Kente: Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts
Online ISSN: 2579-0285
https://doi.org/10.47963/jla.v1i1.1842

Kente

Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts

An Open Access Journal
Online ISSN: 2579-0285

https://doi.org/10.47963/jla.v1i1.1842
Volume (1) Number (1) 2025
Page: 49 - 64

Additional Information

Submission guide: https://journal.ucc.edu.gh/index.php/kente/about/submissions

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Archive: https://doi.org/10.47963/jla.v1i1.1842

Okyere-Darko Nsowah, Daniel et al.,
KENTE 2025
Vol. 1 No. 1

EXPLORING NARRATIVE DISTANCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing attention given to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works, especially *Half of a Yellow Sun*, criticisms about the structure and narrative techniques she adopts in this text are still marginal to the amount of critical review and assessment she has received over the years. For a number of reasons, the bulk of criticism on her works has focused on thematic and ideological issues to the neglect of other equally significant concerns like narrative technique. This study, therefore, explores her adroit use of narrative mood in her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* to highlight and intensify the diegesis of this narrative. By employing one of Genette's (1980) narrative categories, mood (perspective and distance) as the analytical framework, the study explores the narrative's particular use of distance and how this distance aids in realising a cohesive and coherent narrative. By examining the characteristics and other particulars of narrative distance, the authors clarify the mechanisms used in the narrative act and identify the methodological choices the author makes in order to present her story. The study contributes to theory by demonstrating the extent to which Genette's theory of narratology is useful to the analysis of the African novel. The study is also significant, in that it has pedagogical implications, as it will, among other things, serve as a material to facilitate the teaching of narrative analysis, especially narrative technique.

KEYWORDS

Adichie, Distance, Genette, Mood, Narratology

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Introduction

Deliberations on mood usually denote a number of ideas, ranging from its language use to its relation to literature. In relation to language, the *Oxford Fowler's Modern English Usage* (2004) explains that mood refers to a term in grammar that "identifies utterances as being statements, expressions of wish, commands, questions, etc. It is a variant of the word *mode*, and has nothing to do with the more familiar word *mood*" (p. 408). It further explains that in English, "moods are expressed using auxiliary verbs 'can', 'may', etc., called MODAL VERBS, or by the SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD" (p. 408). There are three moods in English: the indicative, used for facts, opinions, and questions; the imperative, used for orders or advice; and the subjunctive, used in certain contexts to express wishes, requests, or conditions contrary to facts, as has already been stated. In literature, on the other hand, mood is used synonymously with "atmosphere" to refer to a literary element that induces certain feelings or sensations in a reader through words and imagery (Murfin & Ray, 1998). Generally, it helps in creating an atmosphere in a literary work by means of setting, theme, diction, and tone. It also evokes various emotional responses in readers and thus ensures their emotional attachment to the literary work they read.

Aside from these ascriptions to mood, there is also another narratological (related to narrative) sense attached to it, which has a metaphoric linguistic implication. According to Genette (1980),

> If the grammatical category of tense clearly applies to the stance of narrative discourse, that of mood might seem a priori to be irrelevant here. Since the function of narrative is not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition, etc., but simply to tell a story and therefore to "report" facts (real or fictive), its one mood, or at least its characteristic mood, strictly speaking can be only the indicative – and at that point we have said everything there is to say on this subject, unless we stretch the linguistic metaphor a little more than is fitting. (p. 161)

Genette (1980) further reiterates, without denying the metaphoric extension, that we can meet the distortion in the term "mood" by saying that:

> There are not only differences between affirming, commanding, wishing, etc., but there are also differences between degrees of affirmation; and that these differences are ordinarily expressed by modal variations, be they the infinitive and subjunctive of indirect discourse in Latin, or, in French, the conditional that indicates information not confirmed. (p. 161)

Consequently, according to Genette (1980), narratives can only tell because all narratives are essentially diegesis (telling), in that they can attain no more than an illusion of mimesis (showing) by making the story real or alive. Hence, a narrative does not represent a factual or fictive story but only recounts it; that is, it signifies it by means of language and a narrator can only "tell more or tell less" what he or she tells and "can tell it according to one point of view or another" (p. 161).

Narrative mood, therefore, has to do with the modalities and capacity of a narrator to relate narrative information to the reader about how he or she tells more or less, and according to one point of view or another. It also concerns the stylistic choices that are made when a text is written to produce specific results in a story's verbal representation. Thus, Genette (1980) emphasises that narrative "representation" or narrative information has its degrees; that is, the narrative can "furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way,

and can thus seem …to keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells" (p. 162), thereby establishing the significant role narrative mood plays in storytelling.

Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), is a novel that explores the Nigerian civil war between 1967-1970. The story revolves around twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, their families, and friends. The novel delves into the complexities of human experience expressed through the themes of identity, culture, politics, and the human cost of conflict, weaving together personal narratives with historical events of the characters involved. Thus, through the characters and a vivid storytelling technique, Adichie brings to life the experiences of those who lived through one of Nigeria's most tumultuous periods. The boldness with which Adichie tackles the subject of the Biafran conflict has endeared her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to the attention of many scholars. However, despite the growing attention given to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, criticisms about the structure and narrative techniques she adopts in this text are still marginal to the amount of critical review and assessment she has received over the years. For a number of reasons, the bulk of criticism on her work has focused on thematic and ideological issues to the neglect of other equally significant concerns, like narrative technique. This study, therefore, explores her adroit use of narrative mood (distance) in *Half of a Yellow Sun* to highlight and intensify the diegesis of this narrative.

Theoretical Framework

The theory underpinning this study is narratology, which is rooted in structuralism: a theory that developed from Saussure's pioneering work on language. Narratology may be defined as "a theory of narrative" (Groden and Kreiswirth {n.d.}). It is a theory of narrative and not the theory of narrative. This implies that there are theories of narrative that are not narratological. Even though the theory had been in practice for a while, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that it found its most widespread influence and application with such activists as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Tzvetan Todorov, and Gerard Genette. Saussure's preliminary idea was to recommend "a general science of signs" based on his theory of language. He labelled this putative science "semiology" and suggested that the method it inaugurates could be applied to more than just the language system. His suggestions make significant contributions to structuralism, where his theory of language is used as the basis for a critical model that investigates a diverse range of cultural phenomena.

There are quite a number of tentative descriptions of what narratology may be considered to be, and these show differences not only in focus but also in the understanding of what narratology can be used for. To see narratology as a theoretical discipline is quite different from seeing it as a branch of poetics, which is again different from seeing it as a method, which can perhaps be used for criticism. Herman (1999) argues that narratology is a study of narrative, but then again, not all studies of narrative are narratological. As a study of narrative, narratology is more correctly a study of narrative qua narrative which, as Prince puts it in the above-mentioned entry (though he still holds on to narratology being a "theory"), "…examines what all narratives, and only narratives, have in common as well as what enables them to differ from one another qua narratives, and it aims to describe the narrative-specific system of rules presiding over narrative production and processing".

It can be argued that there are varied perspectives on the theory of narratology. However, all these views are geared towards providing a systematic, thorough, and impartial approach to the mechanics of narrative. Thus, the theory does not only encourage the study of narrative in general, as opposed to the unadulterated study of the novel or film but also the analysis could take place regarding some fundamental notions that could be translated across

media and forms and that all narratives would have shared features, in addition to concepts developed to describe the specificities of particular forms within given media. To this end, the theory of narratology enables a researcher to identify and isolate the various components of a narrative for scrutiny.

Owing to the multiplicity of views and strands of narratology, as noted above, Genette's (1980) approach is employed as the theoretical framework for the study. This is because Genette's typology of narratology provides a poetics that may be used to address the entire inventory of narrative processes in order to understand exactly how the narrative is organised. His approach also addresses a level that lies below the threshold of interpretation and, as such, it establishes a solid foundation, supplementing other research being carried out in the fields of social sciences, literary history, sociology, psychoanalysis, and ethnology. Many specialists in the field also regard his typology as a reading and analytical methodology that marks a significant milestone in the development of literary theory and discourse analysis.

Genette's Narratological Approach

Genette's version of narratology is derived from *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). The examples he draws from the book are mainly from Proust's epic, *In Search of Lost Time* (1922). One criticism that had been levelled against previous forms of narratology was that they could deal only with simple stories, such as Vladimir Propp's work in *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1968), as well as other short stories. However, if narratology could cope with Proust's epic, this could no longer be said. Genette, thus, advocates various categories of narrative that cover Order, Frequency, Duration, Voice, and Mood. Order, according to Genette, refers to the relationship between the chronological order of events in a story and their actual presentation in the narrative, where he identifies three types: anachrony (flashbacks, flashforwards), achrony (non-chronological narrative), and chronological narrative. Frequency is concerned with how often events are narrated compared to their occurrence in a story. He distinguishes three types: singulative (one event, one narrative), repetitive (one event, multiple narratives), and iterative (multiple events, one narrative).

Again, duration examines the relationship between the time of a story and the time of the narrative. Genette identifies four types, namely: scene (narrative time = story time), summary (narrative time < story time), ellipsis (narrative time = 0, story time > 0), and stretch (narrative time > story time). Voice also has to do with the narrative voice or perspective. That is "Who narrates? level of narrative (intra-, extra, meta-diegetic) and narrative distance (internal and external). Finally, mood concerns itself with the regulation of narrative information. Here, Genette identifies two types: distance (how much the narrative filters or distorts information) and perspective (who sees or what is seen). These subcategories aid in analysing how narratives are structured and how they convey meaning. Thus, Genette's narrative structure posits that the various categories and subcategories emphasise that the narrative is a complex structure in which a narratee is largely present in the various strata of the structure.

It must be emphasised that Genette is concerned with the macro-text of the récit; that is, the representation or ordering of events in a narrative. In addition, Genette argues that each of these categories, as mentioned above, could be isolated and studied to warrant a valid interpretation of any narrative. This study, therefore, employs one of the sub divisions of these categories, mood, in analysing Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The choice of this category is guided by the fact that the researchers are interested in the regulation of narrative

information in narrating the stories in the novel and the "mood" category - distance - addresses that appropriately, especially as it enhances a clearer comprehension of Adichie's narrative.

As has already been indicated, mood concerns itself with the distance created between the narrator and the narrative information available at his or her disposal. That is, the relationship between the narrator and the narrative information, vis-à-vis the reader. In essence, since all narrative is essentially diegesis (telling), it can attain no more than an illusion of mimesis (showing) by making the story real. Consequently, a narrative cannot imitate reality, no matter how realistic. It is intended to be a fictional act of language arising from a narrative instance and that "one can tell more of what one tells, and can tell it according to one point of view or another; and this capacity, and the modalities of its use are precisely what our category of narrative mood aims at" (Genette, p. 161-162).

Narration of Events

Unlike in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), which is Adichie's first novel, and where the narrative is presented from the focalisation of the autodiegetic narrator, Kambili, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is narrated from a heterodiegetic narrator. The author employs the technique of presenting the narrative from the perspectives of three different characters who share the narrative space, alternatively, from Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard. The narrative is presented by a narrator who is outside the narrative but takes on the point of view of any one of these focalised characters alternatively. The narrative begins with the point of view of Ugwu (thirteen years old), who is being brought from the village by his aunt to the city of Nsukka to live with Odenigbo. When Ugwu arrives in the city, he is awed by the city's spectacle, and his perception of life therein sets the tone for the presentation of narration of events in the narrative:

> He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down on them. He would never be able to describe to his sister Anulika how the bungalows here were painted the colour of the sky and sat side by side like polite well-dressed men, how the hedges separating them were trimmed so flat on top that they looked like tables wrapped with leaves…He smelled something sweet, heady, as they walked into a compound, and was sure it came from the white flowers clustered on the bushes at the entrance. The bushes were shaped like slender hills. The lawn glistened. Butterflies hovered above. (Adichie, p. 2)

The quotation above is a presentation by the narrator but perceived through the focalised character, Ugwu, as has already been stated, and it is a description of the setting at Nsukka when Ugwu arrives at the university compound with his aunt. Here, the narrator consciously sheds light on the various facets of the environment: from the smoothness of the tarred streets, the colour and arrangement of the bungalows, the trimming of the hedges, the lawns, to the smell of the flowers. The lucid description of the compound provides a picturesque view of the components therein presented. When Ugwu finally gets to Odenigbo's house, the description given by the narrator is equally done with precision, as the reader can perceive and share in Ugwu's experience of the effect the setting has on him:

> They took off their slippers before walking in. Ugwu had never seen a room so wide. Despite the brown sofas arranged in a semicircle, the side tables between them, the shelves crammed with books, and the center table with a vase of red and white plastic flowers, the room still seemed to have too much space... He looked up at the ceiling, so high up, so piercingly white. He closed his eyes and tried to reimagine this spacious room

> with the alien furniture, but he couldn't…Ugwu entered the kitchen cautiously, placing one foot slowly after the other. When he saw the white thing, almost as tall as he was, he knew it was the fridge. His aunty had told him about it. A cold barn, she had said, that kept food from going bad. He opened it and gasped as the cool air rushed into his face. Oranges, bread, beer, soft drinks: many things in packets and cans were arranged on different levels and, and on the topmost, a roasted, shimmering chicken, whole but for a leg. Ugwu reached out and touched the chicken. The fridge breathed heavily in his ears. He touched the chicken again and licked his finger before he yanked the other leg off, eating it until he had only the cracked, sucked pieces of bones left in his hand. (pp. 4-6)

The information above, on Ugwu's experience in Odenigbo's house, is not restricted to the physical description of the environment but also embraces how it reveals the character of Ugwu as well. These two extracts, coming at the very beginning of the narrative, set the tone for the presentation of pictures. The choice of words here, especially the use of descriptive words like adjectives, nouns, adverbs, etc., produces a synaesthetic effect on the reader, who, at this point, can experience, with the senses, the concrete elements portrayed in the narration.

The employment of colours like "brown, red, white" and such descriptions like, "wide, semicircle, crammed, plastic flowers, too much space, so high up, so piercingly white, spacious room, alien furniture, cautiously, slowly, white thing, cold barn, bad, cool air, soft drinks, roasted shimmering chicken, heavily cracked, sucked and pieces", among others like a simile, such as "as tall as" and personification, such as "the fridge breathed heavily in his ears", to describe Ugwu's new environment, gives the impression of a portrait with outstanding features. These, inevitably, all add up to the outstanding descriptive powers of the narrator. Even though it is only the setting in Odenigbo's home that is shown in this narration of events, the specifics presented here are panoramic, appealing to the sense of sight. This effect does not appear surprising since the narrator intends to show more of the scenes. Consequently, in this narration of events, the narration is mimetic due to the picturesque presentation of the scenes and the considerable amount of information presented in the narrative.

The descriptions of Olanna, for the first time, are equally done in great detail, as the reader can visualise her beauty through Ugwu's eyes. Master's (Odenigbo) initial introduction of Olanna to Ugwu is that "a special woman is coming for the weekend. Very special" and as a result, he wants the house to be clean. This information revealed about Olanna makes the reader anticipate further details to establish how "special" the woman coming is. Ugwu's initial reaction to the reception of Olanna creates a lot of suspense in the narrative, as the reader wonders if Olanna will satisfy the hype that Odenigbo has given her. The narrator captures Ugwu's uttered emotions in the following extract: "When the doorbell rang, he muttered a curse under his breath about her stomach swelling from eating faeces" (p. 22). However, when Ugwu hears Master's "raised voice, excited and childlike, followed by a long silence", he begins to imagine them sharing some intimacy: even this imagination is tainted with disgust, as he imagines "her ugly body pressed to Master's" (p. 22).

There is an anti-climax of Ugwu's emotions and expectations when he finally hears her voice:

> Then he heard her voice. He stood still. He had always thought that Master's English could not be compared to anybody's, not Professor Ezeka, whose English one could hardly hear, or Okeoma, who spoke English as if he were speaking Igbo, with the same cadences and pauses, or Patel, whose English was a faded lilt. Not even the white man Professor Lehman, with his words forced out through his nose, sounded as dignified as Master. Master's English was music, but what Ugwu was hearing now, from this woman,

> was magic. Here was a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he heard on Master's radio, rolling out with clipped precision. It reminded him of slicing a yam with a newly sharpened knife, the easy perfection in every slice. (p. 22)

This picturesque description suppresses any doubt in Ugwu's and the reader's mind about the quality of this "special woman". The presentation of Olanna's voice alone is done with such detail that Ugwu is instantly drawn to her, which is in contradiction to his initial repulsion at her coming to spend the weekend. His anxiety is assuaged when he finally looks at her, to confirm if the looks are as appealing as her voice sounds:

> He finally looked at her as she and Master sat down at the table. Her oval face was smooth like an egg, the lush colour of rain-drenched earth, and her eyes were large and slanted and she looked like she was not supposed to be walking and talking like everyone else; she should be in a glass case like the one in Master's study, where people could admire her curvy, fleshy body, where she would be preserved untainted. Her hair was long; each of the braids that hung down to her neck ended in a soft fuzz. She smiled easily; her teeth were the same bright white as her eyes. He did not know how long he stood staring at her until Master said, "Ugwu usually does a lot better than this. He makes a fantastic stew." (p. 23)

The details in the description of Olanna are done with great precision, and Ugwu is mesmerised by her beauty. In these extracts about Olanna, the narrator is much more interested in showing more about the beauty of Olanna than in talking about events in the narrative; hence, there is a maximum of information, with the narrator completely forgotten, and therefore, the narration becomes mimetic since the reader's attention is focused on the information being revealed to him or her. It must be noted that Ugwu's negative reaction to the idea of another person coming to share in the space occupied by himself and Master is premised on some of the questionable types of different relationships in Adichie's novels. For example, Ugwu feels insecure about the intimacy between Miss Adebayo (one of Odenigbo's friends) and Odenigbo and demonstrates his dislike for her when she places her finger on Odenigbo's mouth:

> …she did what startled Ugwu: she got up laughing and went over to Master and pressed his lips close together. She stood there for what seemed a long time, her hand to his mouth. Ugwu imagined Master's brandy-diluted saliva touching her fingers. He stiffened as he picked up the shattered glass. He wished that Master would not sit there shaking his head as if the whole thing were very funny. (p. 21)

This show of affection by her for Odenigbo makes Ugwu begin to dislike her, as she "became a threat after that". The narrator presents Ugwu's perception of her after that incident:

> She began to look more and more like a fruit bat, with her pinched face and cloudy complexion and print dresses that billowed around her body like wings. Ugwu served her drink last and wasted long minutes drying his hands on a dishcloth before he opened the door to let her in. He worried that she would marry Master and bring her Yoruba-speaking house girl into the house and destroy his herb garden and tell him what he could and could not cook. (p. 21)

He is, however, relieved when he hears Okeoma's comments regarding the fact that he (Odenigbo) was not interested in her.

It is apparent that Ugwu is jealous and over-protective of Odenigbo's affection and attention and does not want to share that space with anyone: "He did not want Miss Adebayo - or any

woman - coming in to intrude and disrupt their lives" (p. 21). "He did not want to share the job of caring for Master with anyone, did not want to disrupt the balance of his life with Master…" (p. 25). This is because Ugwu, perhaps, harbours some affection for Odenigbo, right from their initial meeting, when he describes Odenigbo as "His complexion was very dark, like old bark, and the hair that covered his chest and legs was a lustrous, darker shade" (p. 4):

> Some evenings, when the visitors left early, he would sit on the floor of the living room and listen to Master talk. Master mostly talked about things Ugwu did not understand, as if the brandy made him forget that Ugwu was not one of his visitors. But it didn't matter. All Ugwu needed was the deep voice, the melody of the English-inflected Igbo, the glint of the thick eyeglasses. (p. 21)

The narrator, here, presents Ugwu's impressions of Odenigbo, from their first meeting and the dexterity in the detailed description presents Odenigbo as an appealing character. It is, therefore, not surprising that he feels threatened by the presence of Miss Adebayo and Olanna. Consequently, this affection of a forbidden intimacy between Ugwu and Odenigbo dies prematurely due to a number of reasons. Notably among them is the fact that Ugwu realises that it will be an abomination to pursue this homosexual intimacy with his master, Odenigbo; hence, he becomes castrated from this feeling and channels his attention to Olanna, with whom he identifies a newfound affection, which may be acceptable but also constrained because she is his Master's woman. Secondly, the desire subsides because Odenigbo is oblivious of Ugwu's special attention and interest in him; making the affection one-sided. Subsequently, even though Ugwu does not want to share him with anyone else, not even with Olanna, as it was:

> …suddenly unbearable to think of not seeing her again. Later, after dinner, he tiptoed to the Master's bedroom and rested his ear on the door. She was moaning loudly, sounds that seemed so unlike her, so uncontrolled and stirring and throaty. He stood there for a long time, until the moans stopped, and then he went back to his room. (p. 25)

The imagery (visual and auditory) displayed in the extract above presents the extent to which Ugwu is willing to go in order to compensate for his inability to have either Odenigbo or Olanna to himself.

From the foregoing discussion, therefore, the author does not shy away from tackling the issue of sex and sexuality boldly. Unlike in *Purple Hibiscus,* where such issues relating to sex are shrouded in secrecy and silence, this novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, explores them to an appreciable length in a more picturesque manner. For example, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ugwu is infatuated with Olanna, as has already been discussed above, to the point that he goes to the extent of eavesdropping on her lovemaking with Odenigbo. This theme of sex and sexual affairs is further developed when Olanna has an affair with Richard, Kainene's (her twin sister's) boyfriend, to appease herself for Odenigbo's infidelity with Amala (the girl his mother brings to have a baby with - baby). The boldness with which the author addresses the issues relating to sex in this novel, to the degree of twins sharing a man, for various reasons, and with some justifiable cause, coupled with Ugwu's fantasies about Nnesinachi and her breasts, as well as her treatment of Ugwu's escapades with Chinyere, show her maturity and development or growth as an astute writer. The extract below presents an event of the lovemaking between Olanna and Odenigbo, as focalised through Olanna. The description is vivid enough to warrant a scenic view in the minds of the reader, of two lovers sharing some intimacy:

> She closed her eyes because he was straddling her now, and as he moved, languorously at first and then forcefully, he whispered, "We will have a brilliant child, *nkem*, a

> brilliant child," and she said, Yes, yes. Afterward, she felt happy knowing that some of the sweat on her body was his and some of the sweat on his body was hers. Each time, after he slipped out of her, she pressed her legs together, crossed them at her ankles, and took deep breaths, as if the movement of her lungs would urge conception on. (p. 107)

In addition, the narrator presents the sexual encounter between Olanna and Richard in an equally bold and graphic manner to enable the reader to have a visual effect of the event, as there is a quantity of information, rendering the extract mimetic in nature:

> They sat side by side, their backs resting on the sofa seat. Richard said, in a mumble, "I should leave," or something that sounded like it. But she knew he would not leave and that when she stretched out on the bristly carpet, he would lie next to her. She kissed his lips. He pulled her forcefully close, and then, just as quickly, he let go and moved his face away. She could hear his rapid breathing. She unbuckled his trousers and moved back to pull them down and laughed because they got stuck at his shoes. She took her dress off. He was on top of her and the carpet pricked her naked back and she felt his mouth limply enclose her nipple. It was nothing like Odenigbo's bites and sucks, nothing like those shocks of pleasure. Richard did not run his tongue over her in that flicking way that made her forget everything; rather, when he kissed her belly, she was aware that he was kissing her belly. Everything changed when he was inside her. She raised her hips, moving with him, matching his thrusts, and it was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing herself with the loud, loud cries that burst out of her mouth. Afterward, she felt filled with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace. (p. 234)

Another example of the scenic depiction of the author's bold treatment of sex and lovemaking is one of Ugwu's sexual encounters with Chinyere, which was never planned: "she just appeared on some days and didn't on others". The narrator, here, presents Ugwu's focalisation of one of his escapades with her:

> She smelt of stale onions. The light was off, and in the thin stream that came from the security bulb outside he saw the cone-shaped rise of her breasts as she pulled her blouse off, untied the wrapper around her waist, and lay on her back. There was something moist about the darkness, about their bodies close together, and he imagined that she was Nnesinachi and that the taut legs encircling him were Nnesinachi's. She was silent at first and then, hips thrashing, her hands tight around his back, she called out the same thing she said every time. It sounded like a name - Abonyi, Abonyi - but he wasn't sure. Perhaps she imagined that he was someone else too, someone back in her village. (p 127)

These episodes above are revealing enough to present to the reader a cinematographic representation of the lovemaking of these characters to produce the effect of plausibility. In all of these, the interest of the narrator is in showing as much information to the reader as possible, in a series of narration of events, making the whole narration mimetic in nature, with these episodes being presented as if the reader was actually watching them on screen.

Furthermore, there are other instances in the narrative where the narrator shows his or her prowess at revealing more information to the reader. The episode recounting Olanna's witnessing of the gruelling killings of her uncle, Mbaezi, and his family at Sabon Gari is lucid enough to present a panoramic view of the effects of the massacres that occurred during the Biafran War:

> In Sabon Gari, the first street was empty. Olanna saw the smoke rising like tall grey shadows before she smelled the scent of burning. "Stay here," Mohammed said, as he stopped the car outside Uncle Mbaezi's compound. She watched him run out. The street looked strange, unfamiliar; the compound gate was broken, the metal flattened on the ground. Then she noticed Aunty Ifeka's kiosk, or what remained of it: splinters of wood, packets of groundnuts lying in the dust. She opened the car door and climbed out. She paused for a moment because of how glaringly bright and hot it was, with flames billowing from the roof, with grit and ash floating in the air, before she began to run toward the house. She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay face down in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips. Olanna felt a watery queasiness in her bowels before the numbness spread over her and stopped at her feet. Mohammed was dragging her, pulling her, his grasp hurting her arm. But she could not leave without Arize. Arize was due at any time. Arize needed to be close to a doctor. (p. 147)

In the narrator's conscious choice of detailing the gruelling scene of the events surrounding the killings of Uncle Mbaezi and his family, the narrative assumes a mimetic tone, presenting maximum information, information that is more visually perceptible to the reader. Consequently, as the information condenses the narrative, the reader is drawn closer to the narrative to experience every aspect of the killing from his or her own perspective, while the narrator is consigned to the background. This distance created enables the events to reveal themselves and also enhances the technique employed by the author to enrich the narrative with information that is authentic. The significance of this narratological style of rendering the narrative mimetic is that it produces the effect of authenticity in the narrative. It is, therefore, the purpose of Adichie, in this novel, to employ this flair of narration of events to generate narrative distance as a means of providing more information to the reader.

Narration of Speech

Half of a Yellow Sun is a novel presented by an anonymous heterodiegetic narrator, whom Genette refers to as the "External Focaliser", whose detachment from the narrative reveals glaring restrictions in the amount of narrative information available to him, hence creating some distance between himself and the narrative. Narration of speech, as employed in this text, therefore, enables the narrator to show more information to the reader. The narrator, here, employs varied narrations to present both the focalised (Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard) uttered and unuttered or inner speeches. The beginning of the narrative paves the way for the anticipation of the presentation of dialogue in the narrative. The novel begins with the narrator presenting Ugwu's aunt's impressions about Master (Odenigbo):

> Master was a little crazy; he had spent too many years reading books overseas, talked to himself in his office, did not always return greetings, and had too much hair. Ugwu's aunty said this in a low voice as they walked on the path. "But he is a good man," she added. "And as long as you work well, you will eat well. You will even eat meat every day." She stopped to spit; the saliva left her mouth with a sucking sound and landed on the grass. (p. 3)

The extract above is a mixture of Direct Speech (DS), which captures the uttered speech of Ugwu's aunty and the narrator's commentary on the direct words of his aunty. Here, even though there is clear involvement of the narrator, hence the evidence of diegesis in the narrative, the revelation of Odenigbo is, however, done by Ugwu's aunty, when she is allowed

to take centre stage of the presentation of narrative information. It is through her direct words that the reader forms his or her first impressions about Odenigbo; that "he is a good man" and has also read books overseas and "talked to himself", descriptions which are later corroborated from information revealed in the narrative. There is a swift and smooth blend of these two acts, DS and the narrator's presence in the extract and this makes for a good reading, while also providing an understanding of the adroitness of Adichie's style of writing. This swift change from DS to narration, which Leech and Short (2007) refer to as "slipping", is symbolic of the fluidity in the narrative and also of the fact that the characters will have the opportunity to reveal themselves, as the narrative is mimetic in nature. Leech and Short (2007) define "slipping" as a technique which

> …allows an author to slip from narrative statement to interior portrayal without the reader noticing what has occurred, and as the reader has little choice but to take on trust the views of the narrator, when character and narrator are merged in this way he tends to take over the view of the character too. *The unobtrusive change from one mode to another*, sometimes called 'slipping', can occur more than once inside one sentence. (Leech & Short: p. 272) {emphasis mine}

When Ugwu and his aunty finally get to Nsukka, he is awed by the spectacle of the city, to the extent that he does not even mind "the afternoon sun" that "burned the back of his neck". He is excited and "choked with expectation, too busy imagining his new life away from the village" (p. 3) that "he was prepared to walk hours more in even hotter sun". In the ensuing extract, the narrator captures Ugwu's inner speech and reveals to the reader the effect the city has on him:

> They had been walking for a while now, since they got off the lorry at the motor park, and the afternoon sun burned the back of his neck. But he did not mind. He was prepared to walk hours more in even hotter sun. He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down on them. He would never be able to describe to his sister Anulika how the bungalows here were painted the colour of the sky and sat side by side like polite well-dressed men, how the hedges separating them were trimmed so flat on top that they looked like tables wrapped with leaves. (p. 3)

The extract above is in Free Indirect Discourse (FID). That is, a narrative technique where the narrator recounts a character's thoughts or speech, but in a way that blends the character's voice and perspective with the narrator's, creating a subjective and intimate third-person narration, and this forms the foundation of the predominant consciousness of the primary focalised characters throughout the narrative. As a result, the FID is employed more than the Indirect Transposed Discourse, where the character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation (+ distant) in revealing the character's consciousness.

The speech above reflects Ugwu's consciousness regarding the effect the city has on him. The employment of verbs and expressions of cognition such as "he did not mind, was prepared, never seen, he itched" and the use of tense; that is the future-in-past, "*would never be able to describe to* his sister…" all show the consciousness of Ugwu and his expectations for coming to the city, which are all unuttered yet made available to the reader. The narrator also employs these expressions of mental attribution to reflect the power of descriptiveness in the novel, to enable the reader to share in Ugwu's personal experience, especially of his ignorance and sensibilities.

Unlike in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's first novel, where there is minimal employment of FID because of the narrative technique adopted (the I-narrator), in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, there is a maximum use of FID to enable the reader to get direct access to the thought processes of the characters, thereby creating distance between the narrator and the narrative information. The employment of this technique in this novel also marks a development in Adichie's style of writing. For example, when there is a shortage of food supply during the war, Ugwu presents to the reader the living conditions they have been reduced to, being forced to eat powdered milk and dried egg yolk, among others, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> Ugwu hated the relief food. The rice was puffy, nothing like the slender grains in Nsukka, and the cornmeal never emerged smooth after being stirred in hot water, and the powdered milk ended up as stubborn clumps at the bottom of teacups. He squirmed now as he scooped up some egg yolk. It was difficult to think of the flat powder coming from the egg of a real chicken. He poured it into the dough mix and stirred. Outside, a pot half filled with white sand sat on the fire; he would give it a little more time to heat up before he placed the dough inside. He had been sceptical when Mrs Muokelu first taught Olanna this baking method; he knew enough about Mrs Muokelu's ideas – Olanna's homemade soap, that blackish-brown mash that reminded him of a child's diarrhoea, had come from her, after all. But the first pastry Olanna baked had turned out well; she laughed and said it was ambitious to call it a cake, this mix of flour and palm oil and dried egg yolk, but at least they had put their flour to good use. (p. 283)

The quotation above is in FID mainly by virtue of the omission of the subordinating conjunction, "that". The quote also reflects the difficulty Ugwu's new family is going through because of the raging war. The information provided here also reveals a lot about Ugwu as a character, especially regarding his perception of other characters. He appears to be suspicious about other characters like Odenigbo's mother, Miss Adebayo, and here, Mrs Muokelu. The employment of the FID, here, enables the reader to get into his thought processes to access his perception about Mrs Muokelu.

Another significant effect of the employment of the external type of focalisation in the narrative is the author's attempt at giving authenticity to the narrative information. The author employs a detached zero focaliser, the anonymous third-person narrator, whose detachment creates limitations and restrictions and therefore allows for several shifts in perspectives, as demonstrated in the different focalised characters through whom different portions of the narrative are presented. Here, the narrator is limited because he does not have absolute knowledge of the information available to these focalised characters, thereby creating distance, and can only present what is revealed to him. It is because of this limitation or restriction in the narrative that the author employs the use of these different focalised characters to bridge the gap in narrative information, since in reality, no one person experiences an event, and the Biafran War, for that matter, was not experienced by one person. This technique, therefore, affords the narrative some degree of credibility.

The limitation and its subsequent distances created between the narrator and the narrative are manifest in the instances when the focalised characters themselves have limited or no knowledge about the narrative information, which also culminates in the narrator's deficiency. For example, when Olanna and Odenigbo reconcile after she gets angry over Odenigbo's infidelity with Amala, Ugwu is restricted to some of the narrative information relating to their reconciliation, as illustrated in the following extract:

> He followed. In the kitchen, he heard her voice from the study, shouting a long string of words that he could not make out and did not want to. Then silence. Then the opening and closing of the bedroom door. He waited for a while before he tiptoed across the corridor and pressed his ear against the wood. She sounded different. He was used to her throaty moans, but what he heard now was an outward, gasping *ah-ah-ah*, as if she was gearing up to erupt, as if Master was pleasing and angering her at the same time and she was waiting to see how much pleasure she could take before she let out the rage. Still, hope surged inside Ugwu. He would cook a perfect *jollof* rice for their reconciliation meal. (p. 241)

The whole narration is in FID and the narrator presents Ugwu's perception of the encounter of their reconciliation. The employment of such expressions as "could not make out", "did not want to", "pressed his ear against the wood", all indicate Ugwu's inability to get absolute knowledge of what is happening and therefore, is straining for more information. His lack of accessibility to what is happening between Odenigbo and Olanna can only be imagined from the gasping sound of "*ah-ah-ah*" that she is making, "as if she was gearing up to erupt, as if Master was pleasing and angering her at the same time and she was waiting to see how much pleasure she could take before she let out the rage." The simile and antithesis employed in describing Ugwu's perception of what is transpiring are the closest the narrator can come to the reality of what is actually happening. Thus, the distance created here is only bridged through speculation of what the reader's imagination can suffice.

Furthermore, the employment of such words as "wonder, wondered, perhaps, probably" etc. and expressions as "did not see, had never seen, he was not sure, did not know, could not comprehend, difficult…to visualise, must have, he wished he knew, he did not hear, she imagined, never have imagined" etc. all create some distance between the narrator and the narrative, as they indicate the lack of absolute knowledge, which should be characteristic of an omniscient narrator. For example,

> …Olanna *wondered* if *perhaps* he had recently lost a person he loved. (p. 264) …she *wondered* how baby could stand the awful plastic taste of the dried egg yolk. (p. 270) …*I didn't hear.* (p. 278) …*I don't know*. (p. 281) …*Ugwu was not sure* how America was to blame for other countries not recognising Biafra… (p. 295) …*But he could not visualise her*. (p. 299) … *Olanna kept saying something that Ugwu could not hear while Master silently bent over the open bonnet*… (p. 300)

These highlighted words and expressions, though significant of mental processes of the focalised characters, place some distance between the narrator and the narrative, as these linguistic items clearly portray a barrier to full knowledge of the narrative information, thereby also placing a distance on the reader's access to the narrative information. Consequently, the focalised characters' restriction is the narrator's restriction and subsequently, the reader's; and their full knowledge is also the reader's.

There are also instances where the narrator employs narrative dialogue to allow the characters present narrative information from their perspectives, with the narrator relegated and distanced from the narrative. When the government soldiers begin bombing the villages occupied by the Igbos, they (Igbos) have to seek refuge in bunkers. The extract below is an example of the interaction between Olanna and Ugwu regarding their method of survival during the Biafran War:

> "We are going to stay in the bunker today," she told Ugwu.

> "The bunker, mah?"
> "Yes, the bunker. You heard me."
> "But we cannot just stay in the bunker, mah."
> "Did I speak with water in my mouth? I said we will stay in the bunker."
> Ugwu shrugged. "Yes, mah. Should I bring Baby's food?" (p. 276)
> …
> "Get Baby ready," she said, and turned the radio on.
> "Yes, mah," Ugwu said. "*O nwere igwu.* I found lice eggs in her hair this morning."
> "What?"
> "Lice eggs. But there were only two and I did not find any others."
> "Lice? What are you saying? How can Baby have lice? I keep her clean. Baby! Baby!"
> …
> "We are not staying in the bunker again?"
> "Just take her outside to the veranda."
> "Yes, mah." (p. 277)

In the extract above, the narrator is obliterated, allowing the characters themselves to present the narrative information; hence, rendering the narrative mimetic. The narrative slips from DS to FID. However, the slipping is done in such a way that the reader hardly notices the change in the presentation of narrative information. Again, the omission of the declarative clause in some of the instances creates ambiguity and irony; thereby, creating some kind of distancing, as one wonders who is speaking at a particular time: whether it is Olanna or Ugwu, even though the context provides clues.

This type of dramatic presentation of narrative information, the one that presents the speech of the characters through dialogues and FID, is the kind of narrative positioning commended by theorists of art fiction. The form of this dramatic narration in the 19th century was the epistolary technique, and by the 20th century, the term transformed into the interior monologue. Equally, Booth (1961) emphasises the dramatic presentation of information. According to him, the technique is used "to show characters dramatically engaged with each other...To give the impression that the story is taking place by itself, with the characters existing in a dramatic relationship vis-à-vis the spectator, unmediated by a narrator".

In addition, in the episode when Olanna and Odenigbo reconcile, after Odenigbo's infidelity with Amala, the incident is presented in DS, IS, and FID:

> *They sat on the sofa in the living room. He had no right to harass Richard, to direct his anger at Richard, and yet she understood why he had*. "I never blamed Amala," she said. "It was to you that I had given my trust, and the only way a stranger could tamper with that trust was with your permission. I blamed only you."
>
> Odenigbo placed his hand on her thigh.
>
> "You should be angry with me, not with Richard," she said.
>
> *He was silent for so long that she thought he was not going to respond and then he said, "I want to be angry with you."*
>
> *His defenselessness moved her. She knelt down before him and unbuttoned his shirt to suck the soft-firm flesh of his belly. She felt his intake of breath when she touched his trousers' zipper. In her mouth, he was swollen stiff. The faint ache in her lower jaw, the pressure of his widespread hands on her head, excited her, and afterward*

> *she said*, "Goodness, Ugwu must have seen us." *He led her to the bedroom. They undressed silently and showered together, pressing against each other in the narrow bathroom and then clinging together in bed, their bodies still wet and their movements slow. She marvelled at the comforting compactness of his weight on top of her. His breath smelled of brandy and she wanted to tell him how it was almost like old times again, but she didn't because she was sure he felt the same way and she did not want to ruin the silence that united them*. (p. 246)

This incident vividly depicts what transpires between Olanna and Odenigbo and also shows both their uttered and unuttered thoughts. It is also evident from the extract that the narrator employs DS and IS in conveying the thoughts and feelings of both Odenigbo and Olanna. For portions when they take the centre stage, the narrator allows them to speak for themselves, with their speeches presented in quotation marks. The narrator also adopts the style of FID (the italicised portion) in this extract to speed the flow of the narration here to reflect the emotions projected in the description. This division of modes of speech presentation, according to Leech and Short (2007), "becomes an important vehicle which" writers "use to control our sympathies over a relatively sustained period" (p. 286). In effect, the employment of this technique allows a greater distance to be created in the narrative, as the narrator is constantly obliterated and the characters given more space to reveal themselves.

Conclusion

This study has explored Adichie's adroit use of narrative distance in her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and how this technique aids in highlighting and intensifying the diegesis of this narrative. By employing one of Genette's (1980) narrative categories, mood, as the analytical framework, the study explored the narrative's particular use of distance and how this distance aids in realising a cohesive and coherent narrative. The findings of the study reveal that modern fiction practitioners, in their quest to present life as it really is, adopt the style of narration of events and speech to produce narrative distance in providing additional information to the reader. This way, the narration of events in the narrative is made manifest with the presentation of more details, which the reader is inclined to anticipate in the depiction of events. The elements of character, setting, and theme are creatively woven into the narrative to give a vivid impression of the set elements presented. This calculated blend of these elements, aside providing extra information to the reader, also appeals to the senses, particularly of the pictorial perspicacity, since the scenes portrayed reveal realistically the several physiognomies of the elements: shape, size, texture, colour, temperature, sound etc. described in the narrative, in a panoramic sequence, as if these are actually being shown in motion pictures, revealing a maximum of information. This technique, consequently, shifts the focus of the overall prominence of the narration from the narrator to the events being narrated themselves, making the narrative mimetic. Hence, even though there is a narrator presence, the events present themselves and the narrator becomes a distant figure from what he presents in the narrative. "The narrator is present, therefore, as source, guarantor, as stylist… and particularly – as… producer of metaphors" (Genette, 1980). The study contributes to theory by demonstrating the extent to which Genette's theory of narratology is useful to the analysis of the African novel and is also significant, in that it has pedagogical implications, as it will, among other things, serve as a material to facilitate the teaching of narrative analysis, especially narrative technique.

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