus enacts an argument: when the institutions of reform have been captured, when the channels of legitimate redress have been blocked, and when the state's coercive apparatus is turned against those who seek accountability, the conditions for popular rupture are created. The denouement, the parliamentarians tied with ropes as they cry out in panic that the building is being set on fire (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 113), is simultaneously comic and tragic. It is comic because the mighty have been brought low in a spectacularly undignified manner; it is tragic because it represents the total failure of the institutional architecture that should have prevented matters from reaching this point. Nwabueze does not celebrate the violence; he presents it as the inevitable consequence of a system that has made every other option unavailable.

A Parliament of Vultures is best understood not simply as a thematic critique of corruption but as a formally organised dramaturgical system in which satire, symbolism, and conflict operate in a mutually reinforcing relationship. This convergence produces a mode of political critique that is structurally embedded in the play's formal architecture rather than rhetorically appended to pre-existing thematic content. In this sense, the play exemplifies how dramatic form itself functions as a site of ideological construction, where political meaning emerges through the patterned interaction of artistic strategies rather than through isolated thematic statements. Satire, as the play's dominant mode, performs the work of ideological delegitimation. The satirical construction of characters like Habamero, Madam Omeaku, and Rev. Jossy does more than ridicule individual moral failings; it systematically exposes the institutional conditions that produce and reward such figures. Crucially, satire in the play is not confined to characterisation but extends to the level of institutional process and discourse, revealing how the very language of democratic governance, the procedures, the votes, the official titles can be hollowed out and repurposed as instruments of legitimation for corrupt power. This is the discursive erosion of democracy: the forms are preserved while the substance is evacuated.

Symbolism operates as the organising logic that stabilises and gives intellectual coherence to this satirical critique. The vulture metaphor, permeating the play at every level from the title to Mr. Omeaku's climactic denunciation, transforms individual acts of corruption into manifestations of a systemic condition. By encoding predation, opportunism, and institutional decay in a single, culturally resonant image, the metaphor enables the audience to apprehend the play's critique as a totality rather than as a series of isolated satirical episodes. The counter-symbolic presence of Dr. Parkers and Otobo sharpens this critique further, illustrating how integrity is not absent from the system but is actively marginalised and expelled by it, a finding that extends the play's indictment from corrupt individuals to the institutional logic that sustains them.

Dramatic conflict provides the dynamic structural framework through which these symbolic and satirical elements are activated and driven toward resolution. The escalation of conflict from procedural manipulation to overt coercion, and ultimately to popular uprising, maps the full arc of institutional collapse with dramaturgical precision. The resolution through revolutionary action resonates with Fanon's thesis that systemic oppression inevitably generates conditions for violent rupture when reform becomes impossible; but Nwabueze's framing presents this rupture

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

as a warning, not a prescription, the consequence of failure rather than a desirable political solution. The play's ambivalent ending, which simultaneously punishes the corrupt and mourns the institutional breakdown that made such punishment necessary, reflects a mature and tragic political vision that distinguishes Nwabueze from simple didacticism.

The comparative dimension of the study further illuminates the play's significance. Afolayan (2018) notes that both Ola Rotimi and Nwabueze employ the satiric mode in depicting Nigerian lawmakers as vultures fattening themselves on the common wealth of the nation (p. 220). Nwaozuzu (as cited in Okonkwo, 2023, p. 24) similarly examines how both Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People and *A Parliament of Vultures* project corruption and charlatanry in politics through biting satirical undertones and grim humour. What distinguishes Nwabueze from these predecessors is the specificity of his institutional focus: by centring his drama directly on the legislature, the chamber of democracy itself, he performs a kind of institutional autopsy, cutting open the body of representative governance to reveal the systemic disease within. His resolution, rooted in popular rather than military action, also carries a more explicitly democratic implication: the hope, however fragile, that the people may yet reclaim the institutions built in their name.

Conclusion

This study has argued that *A Parliament of Vultures* achieves its critical force through the systematic convergence of satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict into a unified, formally coherent dramaturgical system. Nwabueze's satirical construction of character, from the grotesque Madam Omeaku to the brazen Chief Habamero and the hypocritical Rev. Jossy, produces a devastating portrait of a political class that has made predation its governing ethic. The vulture metaphor, operating at every structural level of the play from the title to the climactic denunciation by Mr. Omeaku, provides a coherent symbolic framework that organises the play's critique and gives it emotional and intellectual unity. The dramatic conflict between integrity and corruption enacts the play's central argument that systemic corruption is maintained not through individual moral failure alone, but through a political culture in which merit is actively suppressed and self-interest institutionally rewarded. The play's revolutionary resolution is not a celebration of violence but a dramatic warning: when the institutions of democracy are thoroughly corrupted from within, when the legitimate channels of reform are systematically blocked, and when the ordinary citizen is reduced to impotent outrage, the conditions for popular explosion are created. Nwabueze's drama offers a forensic examination of those conditions, and its continuing resonance within Nigerian political system is a measure both of the playwright's prescience and of the persistence of the problems he identifies. By encoding his political analysis in richly imagined characters, precisely constructed conflict, and symbolically charged action, the play produces a work that transcends polemic and achieves genuine artistic force. Future scholarship would benefit from sustained attention to the play's linguistic and performative dimensions, including how Nwabueze's dialogue encodes class, power, and resistance in its very syntax and register. This study affirms that the play occupies a central and significant position in the canon of Nigerian political drama, and that its dramaturgical achievements merit the sustained critical attention it enjoys.

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Theoretically, this study advances a more rigorous account of how political meaning is constructed in dramatic texts, challenging prevailing tendencies to privilege thematic analysis over structural analysis and to treat artistic form as a notable vehicle for social content. The integration of Marxist aesthetic theory, Fanonian postcolonial critique, and the theory of corrective satire with dramaturgical close reading demonstrates that form and ideology are mutually constitutive: the satirical mode, the symbolic architecture, and the conflict structure are not vessels for a pre-given political argument but are themselves its substance. This theoretical contribution has implications beyond Nwabueze's play, offering a framework for analysing other postcolonial dramatic texts in which the relationship between artistic form and social critique is similarly dense and generative.

Methodologically, the study offers a replicable dramaturgical analytical model, organised around the interrelated categories of satire, symbolism, and conflict, and attentive to their structural convergence across the full text that can be adapted for other works in the Nigerian and broader African theatrical canon. Sociopolitically, by demonstrating how the play encodes and dramatises the mechanisms of political corruption, from the capture of democratic institutions to the instrumentalisation of religion, the suppression of integrity, and the exhaustion of legitimate reform, the study contributes to the broader project of making structures of power clear and contestable. The play's continuing resonance with Nigerian political realities underscores the enduring relevance of this analytical trend and the critical tradition to which it subscribes.

Vol. 2, No. 1; June (2026)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

References

Affiah, U. (2012). Vultures in parliament: Perspectives of Emeka Nwabueze. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities, 2*(5), 375–385.

Afolayan, B. F. (2018). "Come and chop": Representations of the parliamentarian in Ola Rotimi's *If* and Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*. In T. Falola & K. Kalu (Eds.), *Africa and globalization: African histories and modernities* (pp. 215–232). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74905-1_12

Aniago, E. (2017). Political culture as product of social constructs in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*. *IKENGA: International Journal of Institute of African Studies, 17*(1), 68–76.

Aniago, E., Eze, N. O., Okoye-Ugwu, S., & Joe, D. S. (2021). Vultures and candles as metaphors of leadership failures in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu's *The Candles*. *Kritika Kultura, 36*, 55–75. https://doi.org/10.13185/KK2021.03605

Anyachonkeya, N. (2011). A study of the linguistic repertoire of Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*. In U. C. Nwaozuzu (Ed.), *Theatre and new horizons: Selected essays on Emeka Nwabueze* (pp. 125–140). ABIC Books.

Anyanwu, C. (2024). Theatre and the politics of representation in contemporary Africa. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 11*(1), 1–10.

Ezeugo, A. (2021). Dramaturgy, politics and development: Emeka Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures*. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3809261

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press.

Nwabueze, E. (2011). *A parliament of vultures*. ABIC Books & Equip Ltd.

Nwaozuzu, U.-C. (2021). Perspectives on corruption and charlatanry in politics: An analysis of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v13n1.10

Okonkwo, U. (2023). Dissecting the bitter truth about our politics and leadership: A study of Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 6*(1), 23–33.

Rotimi, O. (1983). *If: A tragedy of the ruled*. Heinemann Educational Books.

Thrall, W. F., & Addison, H. (1984). *A handbook to literature*. Odyssey Press.