

SATIRE AND SOCIAL DECAY IN ELNATHAN JOHN'S BE(COM)ING NIGERIAN AND ADAMU USMAN'S BIVAN'S HOUSE"

Mohammed El-Nasir Al-Amin¹ 

¹ Kwara State University, (Nigeria)
elnasir.amin@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract: Nigerian literature has historically functioned as a tool for political protest and social commentary, but contemporary writers continue to grapple with enduring crises of corruption, insecurity, and moral decay. This study interrogates how satire serves as a literary weapon against these socio-political distortions in Elnathan John's *Be(com)ing Nigerian* (2019) and Adamu Usman Bivan's *Bivan's House* (2011). The research aims to examine how both authors deploy satirical aesthetics to expose systemic corruption, religious hypocrisy, and moral degeneration in postcolonial Nigeria. It also seeks to reveal how satire not only mirrors societal contradictions but also envisions moral reform and social justice. The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis, drawing on both primary texts and critical secondary materials to unravel the thematic and stylistic operations of satire. Anchored on Marxist literary theory, the analysis situates the texts within broader ideological and class struggles that shape Nigerian society. Through this lens, the research interprets the writers' humorous yet incisive portrayals of political elites, bureaucratic corruption, and public complicity as reflective of structural contradictions inherent in Nigeria's postcolonial experience. Findings indicate that John satirizes political absurdities through parody and irony, exposing the manipulation of religion and media as tools of exploitation, while Usman dramatizes the despair and resilience of ordinary citizens entrapped in corrupt systems. Both writers ultimately project ethical consciousness and civic responsibility as potential routes toward national renewal. The study concludes that satire in contemporary Nigerian prose remains a potent medium for social critique and moral interrogation, reaffirming literature's role as a transformative agent in national discourse.

Keywords: Bigotry; Corruption; Contemporary Nigeria; Marxism; Satire

How to cite the article:

Al-Amin, M. E. (2026). Satire and Social Decay in Elnathan John's *Be(com)ing Nigerian* and Adamu Usman's *Bivan's House*". *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society* (JSLCS), 9(1), 219-232.

¹ Corresponding author : Mohammed El-Nasir Al-Amin Authors' ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9529-4381>

1. Introduction

The African literature has traditionally been inspired by the oral performance, colonial experience and nationalistic resistance, yet nowadays the African literature seems to be shaped by the overwhelming sense of the social and political crisis. According to recent critics, twenty-first-century African literature is no longer preoccupied with the issue of culture identity restoration or the need to narrate a story of colonial trauma but to face the collapse of governance, morality, and daily life in postcolonial states (Quayson, 2021; Adejunmobi, 2019; Jeyifo, 2015). In this dynamic landscape, satire has become one of the most powerful forms of literature with which the authors reveal the hypocrisy, failures and absurdities of contemporary African societies. Although the early African novelists like Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong and Armah extensively used realism and historical reconstruction to challenge colonial ideologies, the post-independence condition created new representational needs. The failure of nationalistic vows, the institutionalization of corruption, dictatorial rule and the increase of social disparity gave rise to the realities that could no longer be sufficiently explained by the traditional realist discourse alone (Gikandi, 2011; Olaniyan, 2013).

It has been demonstrated by scholars that African authors gradually resorted to irony, grotesque exaggeration and dark humour as the means of reflecting the societies where moral reasoning seems to be turned upside down, and authority is maintained by the spectacle instead of accountability (Quayson, 2007; Newell, 2020). Satire was thus not only a style of choice but also a form of criticism that was used to diagnose political malfunction. This satiric tendency has reached a certain acuity in Nigeria. The modern Nigerian culture can be defined as the one where there is extreme wealth and mass poverty, constitutional democracy and institutional impunity, moral rhetoric and disillusionment (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011; Falola and Heaton, 2008). Nigerian authors use satire to bring these contradictions to life through creating fictional worlds that are filled with corrupt elites, institutions and disaffected citizens. Satire reveals how the process of governance has turned into theatre and how daily life has been turned into survival in a highly dysfunctional system through caricature, parody, and narrative absurdity (Ogunyemi, 2020; Newell, 2020).

Despite the prominence of satire in contemporary Nigerian writing, much African literary scholarship still privileges frameworks centred on colonial encounter, nationalism and postcolonial identity. While these remain important, they often obscure how satire functions as a specific literary response to twenty-first-century social decay. Recent African cultural critics increasingly emphasise literature's engagement with what Mbembe (2017) calls the "state of permanent crisis" in postcolonial Africa, yet few studies have systematically examined how satire translates this crisis into narrative and aesthetic form. This gap limits our understanding of how African writers are not only representing dysfunction but also reshaping public consciousness about corruption, power and moral collapse.

This paper thus prefigures satire as a key critical tool to understanding modern Nigerian literature. Instead of considering satire as a secondary stylistic device, it takes it as a critical approach where writers challenge authority, reveal hypocrisy and dramatise the death of social values (Quayson, 2007; Olaniyan, 2013). Through analysis of the functioning of irony, parody, grotesque imagery and comic exaggeration in chosen texts, the paper will show how the lived experiences of decay, when transformed by Nigerian authors, can be turned into effective forms of cultural critique. Finally, this study claims that Nigerian satire is not merely a mockery of failed leaders or broken institutions. It exposes the structural and moral cracks that characterize ordinary life and puts rulers and the citizens on their toes to confront their complicity in the reproduction of crisis (Mbembe, 2017; Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011). In this regard, satire is not merely an art form but a certain form of social intervention, an intervention that demands the truth in a political landscape of illusion, performance and denial.

1.1. Statement of the problem

African prose fiction has continued to develop, and recent research points to the emergence of new aesthetic, thematic and narrative practices replacing the traditional emphasis on the politics of protest and colonial heritage. An example is *Picaresque Narrative Techniques and Popular Literature in African Prose Fiction* (Etyang, Makokha & Obura, 2022) which discusses the use of non-linear, episodic plots and picaresque heroes /picas to innovate popular literatures in Africa, as an alternative to didactic or nationalistic models. On the same note, in *Social Realism, Didacticism and Aesthetics in African Children Prose Fiction*, Kehinde (2021) illustrates how the fiction of children today reflects bright stylistic and aesthetic obsessions and moral teachings, indicating a genre in a state of dynamic transition. *Valuing East African Anglophone Writing: Aesthetic Range and Narrative Powers* (Gagiano, 2023) is another recent publication that highlights the variety of narrative devices and aesthetic experimentation in East Africa; voice and genre, and formal changes.

Even with these developments the gap in scholarship, particularly, in the Nigerian literary context, on how recent prose fiction (since 2010, since 2020) restructures the narrative form, not merely content, but to reflect on socio-political realities, is still very great. In a great number of the recent works, thematic critique (corruption, gender injustice, postcolonial disillusionment) is still accorded greater precedence over the analysis of the role of narrative form (structure, temporality, narration style, genre hybridisation, intermediality) in generating meaning. As an example, the article *Interrogating Gender Injustices in Selected Nigerian Fictions* (2024) addresses the representation of male hegemony in fiction, but does not explore the formal inventions or interruptions (in plot, narration, voice) of the authors in questioning that hegemony.

In sum, while recent literature shows growing interest in aesthetic and formal innovation in African prose fiction, the Nigerian subfield in particular is under-studied when it comes to how newer writers experiment with narrative form to engage political themes. There is an urgent need for research that bridges this gap by analysing both how Nigerian authors are adapting or inventing narrative techniques (form) *and* how those formal interventions shape reader engagement, resistance, identity, or socio-political critique. Without such work, our understanding of African prose fiction remains top-heavy on what is said rather than *how* it is said.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This aim will be pursued through the following specific objectives:

- i. To analyse how satire functions as a literary tool in John's and Usman's works for representing contemporary Nigerian characters and traits.
- ii. To critique the negative implications of the actions and decisions of major characters as reflective of broader societal dysfunctions.

1.3. Scope of the Study

This research is predicated on how Elnathan John and Adamu Usman construct their characters as reflections of contemporary Nigerian society. Their narratives offer diverse modes of storytelling and characterisation, with evident sub-themes that illuminate socio-political realities. Within this purview, the study is limited to the analysis of the selected texts, and other extraneous issues that might be gleaned from the works fall outside the scope of this research.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to deepen scholarly understanding of Elnathan John's *Be(com)ing Nigerian* (2019) and Adamu Usman's *Bivan's House* (2011), particularly their representation of contemporary socio-political issues. By highlighting how both writers deploy satire and characterisation to critique Nigerian society, the study provides valuable insights for researchers of African prose fiction. It will contribute to existing scholarship on Nigerian literature by demonstrating how creative writing not only mirrors societal realities but also interrogates them in ways that resonate with readers, scholars, and policy observers.

1.5. Justification of the Study

The trend of this study is the clear degradation of the Nigerian society, which still has to deal with the problems of corruption, human rights violations, injustice, nepotism, bad governance, political violence, and social unrest. These matters are critical to the development of a nation and literature offers a special perspective through which these issues may be questioned and revealed. Their sociopolitical satire about the Nigerian society informs the decision of Elnathan John and Adamu Usman. Both writers use narrative techniques that are critical of system malfunctions but at the same time provide interpretive paradigms to the Nigerian condition. Their works are therefore artistic interventions which do not only document but also challenge the existing socio-political realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Satire in Nigerian Fiction

Satire has held a core position in the literature of Nigeria due to its ability to reveal domination, hypocrisy and lack of morals. Although the history of satire has been widely recorded in scholarship since the colonial era through to the post-independence era writing, most literature is simply descriptive with much of the literature being thematic catalogue and not how satire is adjusting to the radically different circumstances of the twenty first century. This is a notable restriction especially in the modern Nigeria where insecurity, digital disinformation, religious commodification and political spectacle have changed the landscape of the social crisis. According to Quayson (2021) and Newell (2020), the crisis has become permanent in African literature, which necessitates new aesthetic approaches. Nevertheless, the Nigerian satire has not been adequately theorised in this paradigm of new crisis.

Newer literature has been giving increased emphasis on the ideological and discursive roles of satire. In the *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, Ogundokun (2023) defines satire as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon that reveals citizen complacency and institutional stasis. Although such a contribution plays a vital role in redefining satire as humour to satire as civic action, it is still very formalist and fails to investigate how digital cultures, social media activism, and post-EndSARS political fears are transforming the Nigerian satirical expression. Likewise, the analysis of the African novel as a counter-discursive genre by Boukemoum (2022) preconditions the opposition to hegemonic power but still lacks the focus on the stylistic and ideological changes that define the development of modern Nigerian satire.

The analysis of Menippean satire in the writing of Adesanmi by Ogunbayo (2021) offers an important nod between humour and postcolonial absurdity, demonstrating that grotesque images and irony can be used as the means of revealing the contradictions of African modernity. Nevertheless, he is mostly canonical and does not go further to the more recent Nigerian satirical novelists whose work exists in the digital, religious, and media-saturated world. The discussion of satire and governance failure by Adekoya and Ojo (2020)

also contains valuable insights but does not reflect the aggravation of insecurity, Internet propaganda, and populist religious rhetoric that have become dominant in the life of the Nigerian population nowadays. More recently, the article by Dahunsi (2024) on media discourse and ideological manipulation highlights the urgency of satire in breaking down false political discourses, but does not theorize the role of satire in the modern digital misinformation landscape in Nigeria.

The cultural roots of satire can be studied, including Iyanda (2022) on Yoruba folktales and Akinmusuyi (2022) on political speech acts, to determine continuity between the oral tradition and contemporary satirical activities. These studies reveal the past role of performance, humour and moral pedagogy as forms of social regulation. They are however, very formal and culturalist and provide little insight into how modern Nigerian authors integrate oral aesthetics with documentary realism, social media idioms and global satire to challenge the contemporary moral and psychological fragmentation. According to Adejunmobi (2019), the new publics and platforms are influencing the African literary production more in the digital era, and this aspect has not been sufficiently addressed in traditional satire studies.

Traditionally, Nigerian satire developed out of anti-colonial rhetoric by Osadebey and Azikiwe to post-independence satire by Soyinka, Achebe, Aluko, and Rotimi. This tradition was further influenced by Marxist criticism by writers like Iyayi, Osofisan and Fatunde whose works revolved around class struggle, exploitation and ideological awakening. Although these frameworks are still useful, they do not comprehensively describe the hybrid satirical forms of the twenty-first century, where corruption meets with the religious extremist, digital manipulation, media sensationalism, and urban precarity. The postcolonial Africa today is governed by a regime of permanent crisis, as Mbemba (2017) argues, which insists on the new forms of literature representation other than classical satire and Marxist realism.

Against this changing backdrop, a new generation of Nigerian satirical writing has appeared, which is defined by documentary realism, social media sensibility, acute humour, and ideological self reflexivity. This shift is represented in *Be(com)ing Nigerian* by Elnathan John and *Bivan house* by Adamu Usman Bivan. Current literature (e.g. Atoyebi 2021, Gukas 2022) has been starting to interpret the work of John as a kind of digital civic satire and humour-as-resistance. Nevertheless, the number of these studies is very limited, and their theorisation of the mediating role of satire in the contemporary political trauma of Nigeria, digital activism, and moral disorientation is minimal. Similarly, *Bivan Bivan* in *Bivan* by Bivan, though sharply critical of religious hypocrisy and middle-class exasperation and institutional corruption, has had little sustained academic interest, and betrays a major lapse on the part of Nigerian literary criticism.

This work thus intrudes into a critical space that is not well theorised by locating contemporary Nigerian satire within the wider context of social corruption. Based on Marxist and postcolonial theory, it interprets John *Be(com)ing Nigerian* and *Bivan Bivan's House* as aesthetic statements to heightened Nigerian crisis of governance, ethics and belonging. Through preempting satire as a form of ideological critique and not just stylistic games, the study will contribute to a stronger sense of how modern Nigerian authors employ humour, parody and narrative exaggeration to address systemic failure and envision moral renewal.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Marxist Criticism and Contemporary Nigerian Satire

Marxist criticism is one of the most applicable in the analysis of the reflection and critique of material conditions, ideology, and class struggle in literature as it is based on the analysis of social relations by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Fundamentally, the Marxist literary theory dictates that texts are not aesthetic entities, but cultural artifacts that are created

in, and address, a certain socio-economic reality. Literature is thus contradictory to the society and reflected in it. This theoretical disposition best suits the study of the Nigerian literature whereby issues of stratification of classes, corruption, exploitation, and inequality are the overriding thematic concerns.

Marxist readings as applied to African writing presuppose the way in which narratives participate in the structures of oppression that make everyday life possible. Writers like Elnathan John and Adamu Usman of Nigeria use satire not only to entertain the audience but also to judge the foolishness of the political elite, the brutality of poverty and betrayal of governance. In the Marxist aesthetics, satire is turned into a weapon of class criticism that exposes the incongruities between the rhetoric of the ruling classes and realities. Their novels echo the ideas of Georg Lukács who stressed on realism as the reflector of social totality, yet they also develop this tradition by enlisting irony and ridicule as disruptive strategies which interrogate ideological mystifications.

Recent academic work has helped to revitalize the usefulness of Marxist methodology in African literature. In this neo-Marxist interpretation of the Nigerian poets, Adeniyi (2020) shows how the analysis of the classes restores the socio-economic logic behind the aesthetic decisions and the establishment of the canons. In his discussion of the radical theatre of Olu Obafemi, Olufunwa (2022) goes further to demonstrate how the Marxist criticism unveils the role of drama as a place of resistance and ideological intervention. More recent criticism applies this model to Nigerian prose. As an example, Ofie (2024) uses the Marxist reading to the works of Florence Orabueze in *Men behind the Masks* to highlight that characterisation and conflict can reveal the embedded nature of the contradictions of classes. In like manner, Kruger (2022) places the prizewinning African novels in the political economy of the cultural production and how the value of literature is formed by the forces of the market, which is perceived as neoliberal, and institutional recognition. Taken together, these investigations confirm that the Marxist theory is invaluable in reading the Nigerian texts that mediate socio-economic struggle and ideological struggle.

It is against this backdrop that the fictions of John and Usman are defined more sharply critically. Their satirical figures reflect the paradoxes of modern Nigeria: politicians who live off greed and corruption, people who live in exploitative cycles, and institutions that are rotten inside. When these works are read in a Marxist fashion, the analysis does not only criticise the negative connotations of elite misrule, but also indicates to the liberating power of literature to project an alternative. Finally, transparency and accountability turn out to be the panacea of the developmental transition as the recent scholarship implies. Satire is therefore a form of entertainment as well as an ideological intervention that criticizes exploitation by the classes and promotes social change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in close textual analysis of Elnathan John's *Be(com)ing Nigerian* (2019) and Adamu Usman Bivan's *Bivan's House* (2011). Qualitative textual analysis is particularly appropriate because satire operates through language, narrative form, and symbolic distortion, all of which require interpretive rather than statistical investigation. The method enables the study to examine how meaning, ideology, and sociopolitical critique are embedded within narrative structures, characterisation, humour, and stylistic choices in the selected texts.

The analysis is conducted through three interrelated analytic procedures. First, thematic analysis is used to identify and categorise recurring motifs such as corruption, religious exploitation, class alienation, political manipulation, and the everyday absurdities of Nigerian life. These themes are coded across the texts and interpreted in relation to broader

questions of social decay and postcolonial dysfunction. Second, narrative analysis examines how plot development, character construction, narrative voice, focalisation, and humour generate satirical meaning. Particular attention is given to parody, caricature, irony, exaggeration, and grotesque realism as narrative strategies for exposing power, hypocrisy, and moral contradiction. Third, linguistic and stylistic analysis focuses on discourse-level features, including tone, diction, register shifts, dialogue patterns, metaphor, and rhetorical devices, through which the texts ridicule, subvert, or destabilise dominant ideological narratives.

The study is theoretically anchored in Marxist literary criticism, which provides the primary interpretive lens for analysing satire as a form of ideological critique. From this perspective, the texts are examined for how they represent class relations, material conditions, and power structures, as well as how satire exposes contradictions between official political narratives and the lived experiences of ordinary Nigerians. This framework allows the analysis to foreground issues such as poverty, elite corruption, religious commodification, political manipulation, and institutional failure as expressions of deeper structural inequality. Satire is therefore treated not merely as humour, but as a critical aesthetic practice that reveals class antagonisms, challenges hegemonic ideology, and contests the normalisation of social decay.

To enhance analytical rigour, the textual analysis is triangulated with relevant secondary sources, including peer-reviewed scholarship on African and Nigerian satire, Marxist aesthetics, postcolonial theory, and contemporary Nigerian civic culture. These materials provide theoretical and historical context, enable comparative interpretation, and help situate the selected novels within the evolving tradition of Nigerian satirical writing. The inclusion of recent post-2020 studies further ensures that the analysis remains responsive to current socio-political developments, including digital activism, insecurity, and the transformation of public discourse. Through this combined methodological framework: integrating thematic, narrative, and stylistic analysis within a Marxist critical perspective. The study aims to produce a systematic account of how contemporary Nigerian writers mobilise satire to interrogate national crises, expose ideological failures, and imagine possibilities for ethical and sociopolitical renewal.

4. Results

4.1 *Satire and the Critique of Nigerian Society in Bivan's House and Be(com)ing Nigerian*

Satire takes a central position in the modern Nigerian literature as it serves both aesthetic and socio-political tools. Satire is also deployed in both *Bivan's House* (2011) by Adamu Usman and *Be(com)ing Nigerian: A Guide* (2019) by Elnathan John, as a way of resistant literature that challenges corruption, greed, violence, and bad governance in Nigeria. The two texts vary in form, though; *Bivan House* is a traditional realist novel, whereas *Be(com)ing Nigerian* is written in the form of a satirical handbook; they intersect in their unremitting attack on systemic inertia, and the satire will continue to serve its purpose in the Nigerian literary tradition (Olaniyan, 1988; Darah, 2005).

The *Bivan's House* by Adamu Usman is supported by a satire not only by allegory but also by a very restrained narrative tone, structure and characterisation that together dramatise the tragedy of integrity in a corrupt society. The fictional micro-nation of building the *Bivan House* offers Usman a symbolic place capable of reflecting the political economy of Nigeria but enabling his narrative hyperbolism and clarity of morality. The tone of the novel swings between the harsh realism and ironic positioning creating what Bakhtin refers to as a double-voiced discourse whereby the narrator is both a representative and a critic of the social world being described. The tonal inconstancy does not allow the story to be moralistic; on the

contrary, it reveals the system of corruption as a natural, institutionalised and tragically banal state.

This satirical design mainly revolves around the character of Talgon. In contrast to the trickster-like characters of African satire, Talgon is characterized by moral rigidity and is therefore an intentional deviation in the culture of fraud and moral compromise of Bivan House. His unwillingness to engage in bribery, kickbacks, or religious exploitations makes him a satirical prism through which the absurdity of the moral degradation in Nigeria can be seen. Instead of changing the system, the integrity of Talgon contributes to his further alienation, which supports the argument of Usman that the society where honesty is structurally punished. The continual infiltration of rats in his office functions as a protracted allegorical mechanism: no matter how many rats one kills, they keep coming like the corrupt officials who, despite the political clean-ups, do not get killed. It is akin to hitting the wind with stones as Talgon notes that it is futile to fight the blight in this country akin to a metaphor that states that individual virtue is useless in a system that is ruled by institutionalised decay (Usman, 2011, p. 21). By this imagery Usman maintains satire when he makes political corruption a natural ecological result, which is replicated by the system as opposed to bad actors acting by themselves.

Structurally, the House by Bivan further strengthens this pessimistic satire by being circular and not resolute. The battles of Talgon do not result in redemption and reform; rather, the story returns over and over to defeat, exasperation and stalemate in the bureaucracy. This repetitive pattern reflects the stagnation of the political life of Nigerians, where corruption is constantly criticized and constantly reproduced. By doing so, Usman has made his satire self-sustaining not with punchlines or more explicit ridicule but by narrative fatigue, compelling the reader to face the psychological and moral cost of existing within an irreparably flawed system.

In comparison, the mode of satire in *Be(com)ing Nigerian* by Elnathan John is much more aggressive and confrontational. The text is written in the style of a mock-self-help guide and satirizes the language of the motivational literature and neoliberal self-improvement, providing ironic advice on how to do well in Nigeria by bribing officials, playing with religion, speaking good English, and becoming a hypocrite. Addressing the audience in the second person breaks the barrier between the narrator and the audience, involving the audience in the same behaviours that the narrator is satirising (Adeduntan, 2020). Where Usman externalises corruption via allegorical space and symbolic narrative, John internalises it and corruption becomes a sort of habitus of everyday life, a part of thought, language and social practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

These two texts can be compared in terms of their differing yet complementary satirical tactics. The allegory of Usman shows how even the honest get sucked into the web of systemic corruption and the parody of John shows how the citizens themselves have been conditioned to become and repeat corrupt actions as a way of life. Combined, they provide a multi-layered criticism of Nigerian social decay: a critique that both encompasses the structural machine of corruption, and the psychological internalisation of it. Through a comparative reading of these works, this paper will show that the modern Nigerian satire functions concurrently at both the political system and the subjectivity of daily life, thus emerging as one of the most effective literary modes of diagnosing the twenty-first-century national crisis.

Both readings meet at the point of corruption being normalised and spread everywhere. The police system in *Bivan House* is the epitome of institutionalised extortion with junior officers bribing seniors to get a promotion and the citizen being obliged to give his daily returns to the checkpoints. Equally, John (2019) satirises the unspoken social contract that legitimizes bribery, including the fact that in order to get the civil servants to work the paid job, you must tip them. Corruption in both stories cuts across the political elite to involve the common people, thus destroying the ruler and the ruled dichotomy. In a jibing remark, as Usman (2011) through his narrator tells us, almost everybody you know in this house is a walking fraud; everybody you know is a smiling dupe; but the entire country is a frowning mess (p. 75). John shares this same attitude by transforming the admirable Nigerian perseverance into a joke: the people do not need to reform, they just know how to take advantage of the same system of corruption.

The other thematic overlap is in their treatment of religion. Usman ridicules Christianity as well as Islam as the places of manipulation, violence, and greed. Massacres are based on the basis of religious bigotry and pastors defend embezzlements through their absurd rituals including throwing money to God and retaining the money that bounces back (Usman, 2011, p. 157). The same sentiment is echoed by John (2019) who paradigms religion as a business venture where spiritual leaders take advantage of the desperation of their followers by offering fake miracles and prosperity gospels. Recent research confirms that this criticism is salient, pointing out that Nigerian literature tends to reveal that religion is a contributor to social injustice (Okuyade, 2021; Osha, 2022).

However, the tonal registers of both texts are not the same, even though both use satire. Usman is also satiric, but his work is usually tragicomic, pointing to the price of integrity in a predatory state. The experiences of Talgon help highlight the isolation and susceptibility of fighting against systemic corruption. In comparison, the satire of John is more humorous and ironic and has a stinging cynicism that will not allow tragic ending. The fact that he has written in a guide format suggests that Nigerians have been so acculturated to corruption that it is impossible to see the difference between satire and social reality. In this regard, John takes satire to a level that Mbemba (2001) describes it as the postcolonial convivial, where mockery and collusion both live together as a means of survival.

The Marxist reading also lays stress on the ideological background of the two texts. Corruption in the *House of Bivan* is associated with the exploitation of classes: the bourgeoisie use the proletariat, and even the poor imitating corrupt elites are seeking their survival. The analogy of corruption and leprosy that Usman makes between corruption and leprosy: incurable, contagious and stigmatising that hints at structural and not an individualised criticism. Likewise, John (2019) shows how division into classes is ingrained in the daily exploitation, in the assigning of contracts on the basis of nepotism and the use of poverty to gain political power. These findings are backed by recent scholarship on Marxist criticism of Nigerian literature that identifies how satire is employed by contemporary writers to dramatise the increasing inequalities of neoliberal capitalism (Adesokan, 2021; Nnodim, 2023).

Finally, the *House* and *Be(com)ing Nigerian* by Bivan are two off-shoots of modern Nigerian satire that go hand in hand. The allegorical novel by Usman predicts the continuity of corruption despite personal integrity, and the satirical guide by John the collusion of citizens who make the same normal and reproduce the same structures they criticize. Combined, the texts emphasize the dual purpose of satire, as a reflection and as a weapon, as ridicule and resistance. They also confirm that the literature is an invaluable instrument of diagnosing the political dysfunction of Nigeria, despite the fact that, as Talgon is afraid, it can be likened to throwing stones at the wind.

5. Discussion

The discussion of *Be(com)ing Nigerian* (2019) by Elnathan John and *Bivan's House* (2011) by Adamu Usman Bivan shows that satire is an extremely important aesthetic and ideological weapon in Nigerian literature to reveal and question the systemic corruption and political hypocrisy and moral decadence of society. The two texts represent the so-called dialectical role of art as perceived by Marxist critics: the capacity to mirror, and at the same time criticize, the contradictions inherent to material existence. These authors are not only amusing but also use irony, humour, parody to challenge the readers to face the absurdities of their socio-political realities. John employs humour and parody as a tool of subversion of ideology in *Be(com)ing Nigerian*. His use of biblical references and mimicry of scriptures to parody political sermons and media discourses points to what Bakhtin refers to as the carnivalesque subversion: a discursive manoeuvre that subjugates and destabilizes the prevailing power structures. By revisiting the sacred into the satirical, John shows how the religion, which used to be a guide to morality, has turned into an instrument of control in the hands of the corrupt rulers. Performative religiosity of the politicians therefore comes to be a metaphor of the hypocrisy that keeps the ruling elite in Nigeria going. His approach, which is a mixture of reportage and mock prophecy, heightens the collusion between institutions and the citizenry in the normalisation of exploitation. The satire of John, though comic in character, has its tragic overtones; the laughter of his work is sour, the wit of his jokes diagnostic. The text eventually turns humour into a political weaponry, which conforms to the perception of Marx that the laughter can demystify ideological illusions and reveal the material basis of oppression.

Bivan of Adamu Usman Bivan, by contrast, Bivan of Adamu Usman Bivan, becomes an existential instead of an institutional critique. His allegory of infestation as represented by the recurring image of rats functions as a metaphor of the all consuming rot that is eating Nigeria up ethically and politically. The symbolism of the infestation is that corruption trickles down the ranks of power to the bottom of the society and permeates even domestic places, education systems, and even bureaucracies. The character of the incorruptible protagonist Talgon is used as a moral compass and a tragic symbol of resistance. In a world where honesty is punished and moral steadfastness is treated as naivety, Talgon's moral rectitude exposes the alienation of the ethical subject within a capitalist and kleptocratic order. From a Marxist perspective, *Bivan's House* constructs satire as a critique of the material and ideological conditions that reproduce corruption as a structural necessity rather than a moral accident. Usman's allegorical nation, "Bivan House," functions as a symbolic representation of a postcolonial state in which economic survival, political power, and social legitimacy are organised through patronage, rent-seeking, and elite accumulation. Corruption in this space is not merely individual failure but an expression of what Marxist theory identifies as systemic contradiction, where the political superstructure is shaped by exploitative material relations.

Talgon's position within this system is therefore not simply ethical but classed. Being a non-bribe taker and a salaried bureaucrat, he is in a structurally disadvantaged position in a political economy that is structured to encourage extraction and not service. His integrity makes him cost-effective and dispensable in society, indicating the way integrity works against him in capitalist society perverted through prebendalism. The ratty rats in his office are his allegory of reproduction of the ruling classes: however many officials have been cleared away, the system recreates them because corruption is inherent in the material organisation of power. When Talgon tells him that it is like throwing stones at the wind

fighting the blight in this country (Usman, 2011, p. 21), the quote is a Marxist one: the virtuousness of an individual is no match to the mode of production and governmental structure that rewards exploitation systematically.

This criticism is supported by the cyclical narrative structure of the novel. The constant failures and bureaucratic impasse of Talgon depict what Marxist theorists refer to as reproduction of ideology in the presence of an ordinary practice. The system is not geared towards any progressive reform since it is structured to ensure elite dominance and frustration among the masses. In this regard, satire acts not as light humour, but a kind of ideological demystification to expose the manner in which corruption is a class project that guarantees the privileges of the few against the many.

The Marxist critique of Elnathan John in his *Be(com)ing Nigerian* takes a shift by focusing not on the institutional structures but the neoliberal subjectivity in the state of crisis formation. The text is parodied to reveal how the Nigerians are interpellated as self-help subjects and entrepreneurial success to cope in a collapsing state. The second-person narrative voice makes the reader a subject in corruption dramatizing what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as habits, the internalization of societal structures into dispositions of the day-to-day. In Marxist language, this shows that ideology ceases to work through the actions of the state institutions but through personal wants, dreams, and survival mechanisms.

In the same way Usman demonstrates how political and bureaucratic systems reproduce corruption, John demonstrates how these systems reproduce corruption by ordinary citizens who have to live with scarce resources, unemployment, and failure of the state system. The parody of directives to lie, bribe, use religion and manipulate the bureaucracy reveal that even the aspect of survival has become commoditized. Corruption is not an ethical deviation and it is a logical answer to material deprivation in postcolonial capitalism.

The two texts read together can be viewed as a dialectical model of the satire in Nigeria. The *House of Bivan* reveals the logic of exploitation at the top, and *Be(com)ing Nigerian* at the bottom. Their satirical tactics therefore work on both the base and superstructure: Usman is satirizing the political economy which generates corruption and John the ideological conditioning, which makes it normal. Thus, modern Nigerian satire is created not only as humour but as a Marxist aesthetic practice revealing the hypocrisy of a society between neoliberal survivalism and the rule of the postcolonial elite.

Together, the novels provide a reflection of the socio-economic reality in Nigeria where people tend to ascend the social hierarchy not through hard work, but through ethical corruption. The authors shatter the myth that corruption is a problem of the ruling elites and shows the intricate network of interdependence of exploitation across all social layers. Both authors thus emphasise Marx when he says ideology is most potent when absorbed by the oppressed, when victims of inequality become makers of their own subjugation. In revealing this dynamic, John and Usman are part of a bigger discussion on the morality of citizenship and the culture of silence in the post colonial societies. *Be(com)ing Nigerian* and *Bivan: House* attests to literature as a dual agent, as a reflection and as a generator of consciousness: documentation of a society, a tool of consciousness. Their satire is not just a mockery, but it demands moral and civic enlightenment. Their humor is a kind of uprising that leads to an invitation to conceive a different social order based on accountability and shared responsibility. In this respect satire crosses the aesthetic threshold to be an ethical undertaking, an undertaking that restores truth to propaganda and justice to the rubble of moral decay. Conclusively, both John and Usman express an extreme form of humanism based on the view that art can awaken critical consciousness. Their fictions indicate that the fight against corruption should start with ideological clarity that will result in the re-examination of values

that would give precedence to integrity over profit. Therefore, satire is not only a reflection of the rottenness but a prophetic tool of restorative power, which confirms that the laughter of revolt is the beginning of the restoration of a soul within a nation.

6. Conclusion

The paper has shown that satire is one of the most durable and penetrating art forms of responding to over time crises of governance, morals and social disintegration in Nigeria. Both *Be(com)ing Nigerian* (2019) by Elnathan John and *Bivan's House* (2011) by Adamu Usman Bivan use humour, irony and symbolic exaggeration to reveal both personal and institutional failure. Where John anticipates the use of sharp, satirical teaching that incriminates citizens in the continuation of corruption, Usman uses allegory, narrative tension, and characterisation to show the psychological and institutional effects of structural decay. Collectively, these pieces reiterate Achebe's (1975) claim that African authors serve as moral compass, especially during times of social chaos.

The discussion proves the dualism of satire in the modern Nigerian literature. On the one hand, it serves as a mirror, it reflects the contradictions, absurdities, and ethical emptiness of the postcolonial society; on the other hand, it can be viewed as a possible tool of reform, as a means of creating critical awareness and moral thought. Nobody exemplifies what Freire (1970) calls a pedagogy of hope better than characters like Talgon, who demonstrate that it is still possible to be morally clear and to act in a principled manner even within a system tainted by corruption. Satire is thus a diagnostic, aspirational process: it reveals the exploitation of classes, institutional failure, and moral exhaustion and points towards ethical and sociopolitical renewal. This duality is consistent with the understanding of African satire expressed by Darah (2005) in terms of cultural intervention, which is an act of rebuke, but at the same time educates and restores the communal norms.

Moving forward, future scholarship may build upon this analysis to other Nigerian novels written after 2010, particularly those that address the current crises, including terrorism, digital misinformation, gendered social politics, and the emergence of the neo-Pentecostal spectacle culture. The novels of writers like Kelvin Alaneme (*The Carnivorous City*, 2016) and Helon Habila (*Travellers*, 2019), and even the social-media versions of this genre shot through with satire, are fertile ground to explore how modern authors are reworking the genre in response to changing socio-political anxieties. These studies would enhance the knowledge of the ongoing ability of satire to diagnose dysfunction in the national system as well as developing critical consciousness and civic participation.

In conclusion, this paper confirms once again that satire in Nigerian literature is much more than a stylistic exercise: it is an ethical endeavor. John and Usman embrace storytelling as a method to challenge decay, reinstate human dignity, and envision a more fair and responsible society by using humour and irony, as well as creative exaggeration, in their narratives. As Soyinka (1967) says, it is the man who dies who will not speak in the face of tyranny, and these works show that satire is one of the strongest tools that can be used to provide a voice to that ethical imperative.

References

- Achebe, C. (1978). *Morning yet on creation day: Essays*. London, England: Heinemann.
- Adebanwi, W., & Obadare, E. (2011). *Democracy and prebendal politics in Nigeria: Critical interpretations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Adekoya, B., & Ojo, O. (2020). Satire and the politics of moral decay in contemporary Nigerian fiction. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32(4), 455–470. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jacs.2020.455>
- Adejunmobi, M. (2019). *African literature in the digital age: Class and sexual politics in new writing from Nigeria and Kenya*. University of Michigan Press.
- Akinmusuyi, S. (2022). Pragmatic acts analysis of selected speeches of the Nigerian Honourable Minister of Health. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 5(2), 101–115.
- Boukemoum, A. (2022). The postcolonial novel as counter-discursive. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 4(1), 55–70.
- Dahunsi, T. N. (2024). Bias and ideology in newspapers' reportage of herdsmen crises in Nigeria. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 7(1), 33–50.
- Darah, G. G. (2005). *Radical aesthetics: Essays in honour of Odi Ofeimun*. Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse.
- Darah, G. G. (2008). Revolutionary pressures in Niger Delta literature. *Niger Delta Quarterly Review*, 9(3), 12–24.
- Eagleton, T. (1978). *Criticism and ideology: A study in Marxist literary theory*. London, England: Verso.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuchs, C. (2020). Towards a critical theory of communication in digital capitalism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 18(1), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v18i1.1145>
- Gérard, A. (1981). *African literature in French: A history of creative writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa*. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.
- Gikandi, S. (2011). *Slavery and the culture of taste*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gunner, L. (2004). Africa and orality. In F. Abiola Irele & S. Gikandi (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of African and Caribbean literature* (pp. 167–196). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Habib, M. A. R. (1998). *A history of literary criticism: From Plato to the present*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Iyanda, R. (2022). (Re)storing Yoruba traditional ideals through folktale. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 4(2), 88–102.
- John, E. (2019). *Be(com)ing Nigerian: A guide*. Abuja, Nigeria: Cassava Republic Press.
- Jeyifo, B. (2015). *Contemporary Nigerian literature: New names, new trends*. Bookcraft.
- Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of black reason* (L. Dubois, Trans.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Newell, S. (2020). *Nigerian literature in English*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Njogu, K. (2001). *Reading identity: Theories of language and literature in African context*. Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1972). *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture and politics*. London, England: Heinemann.
- Ogundokun, S. A. (2023). Interrogating mental stasis: A study of social decadence and literary satire. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 6(2), 42–59.
- Ogunbayo, B. (2021). Menippean satire and the postcolonial absurd in Pius Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa*. *Nokoko: Journal of Pan-African Research*, 10(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/nokoko.2021.10.2>
- Ogunyemi, C. O. (2020). Satire and the aesthetics of political disillusionment in contemporary Nigerian fiction. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32(3), 287–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2020.1711523>
- Olaniyan, T. (1988). African literature and the politics of national culture. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26(1), 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X0000854X>
- Olaniyan, T. (2013). *Arrest the music! Fela and his rebel art and politics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Quayson, A. (2007). *Aesthetic nervousness: Disability and the crisis of representation*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Quayson, A. (2021). *Tragedy and postcolonial literature*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Usman, A. (2011). *Bivan's House*. Kaduna, Nigeria: Kraftgriots.
- Lindfors, B. (1979). *Comparative approaches to African literatures*. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.