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## **Stylistic/Textual Analysis of Narrative Techniques in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *a Grain of Wheat***

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**ABSTRACT:** *In A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o demonstrates his mastery of language for both narration and description. In the plot, while telling the story, he provides a vivid description of the social and natural settings in which the action is taking place. He adopts the use of omniscient narrator technique as an objective technique that makes it possible to probe the innermost depths of the characters and determine their psychological and emotional states, especially in the protest against the whiteman's domination of the land. Occasionally, he attempts to illustrate the ongoing action with a corresponding visual symbolism or external imagery starting from the title of the novel – A Grain of Wheat and the character – Kihika respectively. This paper examines stylistic/textual analysis of narrative techniques of Ngugi's style of narrative in A Grain of Wheat. The purpose of this study is to analyse the colonial influences on the Kenyan environment using the post-colonial theory and employing the qualitative method to gather data as regards the use of narrative techniques in the novel. The findings are that the source of environmental degradation and marginalisation of the natives in the novel warranted the use of narrative techniques, especially symbolism and visual imagery as indicated and perfected by the author in A Grain of Wheat. His use of flashback techniques is to give the reader insight into the life and activities in Kenya. Therefore, this paper recommends the use of narrative techniques by authors as part of the thematic expressions of their works.*

**KEYWORDS:** Stylistics, Narrative, Narrative Techniques, Textual, Analysis.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The analysis of the story in the novel falls within the domain of narratology. Analysis of story in narrative of story in narrative fiction poses a major to stylisticians. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's mastery of English language and style is indicated and perfected in *A Grain of Wheat*. He blends sociological details with such artistic skills that keep the readers' interest soaring. Examples include the visit of party men and Gikonyo's public address in chapters one, two and three of the novel respectively. The author makes use of flashback technique to give the reader insight into the life and activities of some events in Kenya, characters; and stories that are not

part of the plot, but would add flavour to the story line. One such flashback is the coming of the whiteman and his occupation of Kenya land. Also flashed is the story of political crises and unlawful detention of Kenyan nationals by the whiteman in their struggle for freedom. Such person like Jomo Kenyatta was named.

There is the prophecy of the Gikuyu seer warning about the coming of the whiteman in Kenya. Thus, the reader has a access to most of the information he or she needs for a fair assessment of each character's action and motivation; and more splendidly the message of protest against white subjugation and seizure of the land is aptly stated. In addition, there are several instances in which the geographical location and physical landscape are clearly described and turned into active participants or collaborators in the on-going struggle and protest. As a style, Ngugi uses side by side colloquial language and Pidgin English alongside the use of normal English. The colloquial expressions are adopted in conversations, which involve the less educated characters, especially the peasants in the novel. This is made evident in chapter seven with the song.

Ngugi's use of epigrammatic statements in *A Grain of Wheat* is equally interesting and they reveal the rich cultures of Kenyans. This is very evident in chapter two of the novel in which the author ridicules the whiteman and shows the people's protest against the whiteman's influence on the culture. "Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword" (p.12). This statement and several others become the recurring decimal in Ngugi's expression of the natives' anger in the novel. A close look at some of the statements will reveal the use of pun, because he manipulates the English words for his literary interest. In the preceding statement before the one cited above, Ngugi says this of the woman, Wangu Makeri: "*The moon played on her: an ecstasy, a mixture of agony and joy* hovered on the woman's face" (p.12). The italicised phrases in the above comment is my making and deliberately for emphasis.

### **Symbolism and Personification**

Consequently, Ngugi makes use of other figures of speech to arouse the reader's interest in the novel. For example, the use of the phrases above: "moon played on her"; "mixture of agony and joy" reveal the use of personification, paradox and antithesis respectively. Other figures of speech used in the novel to keep the deep structure of language use include symbolism. Symbols abound in the novel: starting from the title of the novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. The "grain" symbolises the political party struggle; which took different forms and shapes and later developed to the "wheat" which metamorphosed to Kenyan independence and freedom. Ngugi says this of the novel's title:

Then nobody noticed it; but looking back we can see that Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil (p.13).

The novel contains symbols in characters, for instance, Waiyaki is symbol of a birth for black resistance against whiteman's activities in Kenya. Harry Thuku, a new leader, Ngugi says: "so in Harry Thuku, people saw a man with God's message; Go unto pharaoh and say unto him: let my people go... They would follow Harry through the desert" (p.13).

Ngugi trying an analysis on the kenyans' protest against whiteman's deceit symbolises the whiteman with Mubia as a character. He says: "Mubia, in white robes opened the Bible. He said let kneel down to pray.... When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard (p.15). Kihika is presented as a symbol of terror to the whiteman. He fought relentlessly for the freedom of the natives and sacrificed his life for that purpose. His party address in Kung'ei market reveals this symbol and quality. He stands as the symbol of the black resistance against colonial inhumanity and torture. Excerpt from the novel speaks volumes of this thus:

Caught unawares, the police made a weak resistance as Kihika and his men stormed in. Some policemen.... People came to know kihika as the terror of the whiteman. They said that he could move mountains and compel thunder from heaven (p.16).

Ngugi's style is peculiar to him as an artist as style is the manner of expressing one's thoughts just as there are various ways of doing things, there are stylistic variations in language use. Style is also distinctive in the sense that the language used in some way is significant for the thematic design of any genre. This distinctive aspect of style is predicated upon the fact that from a variety of items of language, the writer chooses and arranges them, depending on the genre, form, theme, author's general disposition etc. "Style is the overall semantic patterning of a text or of a stretch of discourse, it is a reflection of the choices made by the author in terms of how they use language to create meanings" (Halliday 1985, p.31).

Ngugi's use of Gikuyu proverbs in *A Grain of Wheat* is a deliberate attempt to explain his love for his culture (language) and to show a displeasure to the whiteman. The Gikuyu proverbs used in the novel show images of protest. For instance, in reminding the natives of the need for an indefatigable fight against the whiteman's oppression, Kihika spoke to the audience to remember the great Swahili proverb: "Kikulacho Kiko Nguoni Mraka" which literally means "watch and pray". He also uses songs and stories to justify the actions and protests of the people, and spurs them to further action. This is evident in chapter seven of the novel; when the people reacted to the news that Jomo Kenyatta lost a case against the whiteman in kapanguria. They gathered together in their compounds and sang:

"Gikuyu na mu-u-mbii  
Gi-i-kuyu na-mu-u-mbii  
Gi-i-kuyu na-mu-u-mbii  
Nikihiu ngwatiro"

This is a Gikuyu song of freedom and the arrangement of words is in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the author and the idea and the intent in the author's mind as regards the quest for freedom and the regain of the lost land. This is in analogous with Holman's (1980) description of style as "a combination of two elements; the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author" (p.432).

Gatu, is a prototype of the people who believe in Kenyan independence and the regain of the lost land. In fact, an epitome of a good spirit, he, in reply to Gikonyo's statement of his desire to see Mumbi just once because he did not even say farewell to her when the soldiers carried him away; mentioned a Gikuyu story explaining the ills of weakness:

A certain man, the only son of his parents, once wanted a woman. And the woman also wanted to marry him and have children. But the man kept on putting off the marriage because he wanted to build a new hut so that children would be born in a different hut. ...she was tired of waiting and letting life dry in her. She married another man... our people say that building a house is a life-long process. As a result the man never had a woman or children to continue his family fire (p.56).

This is an ideological representation of the relationship between the whiteman and the natives in Kenya. Representation functions as representation, by the position as fixed and immutable. "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser 1971, p.162).

To situate Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* as an anti-colonial novel, we need to understand the characterisation in line with the difference between the protagonist and the antagonist and their peculiar relationship and their effectivity functions in narrative fiction. "It is from this characterisation of ideology, as imaginary relations, that we can appreciate its role in the emergence and development of the African novel" (Udumukwu 2017, p.46). The deep psychological insight and astuteness of characters in *A Grain of Wheat* help to inform the reader about the qualities embedded in the characters he sees in the novel. He also uses the comparison of characters to demonstrate their sameness and historic source in the struggle in Kenya.

In the novel, there is the picture of Mumbi and Gikonyo of a new Kenya, this comes from the reunion of Gikonyo with Mumbi, after the former's release and return from detention with others. The narrator says this of Gikonyo in the novel: "The reunion with Mumbi would see the birth of a new Kenya" (p.52). Jomo Kenyatta and Young Harry are compared in terms of their commitment to the struggle and torture in the hands of the oppressor; they served several prison terms as associates or comrades. Excerpts from the text reads thus:

Young Harry had also been detained and sentenced to live alone on an island in the Indian Ocean for seven years. He had come back a broken man, who promised eternal cooperation with his oppressors denouncing the party he had helped to build.... The same thing, over and over again, through history (p.92).

The technique of comparison helps the reader to assess the qualities in the characters, bringing out areas of similarities and differences in them. This explanation is necessary when viewed against the criticism that Ngugi is fond of using weak characters in his novels. Such weak characters are seen in the personalities of Karanja who depersonalises himself as portrayed in the novel because of his vision of a better tomorrow and his fantastic dreams. Karanja's visit to Mrs. Thompson and the dog incident in Dr. Lynd's house in chapter four of the text expound these innate weak qualities in him. The false accusation leveled against him by Dr. Lynd who says:

I would never have thought this of you – throwing stones at my dog:

Karanja: No stones – I did not throw stones

Dr. Lynd: Didn't I catch you holding a stone?

I should have allowed him to get at you even now I've half a mind to let him....

(p.39).

### **Characterisation in *A Grain of Wheat***

The characters in the novel are presented on their strength and weaknesses to perform their roles as characters in a dehumanising society. Of course, this could be viewed as a deliberate and bold attempt by Ngugi to portray the fictional element of protest in the novel. Ngugi's heroes have been criticised as "weaklings" who cannot bear the burdens of their societies. His use of weak heroes is a deliberate artistic skill and peculiar style to show his belief in the African socialist doctrine of non-heroic figure for society but that heroism belongs to the people – the masses; which completely negates the Aristotelian concept of hero of the special class. Such defame of the central characters is also evident in the *Petals of Blood*.

The use of contradictory and comparative characters is one of the techniques used to demonstrate points and events of emphasis, which have the same artistic source. For instance, *In The Rivers Between*, we have Kabonyi and Joshua compared with Jacob, Ngotho and Boro of *Weep Not Child*.

### **Diction of the Novel**

The use of language in the novel is simple and understandable by the reader. The swift language helps to bridge details and accord the novel its concise nature. The blend of English and Gikuyu language in *A Grain of Wheat* attests to the level of Ngugi's language power, and accords the novelist's concise nature thus gives the reader the sense of "Emergency" of a society under the struggle for political and socio-economic independence. More so, in *A Grain of Wheat*, the in-depth details on socio-anthropology harness the rich cultures and myth of the Gikuyu's; a culture under the influx of westernism.

Ngugi as a master of artistic techniques have helped his works, especially *A Grain of Wheat* to attain its fame. The novel puts together two related hallmarks of Kenyan history: the mau-mau and a long awaited independence. It is a story of heroism and betrayed. The exploits of the young leader Kihika add to the spirit of the resistance, boosting the courage of many, including the women of Thabai who indulged in building a new village in the absence of their men. Kihika's name is mentioned and discussed in anticipation of Uhuru. His militant posture contradicts the soft compromise of Waiyaki. His practical commitment to the cause of freedom

runs counter to Kenyatta's supposed weakness based simply on more political statements and rhetorics not actually needed at this time.

Although the novel does not develop this political theme to give the central significance, it deserves the indicatives are strong of its importance in Ngugi message. Bruce and Kolawole (1975) explain that:

The intriguing narrative technique of *A Grain of Wheat* must be seen not only as a reflection of the Kenyan society at this time, but also as a significant aspect of Ngugi's literary style and conception of the Kenyan history. Ngugi sees history as a continuum in which the past, present and future are inextricably tied, each helping to mirror, justify or condemn the other. Thus, he writes: "For what has been... is intimately bound up with what might, our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential has roots in our experience of the past". He interlocks the past and present in *A Grain of Wheat* (p.214).

Ngugi has effectively used the flashback technique to arouse the anxiety as the past cannot be ignored; the characters reveal the responsible past that led to the present suffering in Kenya. The characters remember earlier events that happened before the current point of the story. By this technique Ngugi uses external analepsis in the novel in the narration of events. The novel shortly begins before the Kenyan Uhuru celebration, and climaxes at the celebration itself.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has delved into the core issues of textual/stylistic analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's style of narrative techniques in *A Grain of Wheat*. It establishes that the author utilise a good number of literary device/techniques to deliver the protest against subjugation, marginalisation, oppression, forceful seizure of land of the natives by their colonial oppressors. A lot of the stylistic/narrative techniques used include: flashback, symbolism, characterisation, personification, etc. He achieved this by the use of the third-person omniscient point of view. Using this technique enables Ngugi, and by extension the reader, to see inside the minds of characters to find out exactly what they are thinking. The author uses flashbacks throughout the novel to heighten suspense. For instance, the precise details concerning Kihika's death are revealed through flashback as what was implicit is made explicit. Since the novel deals with the experiences of different people under British colonial rule in Kenya, it is arguably the case that the third-person omniscient point of view is the most appropriate one to use.

## Recommendations

Stylistic/textual analysis of narrative techniques as used by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *A Grain of Wheat* is an effective tool for studying the novel. It is not used haphazardly, but always used by artists as a means to enhance the effectiveness of their works as well as considering the interests of their audiences/readers. It is therefore recommended because any work of art that

is free of stylistic/textual or narrative techniques is not worth a literary work. It should be taken as a non-literary work than the opposite of it.

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