Metatextualities in the Kenyan Swahili novel: A case study reading of Kyallo Wamitila's *Dharau ya Ini*

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Metatextualities in the Kenyan Swahili novel: A case study reading of Kyallo Wamitila's *Dharau ya Ini*
Contemporary Swahili novels transgress the boundaries of the novel text itself. They employ metatextualities of different categories in order to fulfil a variety of functions. In this article, I explore metatextualities in the Kenyan Swahili novel, and provide a case study reading of one of the novels by the prolific and award-winning writer Kyallo Wadi Wamitila. My reading of Wamitila's novel *Dharau ya Ini* (2007) concentrates on metanarration and metareference. I analyse how narration, especially point of view, is used and how it is discussed and reflected upon by the text and in the text itself (metanarration). I also focus on instances of metareference, especially on references to oral literature and to the literary genres of drama and poetry, as part of a work of prose. These analyses are done through a close reading informed by current research on metatextualities, and, in one of the examples, by phonostylistics. This study is led by the following overall objectives: first, it aims to show how Swahili novel writing as an instance of literature in African languages participates in global discourses on, and practices in, literature and the arts. Secondly, in a perspective of East(ern) African literature, it argues that Swahili literature and literary studies provide stimuli to literary theory and practice otherwise still dominated by its Anglophone counterpart in the region (and, of course, beyond). Thirdly, as regards the domain of Swahili literature, it reflects the crucial impact of Kenyan writing since about the turn of the millennium, in a sphere hitherto dominated by writers from Tanzania. **Keywords:** metatextuality, metanarration, metareference, Kenyan literature, Swahili novel, Kyallo Wadi Wamitila.

Introduction

In the field of Swahili literature, the impact of novels by Kenyan writers has increasingly engaged critics since about the beginning of the 2000s (see Bertoncini-Zúbková, "A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed: Ken Walibora's Novel *Kufa Kuzikana*"; Wamitila, *Misingi ya Uchanganuzi wa Fasihi*; Bertoncini-Zúbková *et al*.; Mwangi; Diegner, "The Kenyan Challenge (?): Dis/Continuities in Swahili Novel Writing 50 Years after Independence"; Tchokothe, "Globalectical Swahili literature", "Kiswahili Literature in Crisis"; Wafula; Gromov, "Visions of the Future in the 'New' Swahili Novel", "Regional or Local? On 'Literary Trajectories' in Recent Swahili Writing", "'New' Novel, New Names, New Dimensions"). Once perceived as a "terra incognita" (Wamitila, "Reading the Kenyan Swahili Prose Works: A 'Terra Incognita' in Swahili Literature"), writers like John Habwe, Mwenda Mbatiah, Clara Momanyi, Kyallo Wamitila, Tom Olali, and the late Ken Walibora have led the way in changing this notion by writing novels which served as an incentive to fellow writers and other actors in the field of Swahili-language fictional writing in Kenya. To date, ten Swahili-language novels by Wamitila have been published in a rather short span of fifteen years, from 1999 to 2014. Among them, the postrealist/postmodernist landmark text *Bina-Adamu!* received both praise and criticism for deliberately tying in with the epochal novels *Nagona* and *Mzingile* authored by the late Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi. So far, *Bina-Adamu!* is the text which has received the broadest attention by critics, compared to Wamitila's other texts (see Bertoncini-Zúbková, "Global Village or Global Pillage? K. W. Wamitila's Novel *Bina-Adamu!*"; Gromov, "Post-Modernistic Elements in Recent Swahili Novels"; Khamis; Rettová; Diegner, "Answers to 'Glocalisation' in Swahili Fiction"; Mwangi; Bertoncini-Zúbková *et al*.; Tchokothe, "Globalectical"; Bulaya and Mkumbwa; Mulokozi; Wambui).

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v58i1.9151

DATES:
Submitted: 2 November 2020; Accepted: 12 February 2021; Published: 21 May 2021

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In this article, I will focus on Wamitila's fifth novel *Dharau ya Ini* (Contempt of the Liver; Know Thyself!) which was published in 2007.[1] Written in the context of Wamitila's return to realism and labelled a political novel, I concur with Mikhail Gromov that the novel "goes beyond this definition" (Bertoncini-Zúbková *et al*. 74). He concludes his encyclopaedic review by saying: "The novel proves again the author's innovative approach and might well serve as [a] further 'cornerstone' in the building of Kenyan Swahili writing in the 21st century" (74).

Despite this accomplished summary, my impression is that this text has been under-researched, and I argue that it deserves more critical attention due to its innovative nature. Among other features, this innovative nature lies in the novel's playful use and experimentation on narration, its comments and reasoning about it (meta-narration), as well as in its references to questions of literary genre—on the one hand, to oral literature and the still-postulated dichotomy of the oral versus the written, and on the other hand, to genres other than prose, especially drama and poetry (metareference). Some of the major questions to be tackled in this article are: in which way does the novel play and experiment on narration? To what end does it expose passages of, and references to, genres other than prose, namely drama and poetry? How does the novel deal with the tenaciously antagonist notions of the oral and the written? And what does that mean for a reading of the eponymous metaphor "*Dharau ya Ini*"?

Methodologically, I will rely on "reading closely" (Veit-Wild and Vierke ix, xiv), in this case understood as a close reading with an emphasis on making time for a rather meticulous analysis of a number of direct quotes from the novel. These quotes will be analysed against the backdrop of recent research in literary and cultural studies on metatextuality, especially metanarration and metareference, and, in one selected example, by applying phono-stylistics, a microstylistic approach at the interface of literary studies and linguistics.

Before I lay out the conceptual framework of metatextualities and its main tenets in the next section, I would like to start by quoting the first lines of the novel.

Ngoma ya mtindo mwingine—A dance in another style

The novel begins with an elaborate direct address to the reader. While this feature might first and foremost remind the reader of, and definitely is, a device which refers to, and draws upon, the style of oral narratives, it becomes clear that it serves a variety of metatextual functions.

> *Uanzayo kuisoma sasa ni lele ya ngoma ya* ***Dharau ya Ini****; ngoma inayochezwa kwa mdundo wa riwaya nyingine ya K. W. Wamitila. Na hii msomaji nakwambia, ni ngoma ya mtindo mwingine.* […] *Jiandae. Tulia. Tamakani. Ni ngoma ambayo inakusihi uyatupilie mbali mawazo yote ambayo umekuwa nayo kuihusu riwaya ya Kiswahili popote ulipoyaokoteza mawazo hayo! Mtindo wake. Sura yake. Usimulizi wake. Na uhalisi wa matukio yake.*[2]
>
> What you start reading now is the prelude to the dance **Dharau ya Ini**, a dance which is performed in the rhythm of [yet] another novel by K. W. Wamitila. And this one, reader, I tell you, is a dance in another style. […] Get ready. Relax. Settle down. It is a dance which begs you to discard all the ideas you had before relating to the Swahili novel, wherever you may have picked up these ideas from! Its style. Its form. Its narration. And the authenticity [reality, credibility] of its events. (*Dharau ya Ini* 1, emphasis in original, all translations are mine)[3]

In technical narrative terms, this passage serves as an exposition to the whole novel which can be seen as a representation of a real-life setting when a narrator starts a session of oral storytelling. Beyond this observation, this passage also has several metatextual implications. First and foremost, by talking to the reader in this way, it addresses the expectations of the readers even before they have started reading these very first lines of the novel—and while they are reading it. It does so by providing a kind of suggestive, slightly procacious, prescriptive, agenda-like comment on the text which has only just begun to be read; its nature; and its relation to these expectations of the readers by stressing its unconventional and innovative nature. While some readers might react by thinking "*Ngoja kwanza nianze kuisoma hiyo matini* (Wait first, so that I may start to read this text), and do not tell me what to think about this text before I have read it", others might be intrigued by this grandiose setting of an agenda, and/or they might simply be curious about what to expect from this text.

Yet what is the agenda contained in this direct address to the reader all about? According to the text, it is nothing more and nothing less than presenting a novel which breaks away from the conventional expectations towards the genre of the novel, concerning "[i]ts style. Its form. Its narration. And the authenticity [reality, credibility] of its events" (*Dharau* 1). Whether this comment and suggestive analysis of the text—by the text itself—

ISSN: 0041-476X E-SSN: 2309-9070

will prove to be adequate or not, is not a major point in my analysis of metatextualities in *Dharau ya Ini*. However, by discussing a variety of examples of metatextualities in the novel, I will convey that it provides the readers with food for thought concerning the paradigms of reading—in both senses of consuming, enjoying, and of interpreting, criticising—Swahili literature.

Metatextualities: Terminology and usage

As a conceptual and terminological framework, I rely on a broad understanding of metatextualities as an umbrella term for metafiction (see Wolf, "Metafiktion"; "Metatext und Metatextualität"), metanarration (see Neumann and Nünning), and metareference (see Wolf, "Metareference across Media").[4] I will concentrate on the latter two, mainly because the theoretical reasoning behind them is more recent and, therefore, they have not been focused upon as much as the more common and rather heterogeneous category of metafiction.[5]

Metanarration, or metanarrative commentary, is defined as "the narrator's reflections on the act or process of narrating" (Neumann and Nünning 1). Using metanarration, writers can highlight playfulness, self-explanation, or irony. In this article, rather than engaging in an in-depth discussion of different types and functions of metanarration, as suggested by Monika Fludernik and Ansgar Nünning (see Fludernik; Nünning), I will specifically deal with metanarrative commentaries on point of view, and on questions of genre. As regards the latter, metanarrative commentaries tend to overlap with metareference.

The category of metareference denotes references to broader subjects, other disciplines, and/or other media; it looks at instances of "self-reference produced by signs or sign configurations which are (felt to be) [sic] located on a logically higher level, a 'metalevel,' within an artefact or performance" (Wolf, "Metareference" 31). In this study, I concentrate on metareferences to literature itself, and in particular, to oral literature, and to genres other than prose. How are these categories used, and to what end? How do they contribute to the overall agenda of the novel?

Playful reference and reverence to *fasihi simulizi*

> *Jiandae vyovyote iwavyo vyema kwako. Mezani. Darasani. Garini. Maktabani. Au ofisini, kama unayo. Popote.* [...] *Umemaliza kujiweka sawa? Ngoma imeanza. Paukwa ...*[6]
>
> Prepare yourself in whatever way is pleasant for you. At the table. In class. In the car. In the library. Or in the office, if you have one. Wherever [you are]. [...] Are you done with setting yourself well? The dance has started. Paukwa ... (*Dharau* 2)

Instead of simply using narrative devices from *fasihi simulizi* (oral literature), the text provides reference and pays reverence to this tradition in a playful manner. By doing so, the text does corroborate the common understanding of postmodern literature as, among many other features, consciously dwelling upon oral literature but adopting, adapting, and transforming it in a playful act of experimentation. The agenda does not consist in emancipation from oral literature, in the sense of a sharp demarcation from supposedly outdated modes of art—even though such a misconception, or at least partial expectation, seems to persist in the traditional way of "thinking literature" along demarcated lines. It is the sheer opposite: it pays reverence to oral literature, pleads for a re-assessment of its aesthetics, and strives to make it part and parcel of the stylistic inventory of complex and appealing contemporary writing.

And in which way are narrative devices of *fasihi simulizi* used? A closer examination of this passage reveals several instances of the use of the second person, in personal and possessive pronouns, to directly address the reader. The colloquial and casual tone in which this is done heightens the intimacy of the address. Its directness is further enhanced by the use of the optative form which serves as an imperative, *jiandae* (prepare yourself).[7] The last instance is the personal pronoun 'u' (you) in "*Umemaliza kujiweka sawa*?" (Are you done with setting yourself well?). Its sentence-initial position and the use of the whole phrase without the particle "*je*", commonly used for questions in written Swahili, serve as a stylistic device emphasising the oral character of this enouncement, and highlighting its intimate immediacy. All this culminates in "*Paukwa ...*", which is the first half of the conventional formula "*Paukwa ...*? *Pakawa ...*" used at the beginning of story-telling in the Swahili literary tradition.[8] "*Paukwa*" is usually uttered by the narrator, and the audience is supposed to answer "*Pakawa*". By giving only half of the formula here, and providing the dots, the narrative voice provokes a direct answer by, in this case, the reader of the novel.

ISSN: 0041-476X E-SSN: 2309-9070

This reference and reverence to *fasihi simulizi* serves as a read thread through the novel, with quite a number of hints and allusions (also in chapters 10, 46, and 65), and then culminating in the elaborate epilogue of the novel which is presented as part of the last chapter (*Dharau* 270–8), which I will come back to in the section preceding the conclusion.

Another striking example of inserting *fasihi simulizi* into the text, both explicitly as a term and explicitly as a text passage, is to be found in chapter 35. The readers are told that cadres of the ruling party—the setting of the novel is a country resembling Kenya—argue with a party dissident. This argument manifests itself in a kind of literary battle. The cadres employ verse to which the dissident replies using an oral tale:

> *Viongozi wa Chama na Serikali wakayakanusha maneno ya mwanasiasa huyo kwa mihemko hasa. Wakatumia hata fasihi simulizi kuusisitiza ujumbe wao.*
>
> *Ni sungura aliyekosa zabibu, kasema chungu.*
>
> […]
>
> *Ni komba aliaye kwa sauti usiku msituni, bila ya nzuri sababu.*
>
> *Naye kajibu.*
>
> *Kajibu kwa hiyo hiyo fasihi simulizi.*
>
> *Hapo zamani za kale paliondokea fisi ambaye kwa tamaa kala asali sana* […]
>
> The cadres of the party and the government denied the words of that politician with veritable passion. They even made use of oral literature to stress their message.
>
> It is the hare that failed to get the grapes who claimed they were sour.
>
> […]
>
> It is the bush baby that cries in the forest at night, without a reason, a good one.
>
> And then he answered.
>
> Answered by using oral literature in the very same way.
>
> Once upon a time there was a hyena who greedily ate a lot of honey […] (*Dharau* 131)

The song-like verse alludes to the genre of *methali* (proverbs), whereas the answer is given as a *ngano* (oral tale). In this way, the text makes reference and pays reverence to several classical genres of oral literature: song, verse, proverbs, tales. The chapter is named after the protagonist in the first line of the verse, "the hare that failed to get the grapes". "*Fasihi simulizi*" is explicitly mentioned twice in this text passage. This may first and foremost give the whole passage a didactic ring. However, in the second instance, the deliberate syntactic brevity and combination with an anadiplosis adds laconic irony to it: "And then he answered. Answered by using oral literature in the very same way."

Another notable feature here is the constellation of the literary 'battle', which clearly alludes to the Swahili-literature-specific genre and practice of *Kujibizana*—a competition of "Poetry in Dialogue", to quote the title of Kimani Njogu's seminal study (Njogu; Biersteker). Apart from the conscious reverence to the heritage of *fasihi simulizi*, this text passage exposes generic hybridity and playful experimentation, a general feature of postmodern writing. Here, the text advocates a kind of meta-genre and/or cross-genre style, and exercises this style in an explicit and thorough manner.

Metanarration: Shall 'I' or will 'you'?

Apart from the metatextual commentaries on oral literature, and the relationship between oral literature and contemporary written prose fiction, there are a number of instances in the novel where we can find metanarration, i.e., comments *on* the narration *in* the narration—and *simultaneous to* the narration, or in other words, in, or during, the very moment of narration.

> *Haikuwa mara ya mwanzo kuliona igizo hili ingawa mara nyingi hunijia katika ndoto sio mchana peupe kama ilivyokuwa leo. Nilishangaa ni kwa nini mara hii ndoto hiyo imeamua kuuvuka ulimwengu wa usimulizi; ulimwengu wa 'ni' na kuingia ulimwengu wa 'u'.*
>
> It was not my first time to see this spectacle although it often comes up to me in dreams not in broad daylight as it happened today. I wondered why this time the dream had decided to cross the world of narration; the world of 'I' and to enter the world of 'you'. (*Dharau* 8)

ISSN: 0041-476X E-SSN: 2309-9070

This passage explicitly talks about the different points of view a narrator may opt for. Moreover, it sets the narrative agenda for the whole novel where the narrator experiments with the interchange of first, second, and third person perspectives.

In most parts, the novel switches between the perspectives of the main protagonist Lila and the antagonist Munene. Lila is a young journalist who pairs with her colleague Derby in investigating cases of political corruption. Apart from her professional life, she is in search of answers to the mysterious circumstances surrounding her father's death. Munene is an archetypical patriarch and corrupt businessman with political ambitions who turns out to be the murderer of Lila's father, and is eventually caught up by his guilty conscience. Whereas Lila is a homodiegetic narrator using the first person point of view, the passages focalising on Munene are told in a heterodiegetic manner using the third person point of view. Apart from this interchange of perspectives which takes place on the level of the short chapters, and sometimes inside of chapters, there are several instances of a switch into the second person point of view—apart from the expositional direct address to the reader which was discussed at the beginning of this article.

In chapter one, when Lila's tribulations oscillating between a daylight hallucination and a traumatic nightmare are described—she is haunted by a mysterious menacing man—, she confesses that she cannot go on narrating herself because it is too burdensome and overwhelming:

> *Nilitulia tutwe kama sanamu. Hata sijui kama naweza kueleza kilichokuwa kikionekana kwenye jukwaa ambako mimi mwenyewe nilikuwa mhusika. Siwezi …*
> Ehh naweza kuelewa kwa nini huwezi. […] Wasiwasi mkubwa ukakuingia. Macho huku na kule. Jasho. […] Moyo wako ukakupiga kwa kasi ya ajabu, ni kama unataka kupasua kifua na kutoka nje. Macho yako yalikuwa yamekutoka pima, na macho yako, si unayajua, ni makubwa kwa hiyo unaweza kufikiria mtazamo wenyewe. Mwili wako ukachezacheza kama tete za majini […]
>
> I turned into a pillar of salt. I even don't know whether I can convey what was visible on the stage on which I myself was a character. I can't …
> *Yeees, I can understand why you can't do that.* […] *Great anxiety befell you. A stare here, a stare there. Sweat.* […] *Your heart beats you [sic] with wondrous speed, it is as if it wants to break through your chest and get out. Your eyes wide open, and your eyes, you know them, don't you, they are big, so you can imagine the stare. Your body was trembling like ripples in the water* […] (*Dharau* 6–7, emphasis in original)

When the homodiegetic narrative voice is overwhelmed by the course of events, it admits that it has to stop narrating. Instead of the well-known category of unreliable narration, this instance can be called a case of 'overwhelmed narration'—before it becomes too difficult or impossible, and thus unreliable, to go on with the narration, the narrative voice gives up, and it shares this frankly with the reader. Admitting this kind of (supposed) 'weakness' on the part of the narrative voice serves to enhance both suspense and also empathy on the part of the reader.

Before climaxing in the elliptic and ruptured "*Siwezi …*" (I cannot …), the narrative voice admits '(self-) unsure narration'—"*sijui kama naweza*" (I do not know whether I can)—and thus questions its own capacity. Furthermore, the use of the literary *termini technici* "*jukwaa*" (stage) and "*mhusika*" deserves attention. *Jukwaa* provides a metareference to the genre of drama, and visualises what is happening on the level of the narrative process during the moment of narration. It can be read as the narrative voice being overwhelmed by what happens, in the sense that it can still see what is happening, but realises that it gradually loses its capability to say, to narrate, what is happening. Whereas the *visual* sense of the narrative voice is still intact, its *narrative* capacity vanishes. In this sense, the use of *jukwaa* also contributes to a sensualisation of narration and it can be read as a metanarrative comment on the sensual aspect of narration. As a term used for literary texts of different genres, "*mhusika*" (character, protagonist) is not limited to drama, and therefore serves as a metareference to literature in general, in the sense of making explicit that this text is a *literary* text. At the same time, it serves as a metanarrative comment as it identifies the narrative voice as what it is, in a narratological sense: a character in the novel. As regards one of the main functions of metatextualities, i.e. enhancing distance versus reducing distance to the reader (Nünning 38), I read this passage as gauging distance in both directions of this bipolar category: while "*jukwaa*" and "*mhusika*" enhance distance, as explicit markers of the text as a literary and thus constructed artefact, "*sijui*" and "*siwezi …*" reduce the distance by inviting the reader to sense the dilemma the narrative voice experiences, to identify with these intensive emotions about losing one's capacity to cope with a situation, at least by being able to continue to give an account of it.

Last but not least, this passage contains some sort of peculiar humour when it says "[…] *na macho yako, si unayajua, ni makubwa kwa hiyo unaweza kufikiria mtazamo wenyewe*" (*Dharau* 7). Of course, one usually knows how one's eyes look like, but the newly 'appointed' narrative voice furnishes its comment with the rhetoric question "*si unayajua*?" (you know them, don't you?). By doing so, the comment asks the character, also in its capacity of the (former) narrative voice, to distance herself from herself, and then imagine herself according to her experience. The laconic way of reminding the character of her big eyes, and what stare they produce, creates an ironic distance. Finally, the use of "*mtazamo*" here, in my reading, is not a coincidence. Whereas it translates as "stare" here, it also means "perspective", and it is the *terminus technicus* in Swahili-language literary studies for "point of view", as Wamitila himself, in his capacity as a scholar, has listed in his seminal dictionary of literary terms and theory *Kamusi ya Fasih: Istilahi na Nadharia* (144–5, 369). Read along these lines, "*mtazamo*" only seems to merely serve a casual description of the situation the character finds themself in; the use of this word also serves as a metanarrative comment of one of the main points of the aesthetic agenda of the whole novel: to experiment on narration by using different points of view in one and the same novel.

In another instance, the *tempus*/time of narration and its conventions are discussed when one protagonist says:

> […] *husimulia kwa wakati uliopo na kuvunja kaida zote tulizofundishwa chuoni za usimulizi wa matukio yaliyopita. Labda maisha yetu, ngano yetu si ya jana bali ni ya leo; labda tunapaswa kuangalia wakati upya.*
>
> […] he is used to narrate in the present tense and to violate all the rules of narrating events in the past we have been taught in college. Perhaps our life, our storytelling is not one of yesterday, but of today; perhaps we should perceive time in a new manner. (*Dharau* 104)

This metanarrational comment implicitly calls for a 'liberalisation' of conventional narratological rules, but it does not stop there. In the second sentence, it passes over into reasoning about the concept of time. It questions conventional linear concepts of time and thus touches on the philosophical notion of time. And at the same time, it relates this reasoning to the question of genre, advocating a re-assessment and re-evaluation of oral literature, in line with the overall agenda of the novel.

Metareferences to prose, drama, and poetry

As has been shown above, metareferences to oral literature are a frequent feature of this novel, and serve the overall agenda of the novel to re-valorise oral literature, and to perceive it anew. Apart from the agenda of questioning not only the dividing line between the oral and the written, but also the conventional value judgment that goes along with it, the novel also makes reference to the genres of poetry, drama, and prose. A reference to drama was already evident in one of the examples above, where *jukwaa* (stage) was used by the narrative voice-cum-character to describe what happened to it/her (*Dharau* 6). In chapter 57, *pazia la igizo la tanzia* (the curtain of a tragic performance/tragedy) and *onyesho* (scene) are used to describe how Munene's second wife Katumbi hopes to cut off all relations with him, in vain, after they have split up (*Dharau* 197).

Apart from inserting key terms from the genre of drama here and there, one instance of radical formal inter-genre use—which also has its metatextual implications—is to be found in chapter 26 when one of Munene's nightmarish dreams is narrated. This dream is narrated with a focalisation on Munene, but when a mysterious giant 'S' (which may allude to the biblical giant Samson, and stand for '*sauti*', [inner] voice) appears, they start an almost *Waiting for Godot*-like dialogue. This dialogue is rendered following the conventions of a play:

ISSN: 0041-476X E-SSN: 2309-9070

M: […] *wewe ni nani?*
S: *Shujaa anashindwaje kunielewa mimi?*
M: *Wewe ni yule mzee anayeniandama kila siku?*
S: *Mimi ni mzee?*
M: *Ehhh …!*
S: *Ehhh … ehhh … ehhh (kicheko kiliendelea kwa muda kisha) … unajijua wewe?*
M: *Ehh!*
S: *Basi mimi ni wewe … mimi ni KIVULI chako!*[9]

M: […] who are you?
S: A hero [like you] fails to recognise me?
M: Are you that old man who runs after me every day?
S: Am I an old man?
M: Oh yes …!
S: Oh yes … Oh yes … Oh yes (ongoing laughter for a while, then) … do you know thyself?
M: Yes!
S: Well then, I am you … I am your SHADOW! (*Dharau* 102)

The insertion of a dialogue presented in this way serves as a metareference to the genre of drama. The implicit metanarrational character of such a dialogue is to emphasise that the conversation at hand is best represented through a change of genre, from prose to drama, which increases its scenographical effect, makes the text livelier, and at the same time gives it a comical ring. In line with the characteristics of postmodern writing, it exposes generic hybridity and (celebratory) playfulness.

This kind of insertion of drama texts into the generic frame of prose narration is a feature which is also used in Wamitila's subsequent novel *Unaitwa Nani*? (2008) when in the first two of three frame stories unnamed patients, unable to speak themselves, wake up in a hospital bed and have to listen to the mocking conversation of doctors and nurses about them (Wamitila, *Unaitwa Nani*? 2–38, 118–44).[10]

More frequent than using and presenting dialogues in the way it is done in the genre of drama are insertions of poetry into the prose which constitute the frame and the matrix of the text. Apart from a variety of other examples (*Dharau* 186, 218, 229, 259), the following one has been chosen for analysis for the way it is embedded into the prose and the structure of the respective chapter on the one hand, and for its phonostylistics on the other. The context is the feud between Munene and his brother Keli. Even after murdering Keli—something which is unambiguously revealed only at the end of the novel—Munene leaves no stone unturned to make the life of his late brother's family miserable. In chapter 52, Keli's widow Mumbe finds out that her entire harvest has been burnt by unknown bandits.

Moyoni hakuhitaji kuelezwa aliyehusika; aliweza kuhisi na hata katika akili yake aliweza kumsawiri akilipanga hili: Munene. Lakini kwa nini? *Alishangaa ni kwa nini*

kiangazi cha dhiki
na dhiki za mkikimkiki
mwili wake zinauhiliki,
na kuufyonza utomvu uliobaki …
Kwa nini? Kwa nini? Kwa nini?

In her heart, she did not need to be explained who was the one involved; she could sense it and in her mind she could also imagine him and compose a word: Munene. *But why*? She was astonished why [this]

dry season of distress
distress and pressure
her body they destroy
and suck the sap left over …
Why? *Why*? *Why*? (*Dharau* 184, emphasis in original)

The conventional prose narration with the interference of the italicised *Kwa nini*? (Why?) switches into a short poem while the sentence seems to be continued, and the switch is marked by a new and indented paragraph. The poem is marked by the end rhyme '-ki', and its phonostylistics feature further repetitions of the 'ki' sound

and combinations of consonants (C) with 'i', following the 'C-i-C-i' and the 'C-i-C-i-C-i-C-i' sound patterns. These sounds are inspired by the key word and concept of *dhiki* (distress). The repetitive 'i' sound can be read as a representation of the painful monotony of distress, whereas the voiceless, 'hard' 'k' sound can be read as a representation of the hardship of distress. As a climax—to the short poem, and to the whole chapter—these very same sounds 'i' and 'k' also feature in the question *Kwa nini*? (Why?), which is repeated thrice and taken up from the italicised insertion into the preceding prose passage. A few lines earlier in the text, Mumbe's agony, her "dry season of distress", had already led her to say:

> *Jamani tumewakosa binadamu nini? Kwa nini? Kwa … K …?*
> *Kimya. Pumzi ndefu.*
>
> My goodness, what have we done wrong to them? Why? Wh … W…?
> Silence. A deep breath. (*Dharau* 184)

The question *Kwa nini*? serves as a heading to the whole passage and is therefore repeated at the end of the poem and the chapter. The way the voiceless 'k' sound is represented in the quest for a reason may be also read as the hardship, or the impossibility, of finding an answer—the "K …" seems to be stuck in Mumbe's throat—an answer to why Munene continues his inexorable cruelty against his brother's family even after murdering him.

The way this poem is embedded into the text, and how it represents the dire straits that the character finds herself in, can be read as a metareference to the peculiar and unique potential of the genre of poetry. The text suggests that a prose narration which aims at gauging its potential to enhance emotional intimacy and immediacy has no choice other than switching the genre and practicing this other genre in a sophisticated manner, in this case by exploring the potential of phonostylistics in a poem.

Another remarkable example to be mentioned in this section is the insertion of a drama text combined with a poem in the form of a song in chapter 66 (244–5), which cannot be discussed here in the interest of space.

And the *ngoma* ends …

The elaborate epilogue of the novel is presented as part of the last chapter (*Dharau* 270–8). It starts with a direct address to the reader:

> *Hukukata tamaa ya kuendelea kusoma? Umesoma mpaka ukafika huku? Ahh, vizuri sana. Hongera hata!*
>
> You didn't give up on reading? You've continued to read until you got here? Ahh, very good. Congrats, even! (*Dharau* 270)

In what follows, the narrative voice—which calls itself 'I'—addresses the reader and states that it likes to counteract the valid reproach that it did not tell a story which it had promised to tell earlier on. In a ten-line address, it calls upon the reader to get ready for what is going to be told, in a way well familiar from the exposition or prologue of the novel.

> *Hii labda ni njia nzuri ya kumalizia riwaya hii. Kaa tayari. Hii ni ngoma muhimu ambayo inapaswa kuiacha mirindimo yake katika masikio yako;* […]
> *Uko tayari? Jiandae vyovyote iwavyo vizuri kwako. Kitini. Darasani. Usishangae. Haya.*
> *Hadithi … Hadithi … Hadithi njoo!*[11]
>
> This is perhaps a good way of ending this novel. Get ready. This is a significant dance that should leave its thundering sounds in your ears; […]
> Are you ready? Prepare yourself in any way that may be well for you. On a chair. In class. Don't marvel. Ok, fine.
> Hadithi … Hadithi … Hadithi njoo! (*Dharau* 271)

The second passage recalls, in parts word-for-word, the direct address to the reader in the prologue of the novel (*Dharau* 2), starting with the (polite) imperative of *jiandae* (prepare yourself), followed by where the reader might perhaps find himself while reading this. The places where this novel might have been read are reduced from four to two. The fact that *darasani* (in class) is the only reiterated '*locus legendi*' can be read as a self-conscious metatextual comment which indicates that this novel, due to its complexity—and also, by that time, rather unusual length—is most likely to be read *in class*. Apart from this self-location of the novel text as regards (the limits, the

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nature of) its readership, this remark can also be read as an ironic sigh, commenting on the fact that complex novels have to cope with these limitations (though perhaps, they might deserve broader readership).

The ironic ring of this exposition to the epilogue becomes more obvious in the first passage when the narrative voice incredulously asks, "you didn't give up on reading?" and even congratulates the reader for their assiduity. As explicated before, the text metatextually comments on its length and complexity, and demonstrates that it is well aware of how laborious the reading of such a text can be.

Coming back to the parallelism with the prologue, the second passage, instead of *Paukwa*, culminates in the formula "*Hadithi … Hadithi … Hadithi njoo!*" (literally, "Tale … Tale … Tale, come [to be told]!") again in reference and reverence to the art of oral storytelling. And the narrative voice is true to its word: the tale follows as promised. It tells the story of colonial and postcolonial Kenya in an allegorical manner, and plays on the onomastics and onomastic connotations of the word 'Kenya' between 'self-sufficiency' (*kinaa*), 'disgust' (*kinyaa*), and 'to smile' (*-kenyaa*). Another metareference to literature and, in this case literary terms, is that the word '*kinaya*', in its understanding as a variant of '*kinaa*', also means 'irony' as a literary device.[12] In this sense, the 'irony' of Kenya's history could be its long journey from 'self-sufficiency' over 'disgust' into the longed-for future as a land of 'smile'.

Finally, in the concluding section of the epilogue, the narrative voice openly takes the role of an elder providing his grandchildren with his *nasaha*, advice and teachings:

> *Wajukuu zangu hii ni ngano ambayo mnapaswa kuipokezana* [sic] *kama chambi.* […] *Chanukeni. Gutukeni.*[13]
>
> My grandchildren, this is a tale which you should pass on to each other like partners in a dance. […] Thrive. Awaken. (*Dharau* 278)

What follows is a series of juxtaposed *methali* (proverbs) before the epilogue commences its last paragraph by reinforcing and explicating its agenda for a reassessment of *fasihi simulizi* (oral literature):

> *Fasihi simulizi ndiyo yenye uhai; ndiyo tunayoishi; hiyo nyingine yenu imekufa au labda inaweza kuhuishwa na hii iliyo hai, na kama mgonjwa aliyeishiwa na damu, ikapewa uhai mwingine!*[14]
>
> Oral literature is the one which is lively; it is what we are experiencing; that other one of yours is dead, or perhaps can be revived by the lively one, and, like a patient who has run out of blood, be given a new life! (*Dharau* 278)

This passage declares that conventional written literature "is dead", and emphatically reiterates the plea for oral literature as a key to give new impulses to contemporary written literature. On yet another level of metatextual commentary, it highlights the potential of oral literature as an integral part of experimentalism. With this plea for the breaching of genre boundaries and playfulness, it stresses the role of oral literature in postmodernist literature, on the one hand. On the other hand, it shows that contemporary writing which consciously makes use of, and plays on, the richness of oral literature can serve to question global-northern-centred notions of what postmodernism in literature is.

In the end, this agenda leads the text into unveiling a reading of its central metaphor *dharau ya ini* which is contained in the proverb "*Mdharau ini humsonga kooni*" (Who despises the liver will have it stuck in their throat). Besides explicitly referring to Prometheus's fate of being punished by helplessly witnessing how an eagle comes every day and devours parts of his liver while he is tied to a giant rock (*Dharau* 2) in an instance of classical intertextuality, this metaphor deserves attention beyond its reference to Greek mythology.

'*Ini*' (the liver)—a slick and slippery organ which is not easy to take and keep hold of, an inner organ found in human beings, hidden, unrecognised, undervalued, despised—becomes a metaphor of cultural and literary identity. "Don't despise your inner self, your culture(s), your literature(s), and its rich stock in oral literature, for what it can contribute to world literature", the text suggests, which has led me to propose to shunt the literal translation of this central metaphor and title of the whole novel in favour of "Know Thyself!". In my reading, the implicit call "*usidharau ini*" (don't contemn/despise the liver) calls for the creation of an awareness of the richness and possibilities contained in the 'heritage'—*and* contemporaneity—of oral literature. In this line of thought, we can also refer back to the 'qualities' of the liver illustrated by Prometheus's fate: though being eaten each and every day by the eagle, it regenerates itself each and every night, time and time again. Even when oral literature is under threat, it is regenerating itself every day, it is vital, it cannot be overcome, it is endless, timeless. Creating such an awareness may enable writers, readers, critics, and all other agents in the literary field/s, to ponder their perception of the

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oral and the written, and of contemporary Swahili literature and its ambitious process of negotiating its trends and tendencies between the poles of conventional(ised) writing and innovative experimentation.

Conclusion

This reading of Wamitila's fifth novel *Dharau ya Ini* has shown that metatextualities are a major feature of this text. A closer analysis of these metatextualities with a focus on metanarration and metareference has disclosed that the novel's main agenda is twofold. The first is experimentation. It experiments on different aspects of narration, in particular on narrative point of view, and it experiments on the insertion of genres other than prose. By combining different points of view, it experiments on narration in a playful manner hitherto unwitnessed in contemporary Swahili literature. However, the text does not content itself with experimentation alone; it also *comments on* it and even seems to *discuss* it, as an integral part of the text. This is where *meta*narration comes in.

In my reading, the text is a conscious invitation to the readers to *reflect upon* narration, and especially on point of view, in this case. Furthermore, the text experiments on questions of genre. With remarkable ease, and again, in a playful manner, it inserts drama and poetry parts into the flow of the matrix text which is prose. Apart from its nature of applying generic intertextuality to the text, I argue to also read this kind of experimentation on a *meta*level for it seems to gauge which genre is suitable to convey which moment, which situation, which sentiment during the process of narration. Though implicitly, this makes it also part of metanarration. At the same time, I read it as a metareference to these genres other than prose which goes beyond the more immediate aspects of narration, of the narrative process in this very moment. As a metareference, it serves to reassess the potential of drama and poetry elements in prose, and questions the conventional boundaries between these genres.

This questioning of genre boundaries goes hand-in-hand with what I read as the second agenda of the novel: its elaborate plea for a fundamental reassessment of oral literature. The novel text suggests that the reassessment that has already taken place, by acknowledging the significant role oral literature plays in contemporary writing—be it as part of magical realism, or as part of postmodernist writing—is not sufficient. It argues that conventional contemporary writing has reached an impasse, and that oral literature is key to renew it, to provide major incentives to it in order to keep it thriving. In a sense, it seems to turn the stigmatised perception of oral literature upside down, or to turn it around: instead of (only, or mainly) asking for more respect and acknowledgement of its merits in the past—and by means of interrogating linear concepts of time—the text holds that oral literature is past, present, and future of ambitious contemporary writing.

But what does this reasoning mean for Swahili literature, in concrete terms? Here, the reading of the eponymous metaphor "*dharau ya ini*" comes in. In my reading and transposition, "Know Thyself!" is both a call for decolonising one's (literary) mind, and a call for a self-conscious and self-confident use of (Eastern) African oral literature. Be it in the form of adoption, adaption, and/or transformation, oral literature is conceived of as being key to any current trends in ambitious contemporary Swahili writing. While advocating this approach contained in a metaphor, concerning its structure, the text itself is quite clear in commenting on itself as a whole, and thus locating itself in the context of this agenda when it says: "*ukakumbuka vile visa vya fasihi simulizi; vyenye muundo sawa tu na riwaya hii*" (then you remembered those stories from oral literature; having the very same structure as this novel) (*Dharau* 7).[15]

To conclude, this "reading closely" of *Dharau ya Ini* with a focus on metanarration and metareference holds that the novel has a twofold agenda which consists of experimentation on narration on the one hand, and a re-assessment of oral literature on the other. In my view, the study at hand corroborates Gromov's dictum of *Dharau ya Ini* being a "cornerstone" (qtd in Bertoncini-Zúbková *et al*. 74), if not a milestone, of Kenyan Swahili novel writing.

Notes

1. The novel has not been translated yet. "Contempt of the Liver" as a translation of the title has been proposed by Gromov (see Bertoncini-Zúbková *et al*. 74). My reading and transposition of the title to "Know Thyself!" will be explicated in the section preceding the conclusion.
2. The italics here and elsewhere distinguishes the Swahili text from English. Though it cannot be shown here, the original passage is printed in italics indeed, which distinguishes it from the main parts of the text.
3. A note on translation: I deliberately apply an approach to literary translation which is open to more unconventional wordings, word order, sounds, and further features which may arise. My aim is to create a literary translation which sometimes deliberately deviates from the conventional expectations in the English language in order to convey the specific aesthetics of the Swahili-language original text.

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4. This goes beyond Gérard Genette's notion of metatextuality as one subcategory of transtextuality, which denotes direct and indirect forms of commenting on a text in a text, "the *critical* relationship par excellence" (Genette 4). The Swahili-language terms I have settled on as a suggestion are "*umatinia*" (metatexuality), "*usimulizia*" (metanarration), and "*urejeleleo*" (metareference).
5. In Anglophone literary studies, metafiction seems to frequently serve as an umbrella term for what I call metatextualities (see Wolf, "Metafiktion"). This corresponds to Swahilophone literary studies, where the terms *bunilizipiku/metabunilizi* have been introduced to denote "metafiction" as an umbrella term (Wamitila, *Kamusi* 120, 358; *Uchanganuzi* 412–3).
6. Original italicised.
7. Though *jiandae* has a polite ring resembling the form of the 'polite imperative' (***u****jiandae*), it is the only imperative form to be constructed due to the reflexive pronoun it contains. Therefore, it 'sounds' more polite, but is actually as 'direct' as an imperative form with a reflexive verb can be.
8. It is most commonly translated as "Once upon a time …", but it actually corresponds to something like "Wasn't there something?" "(Once upon a time) there was …"/"There *was* something!"
9. Original italicised.
10. For a discussion of these passages see Diegner ("Leaving Parched Gardens and Discussing Narration with the Reader. Metatextualities in the Contemporary Swahili Novel" 34–7) and Diegner ("Postrealist, Postmodernist, Postnation? The Swahili Novel 1987–2010" 129–31).
11. Original italicised.
12. The onomastic reasoning suggested in the text deserves some more attention. The verb '*-kenyaa*' is constructed as a variant of '*-kenua*' which is explained as a synonym to '*-tabasamu*'. However, '*-kenua*' is more commonly lexicalised as 'to show one's teeth', and/in the sense of 'to smile/look at someone. contemptuously' (see *KKK* 411; *KKF* 151; *KKS* 205; *KKKiing* 213; Mohamed 299 which give both meanings; for the codes of the consulted *kamusi* (dictionaries), like for instance *KKS*, see the works cited section). The words '*kinaa*' and '*kinaya*' are not given as variants to each other in several sources. Apart from '(literary) irony', '*kinaya*' means "arrogance, pride"; "satiation"; "joke, mockery"; "match, equivalent"; and "pattern, model" (Mohamed 333; *KKKiing* 229).
13. Original italicised.
14. Original italicised.
15. Original italicised.

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