



## **The Synergic Interface between Narrative Techniques and other Elements of fiction: Dramatic Irony and Betrayal in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat***



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### **Abstract**

The author's goal to successfully impart a thought through fiction depends largely on the synergetic relationship between narrative techniques and other literary elements. This paper explores the synergic alliance between the authors' choice of methods or literary devices to reveal the audience how characters and themes affecting them cannot be disconnected. The study hinges on a qualitative document analysis involving Ngugi's novel *A Grain of Wheat*. Discussion was guided by three study questions concerning the place that narrative techniques hold among the fictional generic elements; the use of dramatic irony in *A Grain of Wheat*; and what can be learnt from that situation. Analysis revealed that dramatic irony is used in that novel to show the reader that people could be cautious to decide on heroes and traitors before the story conflict resolution. It was also confirmed that the interface between elements of literature cannot be doubted.

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## 1 Introduction

Literary generic elements ally among themselves to make up a coherent whole. They are interwoven and it is hard, if not impossible, to distance them altogether. In prose fiction, narrative techniques play an important part in shaping characters and themes affecting them for each (Tianyu, 2021). Novels are no exception and are often time characterized by a wide range of styles including but without limitation to various literary devices like metaphor, symbolism, or the like. In this paper, dramatic irony is discussed as a technique used by novelists for the audience to learn from what happened to fictitious characters which reflect the reality of heroism, sacrifice, and betrayal (Bazimaziki, 2021) through stories particularly when the conflict is resolved.

In fiction, narrative techniques denote literary devices that authors use to convey their feelings or thought. The irony is one of those devices. Literary critics posit that authors use irony to highlight the opposite of what was expected; it is a kind of contrasting a situation to the expected outcome. For instance, Singh (2012), puts it that irony consists of presenting indirectly a contradiction between an action, expression, and the context in which it occurs. This discussion explores the interface between the authors' choice of methods or literary devices to depict themes for his/her audience. The study examines how Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* fits this situation because, in fiction, the author's goal to successfully impart a thought depends largely on the synergetic relationship between narrative techniques and other literary elements (Oatley, 2016; Gerlai, 2002).

### *Scope and aim of the study*

In literature, plot, characters, themes, and narrative techniques are interwoven elements that authors combine to convey a thought, indirectly or directly calling the audience's attention to each of them. In this vein, this discussion is a literary analysis concerned with fictional elements as used by a writer to convey his/her thought (Sy, 2020). The author explores the alliance between narrative techniques, themes, and audience with a particular focus on dramatic irony in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. The wish to explore the synergic interface between characters, themes, and narrative techniques in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* sprang from contemporary society's manners to ape historical heroes and blame traitors generally led by the thirst and wickedness to sell their next doors or peers' lives (Price et al., 2018). Thus, the characters connected with the theme of betrayal have been the foci in this discussion.

### *Research questions*

Research gurus believe that formulating research questions is a fundamental and essential step in a research journey (Walliman, 2010; de Souza et al., 2016) as they guide the study. In this line, this essay is inherently guided by three questions that follow:

- What is the place that narrative techniques hold among the fictional generic elements?
- How does Ngugi wa Thiong'o reveal his characters through dramatic irony in *A Grain of Wheat*?
- What could the audience learn from this situation?

### *Conceptual frame: basic literary elements*

Generally, any form of literature be it prose, poetry, or drama form; is built up by elements that connect among themselves, working together to make a whole. These are denoted as literary elements making a pool from which the authors draw to express their views of human beings and the world in which they live. Thus each of these elements holds an important part for the authors to reach their goals. Below is a figure showing the interconnectedness between four of these tools; they need one fitting the need of another and vice versa.

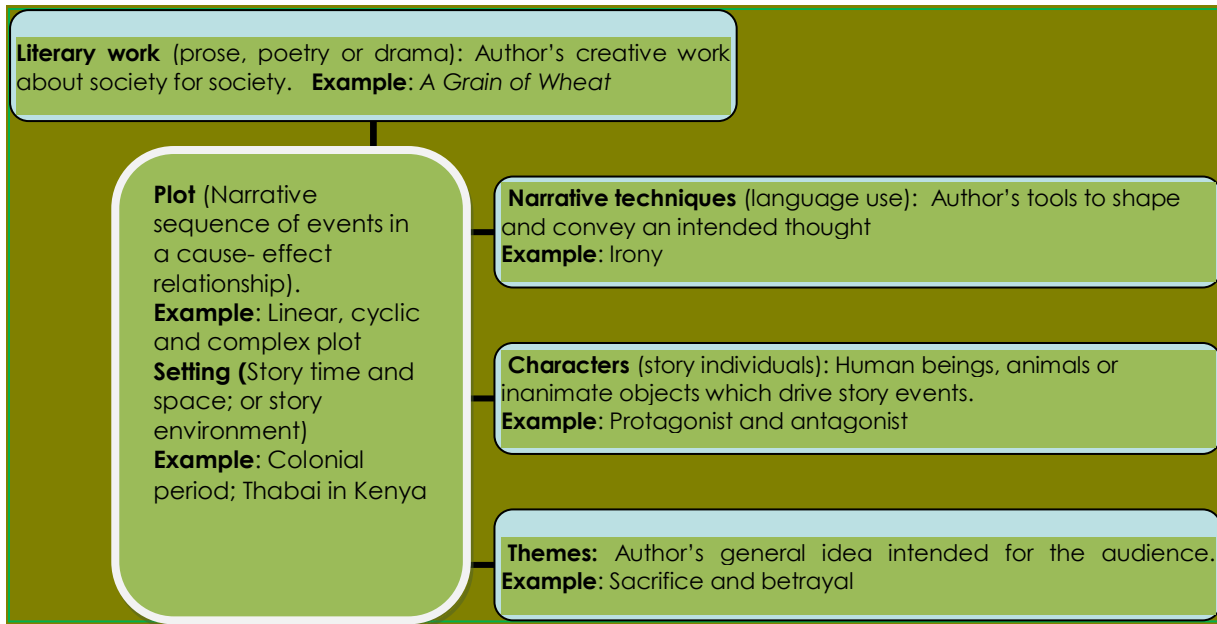


Figure 1. The connection between five main literary elements

The above figure shows the elements of literature. The author's literary work involves time and space or environment (setting). The author hinges on a story on arranged events in a cause-effect relationship (plot). The latter is driven by the actions of individuals described in a story (characters), and these events lead the author to convey successfully his/her general idea (theme). For all of these elements to be inclusive, the author's use of language (narrative techniques) plays a significant part. Thus, any of these five basic elements of literature is worth considering for a work of art. They need to be connected as a means to an end.

## 2 Materials and Methods

Research methodology is concerned with principles, rules, and procedures to be used in research (Walliman, 2010). This study is no exception as driven by the qualitative method and synergetic approach. It used descriptive literary analysis and discussion inherently centered on one narrative technique used to describe characters and themes affecting them. The synergy between those elements is described in the light of the writer's intended goal to teach society through prose fiction. Indeed, document analysis was used as the main method of data collection. Ngugi's novel *A Grain of Wheat* was the primary source seconded by related critical studies to strengthen the discussion. The interest in that literary work is justified not only by the techniques used in it but also by its critical appreciation in the literary area of contention. Singh (2012), cemented this discussion as his paper shed light on irony framing the belief that dramatic irony is concerned with the contrast between what the character thinks to be true and what we (the reader) know to be true.

## 3 Results and Discussions

One of the aims of using narrative techniques, literary devices, in particular, is to deliberately stir the readers' emotions and critical thinking (Ika Kana Trisnawati et al., 2016). Authors of fiction have their ways to shape and convey a thought to their audience. These are called narrative techniques described in Makwana (2021), as technical tools through which stories are told. Among which irony [dramatic irony in particular] is identified in Singh (2012), as used mostly actually or ostensibly stated. Indeed, this is done through plot development because characters and plots must fit each other, especially in contemporary fictional prose. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the author presents characters affected by events in a cause-effect relationship. In Fadhel (2015), Ngugi's characters in *A Grain of Wheat*

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are described as violent rebels fighting for freedom as a result of a long period of suffering, oppression, and violence done by the colonizer over the natives (Catani & Mesulam, 2008). Three characters are more concerned than the rest; as they are weaving around the event of betrayal in the story, a theme described through dramatic irony which, according to Singh (2012), contrasts between what the character thinks to be true and what we (the reader) know to be true. In that situation, the audiences are sometimes placed in the position of knowing more than what one character knows. As such, readers read to discover characters' reactions when they learn the truth of the situation simply because they (readers) know something the character does not. According to Ika Kana Trisnawati et al. (2016), the use of irony in literature makes readers realize the character's action or expectation is inappropriate to the actuality of the story. Relatedly, Abrahams & Harpham (2009), discuss dramatic irony in literature as:

A situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant; in that situation, the literary character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in-store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that the character intends.

Similar to the above situation, three characters are affected by dramatic irony in *A Grain of Wheat*. These are Kihika, Mugo, and Karanja whom the public is talking about as regard betrayal. Initially, Kihika, the face of the Mau Mau resistance and freedom, the "Black Moses" (Fadhel, 2015), is calling for a freedom fight (Ngugi, 1967). Joined by a handful of fighters, they now achieved a lot of successes including the captured Mahee that is in their hand, thus a tremendous victory over the colonizer. However, it followed that a cost was put over his head (Ngugi, 1967), as the only remaining strategy for the colonizer to win the battle.

Kihika is sold by one of his colleague fighters, thus a betrayal which is dramatically depicted by the author, involving three sides namely Kihika who is betrayed [referred to as the Jesus in the Bible], Karanja the suspected betrayer by the public, and Mugo the true betrayer [the latter taken as Judas in the Holy Bible]. The latter is by and large depicted as an ironic character (Koehler, & Gershoff, 2003). Indeed, designed as the speaker at the occasion of "Uhuru" celebration (Ngugi, 193), a task he could not fathom based on his achievements all along the journey to freedom, he conversely thought he was called to repent, to plead guilty as a traitor to Kihika. He now made it (Ngugi, 1967), and it was a ripe time for the public to know all about the one who sold Kihika's life. It is a dramatic irony that reflects the author's genius to attract readers' attention.

Taken together, the above discussion reflects how Ngugi revealed his characters, through dramatic irony in *A Grain of Wheat*. Besides that situation, it is worth turning to the third research question concerned with what the audience could learn from what happened to those characters revealed ironically and dramatically (Kay & LeSage, 2009; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Indeed, readers will draw much attention to heroism and its contrast. Because heroism in fictional stories is associated with unequalled human qualities of selfless and sacrifice (Bazimaziki, 2021), it is also connected with human weaknesses of betrayal faced by the hero in one way or another. Betrayal is inevitably linked with the protagonist's acceptance of the call to fulfill his mission along his quest, his hazardous and difficult journey to freedom (Aimone & Houser, 2013). Second, one will know that they could not decide hastily. Rather, much attention could be paid so as not to decide on heroes and traitors before the story conflict resolution or denouement.

From the public suspicion and misjudgment that Karanja betrayed Kihika, yet it is Mugo who did it, one could learn that "judging a book by its cover" is often time deceptive. Relatedly, the Kihika - Mugo situation conveys the message that the one who betrays so and so is not an outsider. People's betrayers are those that know well the victim (Bazimaziki, 2021) and, in the same token, not everybody has that quality of truth revealing, confessing, or pleading guilty surprisingly as Mugo did it ostensibly. Lastly, the reader(s) will know that a grain of wheat implies that few shall die and many will live since blood must spill for independence to take place (Ngugi, 1967). That is how literature artistically shapes critical events and situations about human lives. The reader will finally perceive Ngugi's genius as an ironical but realistic author.

## 4 Conclusion

In fiction, the effect of rich and beautiful expressions is achieved by shaping events and crises (Ika Kana Trisnawati et al., 2016). Plot, characters, themes and narrative techniques are interwoven elements that help authors achieve such effect. Authors combine those literary elements to convey a thought, indirectly or directly calling the audience's

attention to consider each of them. In this paper, the synergy between those elements has been a central concern. Analysis carried out with particular interest in dramatic irony used in *A Grain of Wheat* reveals that the author used such technique to reveal three characters affected by the theme of betrayal. The discussion concluded that deciding heroes and traitors before the story denouement is like “judging erroneously a book by its cover”. More particularly, analysis reveals the author’s genius. He is ironic while being realistic. In a word, narrative techniques are a means to an end in literature. They are like the author’s tools in his/her work. They hold an invaluable part in fiction. Thus, the synergic relationship between narrative techniques and other literary elements cannot be doubted.

*Conflict of interest statement*

The author declared that she have no competing interest.

*Statement of authorship*

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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