

# STYLE AND LANGUAGE OF REPRESENTATION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S WIZARD OF THE CROW

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## ABSTRACT

Meaning is always produced within and through language which consists of signs organized into various relationships. And representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged through members of a given culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Wizard of the Crow* uses his style of storytelling as a potent and viable means of rejecting and registering his dissatisfaction and discontentment at neo-colonialism, dictatorship and imperialism and employs the language of representation as a module for resistance. Even as many African nations try to toss off colonialism and imperialism, this research posits, that the themes of corruption and ineptitude leadership as contained in the novel are still obtainable in the present-day African political context and are integral to the politics of neo-colonialism. It therefore, argues, that for the fight for an authentic voice and representational governance to be achieved, Africans must eschew corruption and equally realize that the requisite tools for development has nothing to do with geographical location or skin color but rather with the harnessing of the resources both human and natural within the borders of one's country and using those resources effectively to provide essential needed goods and services for the people. It concludes that our language of representation can serve as a tool for resistance, a form of new reality and a module through which people can rediscover and renew themselves.

Keywords: Style, representation, corruption, neocolonialism, imperialism

## INTRODUCTION

Literature has an essentially artistic quality and all art is the expression of life in form of truth and beauty through language. The language of novels is often seen as a medium through which the novelist works. This language as used in literature is an embellishing device working to redefine other elements in fiction or "to provide a kind of separate attraction" (Fowler 1971:24).

Also, literature is the work of men who are especially sensitive to the language of their time and “who use the skills of language to make permanent their visions of life” (Nweze 2012:1). They manipulate language by making it contain a unique series of experience and interpretations. And meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or ‘represent’ the world, enabling us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads. According to Stuart Hall (1997:17), representation is the production of meaning through language. To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our minds or in the senses. To represent also means to symbolize, stand for; to substitute for, or to be a specimen of. It serves as a link between language and concepts which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.

However, a distinguishing feature of literature brings in a word which has been given many interpretations: “imagination.” One can say that the meaning is not confined to that of fantasy or even to the creation of characters and episodes which never had a ‘real’ existence. It suggests that “metaphorical imagination is the central epistemic logic that is used to develop and select theoretical representations in relation to a target subject or problem” (Cornelissen 2006:7). Raymond Chapman (1983:63) has also noted that the linguistic utterance which involves imagination has a quality beyond the use of words to convey referential meaning. A work of literature may indeed offer information, and it will probably have meaningful content which can be paraphrased in referential prose. And Ngugi wa Thiong’o like every other literary artist chooses and manipulates language with greater complexity than the average language user can or wishes to exercise. Meanwhile, if this distinctive use of language is recognized, it may be possible to discuss intelligently a writer’s individual style.

Styles are the product of social situation: of a common relationship between language users. Stylistics is thus a part of sociolinguistics – language studied in relation to society. The stylistics of literature, however, elucidates the methods of using language and of combining aesthetic and communicative function in language. And meaning is the practice of representation, constructed through signifying and always produced within language.

Ngugi’s style and language of representation indicates that supernatural, floral, faunal symbols can serve as main vehicles of power. As a critic of the post-independence politics of the new wave of African leaders, his keen interest has always been the lack of socialization of government efforts and the endemic corruption that has strangled several African countries including his home country – Kenya, which had to go through a series of constitutional reforms after the 2008 electoral crisis.

#### Statement of the Problem

Various researchers have viewed stylistics as an aspect of literary study that emphasizes the analysis of various elements of style (such as metaphor and diction). The ancients, however, saw style as the proper adornment of thought. This view prevailed throughout the

Renaissance where devices of style can be catalogued and framed with the help of model sentences and prescribed types of figures suited to the mode of discourse.

However, in this research, the relationships that exist amongst style, language of representation and the individual writer's unique vision of reality are emphasized. No matter how plausible the concept of stylistic embellishment appears, there are difficulties. These difficulties arise because of elaboration of form which inevitably brings about an elaboration of meaning. But unfortunately, these have not been accounted for nor taken into consideration by previous researchers. This research, however, proceeds from analysis of the text and of its composition and structure to the study of language of representation and the identification of the stylistic traits of both the linguistic and literary phenomenon in the novel. In other words, the purpose is to explain the language of representation, the meaning and value of the text and thereby fill the gap which other research works have failed to cover.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the linguistic particularities of the text to understand the anatomy and functions of the language used. The celebrated Socratic phrase 'the examined life' is often invoked to remind us of our need to subject all our behaviors to rational and moral self-scrutiny. Stylistics nails its colors to an analogous slogan, the need for and value of 'examined text'. This study is therefore concerned with excellence of technique and the author's craft in his merger of theme, style and language of representation in the novel under study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design of this work is analytic, interpretative as well as descriptive. A descriptive study describes phenomena that exist. The methodology applied hinges on literary and linguistic style of the author using a constructionist theory of representation. The constructionist approach recognizes the social character of language and emphasizes that meaning is not inherent within an object itself, rather we construct meaning using systems of representation (concepts and signs).

This study, therefore, collects data for analysis of style and language of representation from Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* with the intention of reaching an understanding of meaning and themes of the text which the writer intends to convey. The text is full of satiric events which serve as a pointer to the individual writer's choice of language which he uses to explicate meaning that ultimately reflects his style.

### Language of Representation and Style as a Linguistic Thumbprint

Language consists of signs organized into various relationships. To represent means to symbolize, to substitute for. Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. Concepts are our mental representations of real-world phenomena. They may be constructed from physical, material objects that we can perceive through our senses (e.g. a chair, a flower, a ball, etc.), or they may be abstract things that we cannot directly see, feel, or touch (e.g. love, war, culture, etc.). In our minds, as has been noted by Stuart Hall, we organize, cluster, arrange and classify

different concepts and build complex schemas to describe the relations between them. To Geoffrey Leech, “the interface between linguistic description and interpretation is precisely the sphere of stylistics” (2008:3). He observes that by undertaking a linguistic analysis as part of the interrelation between the two fields of study, we facilitate and anticipate an interpretative synthesis. In stylistics, the linguistic and literary concerns are as inseparably related as are the two sides of a coin or (in the context of linguistics) the formal and functional aspects of textual study. Again, according to Geoffrey Finch in *Linguistic Terms and Concepts* stylistics is concerned with “using the methodology of linguistics to study the concept of ‘style’ in language” (2000:189). He posits that every time we use language, we necessarily adopt a style of some sort; we select from a range of syntactic and lexical possibilities according to the purpose of communication. The stylistics of literature elucidate the methods of using language and of combining aesthetic and communicative functions in language. It also identifies how language becomes a work of art within literature. Since the justification for stylistics is in the application of linguistic methods and tools to literature, it is in its very nature an applied and practical discipline – which we put into practice by addressing the artistry of piece of poetry or prose. “Putting into practice” here simply means applying the methods and insights of stylistics to literary examples and especially to substantial texts and extracts representing various texts and types of literature.

However, the most powerful of all human symbols is language – a system of verbal and sometimes written representations that are culturally specific and convey meaning about the world. Language is an important source of continuity and identity in a culture and a module for representation. The most specific domain of style and in many ways the most valuable starting point for stylistics is the individual text or text extracts.

Traditionally, the Latin dictum *stilus virum arguit*, explains that “the style proclaims the man.” Each writer has a linguistic “thumb print”, an individual combination of linguistic habits which somehow betray(s) him in all that he writes. The style in *Wizard of the Crow* is unique and the theme borders on magical realism with naturalistic settings. The tradition that restricts style to choices of MANNER rather than MATTER, of EXPRESSION rather than CONTENT is regarded as common definition of style which is a ‘way of writing’ or a ‘mode of expression’. This approach may be called ‘DUALIST’ (Leech and Short 2007:13), because it rests on an assumed dualism in language between form and meaning. Again, the distinction between what a writer has to say, and how it is presented to the reader, underlies one of the earliest and most persistent concepts of style: that of style as the ‘dress of thought’. This definition is implicit in Pope’s well-known definition of wit in *An Essay on Criticism*. He says, “True wit is nature to advantage dressed, what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed” (Alexander Pope quoted in Leech and Short 2007:13). This is a metaphor of style as some kind of ‘adornment’ or ‘covering’ of thought or meaning. A converse implication of the ‘dress of thought’ view is that it is possible to write in a style which is the “nadir of plainness and neutrality” (Leech & Short 2007:15)

So, from the above, we could in theory have a manner of writing in which content is presented in its nakedness. In writing, every writer (just like Ngugi) makes choices of expression; it is in these choices, in a particular ‘way of putting things’ that style resides.

Ngugi in *Wizard of the Crow* uses his peculiar style to constructively criticize the post-independence politics of the new wave of African leaders. He blends satire and polemic in his depiction of an African nation at crossroads in the aftermath of White rule. Ngugi's observations from the dawn of independence when the capsule of euphoria burst and evaporated all at once leaving behind a blanket of realities are encapsulated in his works. In that fictional country of Aburiria, we meet the head of state simply known as the Ruler and his cronies – Silver Sikiokuu, (minister of state), Titus Tajirika (a business tycoon become a Ruler's adviser, a minister and an Emperor), Kaniuru (a youth-winger become Minister of Defense), Big Ben Mambo (Minister of Information) and other bootlickers who would sing praises if those praise-songs and appellations will enable them to steal more.

In this set up, affiliations and alliances are capricious and last if dew would drop in dry season. In the ruler's government, positions are given to those who can steal more and those who excelled are made governors and managers of central and national banks, they are put in places where they can siphon more and share with the leader. Those who are hounded and described as enemies of the state are the poor selfless souls whose only crime is that they won't participate in pillage; that they are pure and seek the healing of the souls; people like Nyawira (the limping witch) and Kamiti (the wizard of the crow).

The corruption in the country gets out of hand and to such a level that it becomes abnormal to be moral, to be seen doing the right thing. The ruler rules the country with an iron fist almost since the day the English left. He is both the ruler and the lord of everyone, and nobody tells him that there is limit to his power. He devises a grand plan to carry out a useless and visionless project, "Marching to Heaven" the building of a modern-day Tower of Babel and march all the way to the stars to show the world that Africa can do things the West can't even imagine. All he needs to get it going is to (1) use both whips and carrots to convince the people that this is much more important than nonsense such as democracy, jobs and food. (2) Convince the Global Bank to finance it since Aburiria doesn't have much money of its own.

Furthermore, Ngugi demonstrates his use of satirical magic realism where character representation stretches the limits of conventional realism. He mocks national leadership in Africa and elsewhere through the manipulation of the realistic mode which has also been quite effective in representing political issues in Africa. The novel satirizes the ruler of Aburiria and his attempts to dominate the nation while seeking financial support from western global institutions. Through the wizard's character and Nyawira, both advocates for the people, the novel shows how national and global interests are often inseparable and can be linked to such concerns as eco-criticism and diaspora relationships.

Ngugi uses his style and language of representation to fashion the story into a powerful dazzling mosaic and reveals humanity in all its endlessly surprising complexity. The Aburiria of Ngugi's imagination is representative of many African dictatorships. Its leader is known only as the Ruler and his band of sycophantic and fending ministers govern with a blend of showmanship and brutality. Corruption is rife, the economy nonexistent and the giant building "Marching to Heaven" is intended to shore up the leader's popularity. In the era of globalization all those who have fought for Africa's soul in the past – church, despots and sorcerers are now joined by the Global Bank, on whom the government depends on to

finance its project. Since the end of the cold war, the Ruler, like many third world strong men once useful to first world powers, now finds himself dispensable. His efforts to secure the funding for his world's tallest building project provide the arc of the novel's narrative.

Ngugi's language of representation performs several different functions, and any piece of language is likely to be the result of choices made on different functional levels. As a pluralist, he wants to distinguish various strands of meaning according to the various functions. It is obvious that in linguistic thought, language can perform varied functions or communicative roles. His language of representation has referential and social functions. To this general appreciation of functional variety in language, the pluralist adds the idea that language is intrinsically multifunctional, so that even the simplest utterance conveys more than one kind of meaning.

### **Foregrounding and Style as Deviation**

The creative writer makes use of deviants for stylistic effects. In the syntax of literature, A linguistic utterance involves some tension between the rules of which communication depends on and the freedom which the user's unique situation demands. The deeper the artistic concern with the manner as well as the matter, the greater the tension is likely to become (Chapman 1983:48-49)

Although English has a rigid word-order in some respects, it still allows freedom of change which the native user learns to handle for emphasis. Foregrounding implies "stylistically giving special prominence to part of an utterance" (Chapman 1983: 114). The term is used to describe the kind of deviation which has the function of bringing some items into artistic emphasis so that it stands out from its surroundings. It is helpfully described by Halliday (1978:112) as "prominence that is motivated." This notion is owed to the Prague school of linguistics. In the text under study, we encounter deviant structures. Apart from category rule violation and breach of selection restriction rule as examples of linguistic foregrounding, we also have foregrounding of imagery. Here, there is a prominence of imagery which draws attention to itself. For example, the imagery of a dream world (Elderado) from the following: "There was a bang on the door, Kamiti who had fallen asleep, was tied to his bed of dream by a thousand strands of rainbow colors. Who was waking him in his flower garden?" (2007:94). Here, the author uses this linguistic deviation to foreground the high hopes and wishes of the poor, reflecting this through the character of Kamiti. Kamiti wishes he remains in such dreams lest he wakes up and faces the ugly realities of life in his country.

Another stylistic device is linguistic parallelism. Linguistic parallelism is the use of pattern repetition in literary text for a particular stylistic effect. When Kamiti tried having carnal knowledge of Nyawira, the latter objected on the basis that Kamiti has no condom. And how the writer highlighted the incident can be structurally placed. Again, from the extract, it shows an example of grammatical parallelism, "Do you think pregnancy is the worst that can happen to a woman? Pregnancy is not malignant. Do you know about the virus? Pregnancy is life. The virus means death" (2007:92).

From the last two sentences, a noun clause of the structure + noun + verb phrase ('pregnancy is life') is followed by another clause of like structure ('the virus means death').

### **Language and Mimetic Levels of Representation in Novel**

The contrast between the language of the narrator and the character can be explained by the narrator's ideological commitment to a theory of language use quite different from the language of everyday speech. Again, the language of the character may be educated, standard, dialectical or slangy, but its essential business is to set up and maintain a "relationship of inter subjectivity among the participants" (Akwanya 2004: 215) and secondly express the speaker's character and rhythm" (Frye quoted in Akwanya, 2004).

Furthermore, the doctrine of decorum which was influential through the eighteenth century required that the level of style in a work be appropriate to the social class of the speaker, to the occasion on which it is spoken, and to the dignity of its literary genre. The demotic style is molded on the language, rhythms and associations of ordinary speech. In *Wizard of the Crow*, ordinary speech and dialect are employed to register the citizens' dissatisfaction and discontentment with the visionless leadership of the ruler in the fictitious Aburiria country. The old man that in beckoned to comment on the Ruler's birthday gift deliberately insults him using his vernacular. In his native Swahili language, he addresses the Ruler:

Mtukutu Rahisi means Cheap Excellency. The policeman that has helped the old man to the microphone tells him that the correct phrase is: Mtukufu Rais or Rais Mtukufu. The man coughing and clearing his throat to still himself, calls out into the microphone: Rahisi Mkundu which means Cheap Arsehole. The other policeman whispered in the old man's ear that it is His Holy Mightiness Mtukufu Mtakatifu. This does not help matters because the old man now gesturing to the Ruler says, Mkundu Takatifu meaning His Holy Arsehole. At the mention of "His Holy Arsehole," the multitude that has gathered unwittingly for the birthday celebration break out in hilarious laughter which disrupts the event to the discomfiture of the Ruler, his sycophantic ministers and praise singers.

It can be observed that the old man's language is not just vulgar but has a social character which undoubtedly represents the masses' disposition towards the ruler. While the citizens are wallowing in abject poverty amidst plenty, the Ruler and his sycophants are busy draining the national treasury. The old man uses his dialect to bring to the attention of the Ruler his visionless leadership and the meaninglessness of their project – the building of tower of Babel they call Marching to Heaven. The use of local dialect by the author is for a peculiar stylistic effect that shows that style is the product of sociolinguistics – "the study of language in relation to society" (Hudson quoted in Lyons, 2009:267). And it is interesting in the effect of language upon language speaker groups according to ethnic, social class, or other divisions. From the examples cited so far, we have seen that every style is used for communication within a group with features which are accepted as communicative by members of that group. The grammatical role of the character's language is therefore in terms of the "syntax" of narrative. It is not concerned with projecting one or another attitude toward

language. Ngugi in this novel is ideologically correct in using language in such a way as to reflect confidence in it to represent thought and reality faithfully.

However, the mode of representation is the dominant factor in determining the stylistic level, but the orientation of the sequence is decisive in matters of tone, mood, attitude, and in selecting the words, cadence patterns and stylistic practices a text is to follow. In the analysis of style, myth, romance, and sequences of high mimetic level are presented basically in the same style, the grand style which in classical rhetoric is called *sermosublimis* or *sermo gravis*. At the other extreme is the low style – the *sermoremissus* or *sermo humilis* of farce, satire, and the comedy of manners structured on snobbery and slander. We again have the “mixed style” of realism. In the ironic mode of low mimetic level of representation, probability is much lower, as the focus is the situation of bondage, frustration, or absurdity in which the character finds himself. Ngugi’s novel under study shares the features of grand, mixed and low styles as can be seen in the stylistic mannerisms and methods of the author.

The text equally falls under the category of the second mimetic level of representation according to Frye’s account that pertains to an action in which the central figure is human, and yet capable of functioning at a level outside the limits of natural law. Here nature is in some respect fixed and in some changeable: in which human beings can exercise extraordinary powers. The characters – Kamiti and Nyawira are purely human figures though “better” than the average in their singleness of purpose, invincible courage, and unshakeable belief in the rightness of their cause. All the works involving heroic characters select the elevated style purely by reason of the mode of human action represented.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, the heroic status of the narrative is most dearly defined in the figure of Nyawira leading the fight against an oppressive system of power which the Ruler is upholding, and she becomes the embodiment of the values of freedom and human dignity. It is a vastly unequal struggle, and her victory despite the odds against her and the Wizard of the Crow (Kamiti), is of epic dimensions.

## CONCLUSION

Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* is a furious satire on all sorts of oppression, whether based on political, economic or physical power. Though the text draws much of its mimetic power from the African political experiences, it reveals a universal human condition through the characteristic style of its language. It is apparent throughout the novel that Ngugi reflects the plague of post-colonial societies and the manifestation of inherited colonial heritage.

From the foregoing, this research brings to the fore the related effect of style and language of representation and shows their functional significance for the interpretation of the text and equally relates their literary effects to the linguistic causes. It finally concludes that our language of representation can serve as a tool for resistance, a form of new reality and a module through which people can rediscover and renew themselves.

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