

## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *DREAMS IN A TIME OF WAR*

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### **Résumé :**

Cette étude sur l'analyse de techniques de narration dans l'œuvre romanesque *Rêve en Temps de guerre*, de Ngugi wa Thiong'o consiste à approfondir la l'entendement stylistique du roman afin d'avoir l'idée sur le genre de langage utilisé dans cette œuvre.

L'écriture de Ngugi wa Thiong'o est caractérisée par l'usage des phrases simples et courtes, phrases longues et complexes, usage de flashback, usage de noms réels et d'une forêt de figures de style.

**Mots Clés:** *Rêves, Temps de guerre, Narratif et Techniques de narration*

### **Abstract**

The study on analysis of narrative Techniques in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War* consists of deepening stylistic studies of the and finally to have an idea on the sort of language used in the work.

The style of Ngugi wa Thiong'o is characterized by usage of simple sentences and short, long even complex, usage the flashback, usage the real names and a forest of figures of style.

**Key Words:** *Dreams, Time, War, Narrative Techniques.*

## Introduction

### 1.1. Problem Statement

In traditional Africa, storytelling was an art which was not possessed by any person. Some old persons were specialists in narrating the story. All stories were told in oral way.

Children had to sit around the fire in the evenings. The storyteller used some narrative techniques to attract the audience. During the arrival of fictional writing missionaries from western countries, they attempted to give to the ways of telling tales, fable stories, legends... a technical name which would be later called narratives techniques. These narrative techniques seemed to be Western invention whereas they existed in Africa Oral Literature in a form which was subconscious to African. This idea expressed above rises the following questions for the present article:

- What are the narrative techniques that the writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o has used to portray the different events in his novel " Dreams in a Time of War " ?
- Did the author use specific narrative techniques throughout the whole story?
- What narrative techniques did the writer use more or less than others and why?

### 1.2. Choice and Interest of the Subject

Literature is a domain which represents a nation, a country, a continent; a tribe even an ethnic group outside it and values its traditions and customs. The ways artists assemble their elements to give a shape remain very important for a critic. Works of art and the ways they are assembled always attract me and serve as my favorite topic for discussion and thinking during my spare time and occupation time.

This sort of things that is narrative techniques have boiled my brain to examine them in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's ' Dreams in a Time of War ' and tortured my choice and interest to work on them that is narrative techniques.

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

In this work, I point out some narrative techniques used by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his one socio-political novels under study, in order to analyze them, and examine how they help the author to underscore his message.

The purpose of this work is to analyze some narrative techniques used by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-) in his novel ' Dreams in a Time of War (DTW)

- The present article shows the different kinds of narrative techniques

In this work, I point out some Narrative Techniques used by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his socio-political novels under study, in order to analyze them, and examine how they help the author to underscore his message.

The purpose of this work is to analyze some narrative techniques used by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-) in his " Dreams in a Time of War (DTW)

- The present article shows the different kinds of narrative techniques that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has used to portray the different events taking place in his story ' Dreams in a Time of War '
- It aims at presenting to the reader the specific narrative techniques that the author has used to exploit characters speeches and thoughts throughout his narration.
- The article specifies the narrative techniques that the writer has used more or less during the conception of the events of the story.

### 1.4. Hypotheses

The present article hypothesizes the following assumptions:

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses various narrative techniques to portray the character's speeches and thoughts expressed during the different events occurring in the novel story.
- The writer of the novel exploits some specific narrative techniques throughout his narration.
- The author attempts to exploit some narrative techniques more often than others and he knows why he does so.

### 1.5. Frame work

The article deals with some narrative techniques that the writer of the novel, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has used to communicate his message to his readers. He has used a great deal of narrative techniques but I have limited my analysis to some figures of style, some short sentences and the like.

### 1.6. Review of the Literature

Some authors have already tackled this issue about narrative techniques. I am going to present some to show that my analysis is different from theirs.

01. Bahanuzi Habamungo (2012) exploited Narrative techniques in his analysis on Ayikweyi Armah's novel entitled 'A Stylistic Analysis in Ayikweyi Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born.*' At the end of the analysis, he realized that, to portray his characters' utterances, Armah has used a great number of narrative techniques including figures and foregroundings.
02. Okende Matete Mohamed (2011), examined Narrative techniques in his work entitled, A Stylistic Analysis of Conversational Mechanism in Nicholas Sparks' "True Believer". At the end of the paper, he noticed that the writer prefers the use of old figures of speech utterances to vehicle the novel message to his readers.

My article differs as I have taken a different novel and have decided to work on some narrative techniques in Ngugi's fictional style.

#### 1. Definition of Concepts:

a) A narrative is a story, a succession of happening involving a plot and a setting. Narrative as adjective is which is related to a story, a narration.

b) A technique with a message and a style are the three important factors in any creative writing.

- a message is something to say, the thing the writer wants to write about, the content of the narrative;

- A style is a manner of using words in the final expression of the story;

- A technique is the ways and means of organizing and manipulating the materials.

It is commonly called the structure of the story. Etymologically, the word technique comes from Greek and it means, "crafts manship". The classical philosopher Plato explained it clearly "Ta pragmatic technica" or "the affairs of crafts manship".

Mongbolo N. (2010) wrote that nobody can give a writer a style; nobody can give a writer a technique. Mental equipment forces the spirit to achieve its purposes. A technique is mastered and forgotten, and it becomes an unconscious part of one's equipment, the writer has subjected it during his formative years.

### 2. Some Narrative Techniques in *Dreams in a Time of War*

At this sense, the study of a narrative technique urges upon each writer, critic and researcher. In other words, the success of a work of art depends to a great extent upon its employment.

A writer has some materials: facts about life, with these, he wants to do something, this is, his purpose. Therefore, to achieve his purpose, he needs how to do it. To ignore a technique is to miss part of the substance of a literary work.

Moreover, one way, probably the most important way in which the study of literature can help us to read more perceptively and hence increase our understanding and enjoyment of what we read is to acquaint us with the literary techniques.

#### 1. Use of Short, Simple Sentences

Eckersley, C.E and Ackersley, J.M. in their book *A Comprehensive English Grammar for Foreign Students* define a simple sentence as "the one that contains a finite verb. It does one of four things:

- makes a statement,
- asks a question,
- gives a command or makes a request,
- makes an exclamation.

Here are some examples:

- Did you succeed? (Question)

- Please help me! (Request)

- Wow, too hot again! (Exclamation).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel is full of short and simple sentences.

When he remembered the way school has changed his mind, in the evidence bellow, Ngugi says:

Thank you, Mother, thank you

The school has opened my eyes.

When later in church I heard the words I was blind and now I see, from the hymn 'Amazing Grace', I remember Kamandura school, and the day I learned to read. (DTW, 64)

*Dreams in a Time of War* is written in the form of dialogue. That is what makes a novel sweet and easy to be read even by people who have not yet master English language.

The effect, better the literary effect of the use of short, simple sentences is to be demonstrated here. It is commonly stated that simple sentences express complete and full ideas at a time. The style is simple, but very pure. The reader has not to think much to tackle the idea expressed by the writer, and it helps both the writer and the reader to progress step

by step either in writing or in reading. Many writers such as Ernest Miller Hemingway have devoted much of their time in writing fiction on short, simple sentences.

## 2. Use of Complex Sentences

Other group of sentences in the novel seems to appear longer but even though that, they are easy to understand. Let's consider these:

They had their own individuality. Njeri the youngest was strong –famed with a sharp irreverent tongue. She brooked me nonsense from any one. She was known to speak on behalf of any of the other woman against an out sider event of it was a man. She could openly defy my father but she also knew when and how to back off. She was the undeclared defence minister of the homestead. My mother was thinker and good listener loved for generosity and respected for the legendary capacity for work. Though she would not confront my father openly, she was stubborn and let her actions speak for her. She was like the minister of work(DTW, 28).

This comparison made by Ngugi above between his mother and his step mother clarifies why the use of long and complex sentences is important in literary texts. Some events, messages, flashbacks and descriptions are not possible to describe in short sentences, so, long and complex sentences are needed.

## 3. Use of Real Names/ Verisimilitude

Literature is the mixture of fact and imagination. To prove that the events described in a work of art are only not unreal, writers are obliged to use some real names in their text to achieve their verisimilitude. Let's consider Ngugi's case in the passage which follows:

The two organisations had religious affiliations: the **African Independent Pentecostal Church** for KASI and the **African Orthodox Church** for KKEA, with roots that went back to the **American African Orthodox Church** via **South Africa** through **Bishop William Daniel Alexander**, who visited **Kenya** for sixteen months between 1935 and 1937. The **American African Orthodox Church** had been formed by another **Alexander**, **Bishop George Alexander McGuire**, who earlier had been chief chaplain of **Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association**. (DTW, 113)

To achieve his verisimilitude, Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses in his text many names of places and people that exist in real. The purpose of this use is to put readers familiar with a milieu they know well so that they could see themselves in the text.

## 4. Use of Flashback/ A Story within a Story

It is not possible to understand the *raison d'être* of some events without finding explanation in other events which previously took place in the past. The author therefore gives flashback in order to illuminate the reader's mind and to restore the link in events.

Then, a flashback is a device that allows the writer to present events that happened before the time of current narrative or the current events in the fiction. The flashback techniques include memories, dreams, and stories of the past told by characters to fill in the reader about a character, a place or a background to a conflict. It may be a part of a film that goes back in time to show what happened earlier in the story. It has the purpose of enlightening the part of the story, to understand the next episode of the story.

The mysterious illness that wiped out my grand parents and forced my father to take flight only made sense when years later I read stories of communal affliction in the Old Testament. Then I would think of my father and his brother as part of an exodus from a plague biblical proration in search of a promised land. But when I read about Arab slaves traders, missionary explorers , and even big game hunters (...)I reimagined my father and uncle as two adventurers armed with bows and arrows traversing the some paths daggling these hunters fishing off morning lions narrowly scraping slithery snacks(...) eventually he got a job as domestic worker in an European house . Once again detail about. (DTW, 117).

To make sense to his live, to understand where he is from, Ngugi brings us to the past where his father and uncle came from. Why they left the land, the village and the parents. Ngugi compare this to the biblical event found in Exodus. He imagined his father living alone, far away from family and friends. All these things inspired Ngugi's writing and life.

## 5. Use of Point of View / Angle of Narration

Narrative point of view or narrative perspective describes the position of the narrator, that is, the character of the storyteller, in relation to the story being told. It can be thought of as a camera mounted on the narrator's shoulder that can also look back inside the narrator's mind.

### a. First-Person Point of View

With the *first-person* point of view, a story is revealed through a narrator who is also explicitly a character within his or her own story. In a first person narrative, the narrator can create a close relationship between the reader and the writer. Therefore, the narrator reveals the plot by referring to this viewpoint character with forms of "I" (that is, the

narrator is a person who openly acknowledges his or her own existence) or, when part of a larger group, "we". Frequently, the narrator is the protagonist, whose inner thoughts are expressed to the audience, even if not to any of the other characters.

A conscious narrator, as a human participant of past events, is an incomplete witness by definition, unable to fully see and comprehend events in their entirety as they unfurl, not necessarily objective in their inner thoughts or sharing them fully, and furthermore may be pursuing some hidden agenda. Forms include temporary first-person narration as a story within a story, wherein a narrator or character observing the telling of a story by another is reproduced in full, temporarily and without interruption shifting from the narration to the speaker. The first-person narrator can also be the focal character.

*Dreams in a Time of War* opened with this sentences:

Years later when I read T.S Etroit line that April was the cruellest month. I would recall what happened to me one April day in 1952, in chilli Limuru; the prime estate of what, in 1902, (...) I had not had lunch that day, and my tummy had forgotten the porridge I had gobbled that morning before the six-mile run to Kinyogori Intermediate School. (DTW, 3)

The story in *Dreams in a Time of War* is told in first person point of view since the book is a childhood memoir of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It tells the story from his birth up to his admission to Alliance High-School as the first child of his village to attend that prestigious school.

### b. Second-Person Point of View

The *second-person* point of view is a point of view where the audience is made a character. This is done with the use of the pronouns "you", "your", and "yours." The narrator is trying to address the audience, not necessarily directly, but rather to administer more of a connection. Stories and novels in second person are comparatively rare. An example in contemporary literature is Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, in which the second-person narrator is observing his life from a distance as a way to cope with a trauma he keeps hidden from readers for most of the book.

"You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy."—Opening lines of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984).

### c. Third-Person Point of View

In the *third-person* narrative mode, characters are referred to by the narrator as "he", "she", or "they", but never as "I" or "we" (first-person), or "you" (second-person). This makes it clear that the narrator is an unspecified entity or uninvolved person who conveys the story and is not a character of any kind within the story, or at least is not referred to as such.

Traditionally, third-person narration is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature. It does not require that the narrator's existence be explained or developed as a particular character, as with a first-person narrator. It thus allows a story to be told without detailing any information about the teller (narrator) of the story. Instead, a third-person narrator is often simply some disembodied "commentary" or "voice", rather than a fully developed character. Sometimes, third-person narration is called the "he/she" perspective.

### A Dramatic Point of View

We speak of dramatic point of view when the author uses dialogues to tell the story.

This passage below uses a dramatic point of view:

“Where have you been?”  
 “An open-air Christmas service.”  
 “Say ‘effendi,’ he shouted.  
 “Effendi”  
 “Where do you go to school?”  
 “Kinyogori Intermediate School. District Education Board.  
 I have done my KAPE and I am waiting for results”  
 “Have you got brothers?”  
 “Yes”  
 “Say ‘effendi,’ he said  
 “Yes, effendi.”  
 “How many?”  
 “My father has four wives. I have about ten. ...”  
 “Say ‘effendi,’ ”  
 “Ten, ‘effendi’  
 “Are all your brothers at home? What do they do?” (DTW, 239)

This dialogue between Ngugi and soldiers was done in the purpose of knowing if one of Ngugi's brothers is involved in Mau Mau rebellion.

### 6. Use of Some Figures of Speech.

A figure of speech is a word or phrase that possesses a separate meaning from its literal definition. It can be a metaphor or a simile to provide a dramatic effect. There are several figures of speech I found in the novel analyzed in this research paper, among them we have:

#### a) Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech which compares two things by identifying one with the other. They are found in primitive speech, in music, in the speech of the unlearned and learned, in that of children, in the profession argot of theatre, in short, in all life occupations.

In the novel under study, different metaphorical speeches are found, among them, the one below needs to be quoted:

In the daytime, we would try to retell the stories we had heard among ourselves, but they did not come out as powerfully as when told around the fireside, the entire space gammed with eager participatory listeners. Daylight, our mothers always told us, drove stories away and it seemed true. (DTW, 31)

Ngugi's comparison between day and night seem strange. In daylight, stories are not possible to tell as sweet as they are tonight, around the fire. Night fire is a metaphor for african solidarity, african unity, african love.

#### 7. Interrogation

It is a question asked without need to be answered.

I was excited that I had been to the big city. I had never seen many stone buildings together. Were these the same buildings that my father had seen as a youth in flight from Murang'a? Or the same that hah housed half-brother Kabae, the king's man? Could any of these buildings be the place where the truck that hit our house had come from? Or maybe they were all different Nairobis (DTW,48).

Ngugi's impression was surprising when he saw for the first time big stone houses. He asked himself so many questions that remained unanswered.

#### b. Metonymy

A figure of speech in which the name of an attribute or a thing is substituted for the thing itself.

Eventually he got the job as a domestic worker in a european house. Once again details about this phase of life **in a white house** were few, except for the story of how he escaped induction into the First World War. (DTW, 15)

In expression, white house, in this above passage, Ngugi described his father domestic work in a white men's house when he and his brother left the village and family to a unknown place.

#### 8. Enumeration

A figure of speech which consist of mentioning within the same line or paragraph, many things, different names or objects.

Ngugi uses this in the following passage:

I was always Ngugi wa Wanjiku. In addition, many of my sisters and brothers had nicknames they had given themselves or had been given by others, and these individual to them. There was Gacungwa, 'Little Orange'; Gatunda, 'Little Fruit'; Kahabu, 'Half-cent'; Kibiruri, 'The player of spinning Tops'; Wabia, 'Ruppee'; Mbecia, 'Money'; Ngiree, 'Gray'; Guthera, 'Miss Clean'; Tumbo, 'Big Tummy.' (DTW, 27)

The environment of Ngugi's family was amazing as he described his brothers and sisters. The situation is alike in all African countries where young children give themselves nicknames.

### Conclusion

This article concerned some the literary devices used in *Dreams in a Time of War* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The stress is put on the use of Short, simple sentences, the use of long, complex sentences; the use of point of view, the use of flashback, the use of real names and the use of some figures of speech.

For which concerns figures of speech, metaphor is at no doubt, the most used figure of speech in Ngugi's body of work. It is used everywhere in everyday speech.

## Findings

Throughout my article interpretation, I have found out that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has used as well, short, simple sentences as complex sentences and real names. Some other techniques that the writer has used to present his different dreams during Mau Mau struggle for independence of Kenya from the hands of imperialists are great deal of Gikuyu, Swahili Loan words that you can observe throughout the different passages evidenced in the paper. The writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o did not exclude the use of various figures of speech like those of thought comparison, non-real words. A series of proverbs can be found throughout some extracts in the novel "Dreams in a Time of War." The different speeches and thoughts are expressed in utterances denoting intimidation, betrayal, ealesy and hatred observed on both sides of fighters British imperialist fighters and Mau Mau fighters.

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