

Revealing in Change: A Comparative Analytical Study of Narrative techniques between "The Canary" and "The Swing"

Instructor: Jinan Hameed Jasim

General Directorate for Education in Diyala, Ministry of Education. □

Email: jinanhameed73@gmail.com

الكشف والاعتراف من خلال التغيير: دراسة تحليلية مقارنة لتقنيات السرد في قصتي "طائر الكناري" و "الارجوحة"

م. جنان حميد جاسم

وزارة التربية المديرية العامة لتربية ديالى

Abstract:

From the second half of the 20th century, Iraqi narration formed a remarkable phenomenon in the Arab literary arena. Many prominent novelists and short story writers appeared. Among them was Mohammed Khudhair (1942-) who had taken a lead of the narrative scene at the beginning of 1970s. He uses profound narrative techniques in his stories. On the other hand, Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), a modernist writer, uses unique genuine techniques in her works. This paper analyzes, compares and studies the narrative techniques used by both writers especially, time, place and character techniques. Both writers try to reflect the inner emotions and realities of their characters and in return of their societies. **Keywords:** The swing, the canary, narrative technique.

المستخلص:

شكلت السردية العراقية منذ النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين ظاهرة ملفتة للنظر محليا وعربيا على الاقل. وبرز ضمن تلك الفترة روائيون وقصاصون مهمون وكان بضمنهم القاص محمد خضير (١٩٤٢-) الذي تصدر المشهد السردى العراقي بداية السبعينيات، حيث استثمر التقانات السردية في قصصه. وعلى صعيد اخر، استخدمت الكاتبة الحداثية كاثرين مانسفيلد (١٨٨٨-١٩٢٣) تقنيات فريدة في اعمالها الادبية. وسنقف في هذا البحث على تحليل ومقارنة ودراسة التقانات السردية التي استعملها الكاتبين وبالاخص تقنيات الزمن والمكان والشخصية. كلا الكاتبين حاول التجديد وان يعكس المشاعر والعواطف الداخلية وان يعكس حقيقة شخصياته السردية وبالتالي يعكس واقع المجتمع الذي يعيش فيه.

الكلمات المفتاح: الارجوحة ، الكناري ، تقنيات السرد

Introduction

From the second half of the 20th century, Iraqi narration formed a remarkable phenomenon in the Arab literary arena. Many prominent novelists and short story writers appeared. Among them was Mohammed Khudhair (1942-) who had taken a lead of the narrative scene at the beginning of 1970s. He has written many stories that are profound critical analysis and made use of many narrative techniques. "The Swing" is one of his best short stories. It tells about a soldier, Sattar, who returned from the hell of a battle carrying a message to the family of his dead friend, Ali, who was killed in the battle leaving behind a waiting mother, wife and a little daughter. The visitor Sattar tries to compensate little Haleema the fatherly love and to support the family emotionally. The story does not have many events but there are many narrative shifts that enrich the texture of the story, particularly the writer's profound ability in using variety of techniques. Therefore, this study will deal with a critical affinity between "The Swing" and the story of Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) "The Canary". This story seems to use a similar narrative approach in terms of giving the character a special attention in constructing the events. These events are mental. The most important affinity is how the writer deals with and explores certain narrative techniques in a smart and a profound way. "The Canary" tells about a lonely woman whose life becomes hallow after the death of her bird. The woman is emotionally attached to the canary. It becomes her

perfect company and sympathizes with her unlike human beings. This technical affinity is the core of this study. For this reason, the researcher exclude the biographies of the two writers and concentrate on the technical patterns used by the two writers especially time, place and character techniques.

Narrative Techniques:

As a term, "technique" is not steady and clear in Arabic narrative studies. Many of narrative lexicons do not mention or use it despite of its widely usage in Arabic studies. But this fact does not give this term a legislative use. Our reviews of some Arabic books and articles that come under the title of "Technique" make us search for the meaning of this word in Arabic lexicons. This utterance means no more than "rules" according to its verb (Ibin-Mandhoor. 2005. 229). As a fact, this word comes from the transliteration of the English word "technique" which means according to Meriam-Webster dictionary "the manner in which technical details are treated (as by a writer) or basic physical movements are (as by a dancer)". So, it refers to the writer's ability to treat the details by using technical methods to accomplish and achieve his aim. Whereas Cambridge dictionary defines this word as "a way of doing an activity that needs skill" or "a way of doing anything that involves planning". For this, this term is misinterpreted in Arabic books. In Arabic narrative criticism some critics use another terms that come close to the word 'technique' in indication and conception such as elements of narration, narrative structure, narrative components...etc. This makes the reader or the researcher hesitate in which to use instead of the other. This term might probably confined to description, dialogue and to some extent the language. Adul Malik Murtadh's (1998). *In the Theory of the Novel: A Search in the Narrative Techniques* defines technique as the artistic tools on which narration based. He deals with the techniques as the character, the levels of the language, space, narrative forms, the relation of narration with time and a web of narrative relations (5-14). While Tha'ir Al-Athari (2020). *The Theory of the Short Story*. The writer uses this term in the third chapter "Techniques of the Structure of Short Story" and in the fourth chapter under the title of "Diagnostic Technique". Some Arab critics and researchers understand the narrative technique as stylistic understanding. In this respect, technique means the self-ability in dealing with the technique and the need to use it in this story or that one. Therefore, Jasim Khalaf Alyas in *The Poetics of the Short Story* (2010), states that technique is the "allegory, paradox, irony, displacement and the symbol" (150). In spite of the importance of such devices but they are not narrative techniques but they are techniques of the literary style that may be used widely in one genre than another. This paper shows the indications of such terms in an attempt to display our own conception of the term "technique". For the researcher, technique means to observe the work of the narrative elements and the nature of mobilization of these elements in the world of the story. This means that time technique does not refer to the time but how the writer deals with time and the nature of employing time in the story that ensure the integrity of the narrative structure and the interaction of its other technical elements with each other. Thus, the study is going to examine three narrative elements in accordance to their vitality in producing the theme of the story and framing the narrative world. We try to make an affinity in performance and in employing place, time and character techniques used by two writers who belong to two different cultures and two different generations.

Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary"

According to Tomalin, Katherine Mansfield "revelled in change" (1988. 89). This change "gave her freedom" to express her own feelings. She looked for a "life free from social constraints" (Morrow. 1993. 13). Katherine Mansfield did not accept to be bounded by people's ideas (13). She tried to show that one cannot live in isolation whether of the "individual in society" or "self-induced isolation" (47). Such matters are evidence and clear in the way she wrote her short stories and in the narrative techniques she used. In *The Canary*, Katherine Mansfield shows how a lonely and an isolated woman lives in the society. The words and the work of this woman set as the tone of her story. Whereas the time of the action becomes a symbol to any lonely person lives in this world. The story starts with the second person 'you'. This 'you' can be interpreted to any reader or to 'the self'. It is an imaginary 'you' which could refer to the person of the writer as a human being. This means that the writer of the story has an inner conflict as a writer or as a woman, other times, as a worker and as a lonely person who seeks "perfect company" in society. For that, *The Canary* is a story of a character. It is not a story that depends on action. Therefore, the writer mixes between dialogue and monologue to narrate the events. The first word in the story "sends the reader off on a search for meaning" (Iser. 1993. 27) by using imagination. The story opens with the discourse of the woman to an imaginary character, "You see ... You see that big nail" (2002. 370). This nail reminds her with her relation with a cage that was hanging there. It is the home place of a bird and the woman's home of sweet lively memories. It is the canary whom the woman had an intimate relation with this relation has an existential dimension. It evokes humanity between the world of a woman and the world of a

bird. Thus place has a vital role in this story. The protagonist starts her narration from an imaginary place. It is the place where one cannot reach. It is 'the world of the death'. The protagonist uses her imagination to recall her memories about the place. Then she writes according to what she thinks at the moment of remembering. It is the present moment. The place where events take place is a mere house. This house reflects a thematic balance between two worlds. The first one is a closed world in which events are narrated. Whereas the other world is an open one in which events are recalled. These two worlds have smaller units which are unified to reproduce the general conception of the place. In the house, there is a closed garden. It is the backyard from which the protagonist watches the horizon/ the sun. There is also the room and the veranda. There is the cage and the bird. Such dichotomies are indications of the worlds of closeness and openness. Two worlds are in contrary to each other but are related to one another. The open world represents life as well as unknown future. The closed world represents death and the known past memories. It is not the actual death but it is a spiritual and mental death of loss and deprivation. This dichotomy of closeness and openness reflects the correlation between the self of the woman who is imprisoned inside her body and the self of the bird that is imprisoned behind the bars of the cage. This bird becomes the soul that is imprisoned inside the body. It is the theme that Katherine Mansfield depicted in the story. It is the correlation of life and death. Death releases the bird from the bondage of the body to the open space of the spirit. Death also means searching for faith in the infinite spirit not as an ephemeral corpus. Katherine Mansfield deals with place not as an actual place with its dimensions, but as an indicator to closeness. She transforms place to an important part of the theme that reveals and completes it. The writer uses objects to summarize human life by "suggestion rather than statement" (Meyers. 1978. 128) Place interacts horizontally with time and character to produce the action of the story. In such case, places are changed to become the production of the interaction of the self with the incidents of the story. It is a horizontal place. Therefore, the first lines of *The Canary* show how the narrative ego or the narrative self directs the discourse in present time: ... You see that big nail to the right of the front door? I can scarcely look at it even now and yet I could not bear to take it out. I should like to think it was there always even after my time (361) This extract marks out the starting point of time of the narrative discourse which is not necessarily to be unified with the time of the telling of the story. The narrator specifies 'now' as the point on which the narrative discourse is built up. 'Now' suits the narration when the narrative self is part of the story. It tells events related to it and such events are actually occurred in the past but they are acquainted the present moment, either as flashbacks addressed to certain addressee or as dairies. In the next paragraph, the writer uses verbs in the simple past. What is amazing here is the domination of present tense on the behalf of the narrator. The narrator recalls events and tries to reproduce them as if they are newly happened. Here the narrator recalls time and turns it into another form. The narrator exchanges the time when the story happened by transmitting the story from the past to the present as if it can be repetitive anachronies. In such away, the reader will be able to follow the events from the protagonist's point of view as it was happened. In other words, such technique shows the apparent attachment of the woman with the life of the bird. This is obvious in the place of the nail that the woman was not able to take it out and she "should like to think it was there always even after my time" (361). It is a reference to the infinite spirit. The woman does not want to accept the death of the bird/ spirit. In her recalling the past story of the bird, she uses the present tense so as to enhance the idea of closeness and openness. Time passes but one cannot forget the beautiful and excited past moments. The narrator is trapped in her past memories as if her past becomes a cage to her present. Time becomes part of the theme. It reveals the theme of isolation and its hardest outcomes. Therefore, when the woman says "I even covered my face for a minute" (364), the reader is not concerned with time, but becomes satisfied with imagining the incident. How the incident had happened and how was the feeling of the woman at that moment? The reader puts himself/herself in the foot of the woman as if the reader undergoes and tests the emotion of the past moment. The same thing is repeated in her saying "when I found him, lying on his back..." (364). This affinity between the past and the present reflexes what the woman feels at the moment of narration not only describing what happened in the past. Here the writer succeeded in transmitting the feelings of the character to her reader. The interplay of space and time in this story is vivid in revealing the attachment of the protagonist with the past as if she lives the moment in her feelings. Every small unit in the house as the veranda where the nail is placed unifies her spirit with the presence of the canary. The presence of sweet memories makes her alive and makes her forget the cruelty of life outside her house. Katherine Mansfield turns *The Canary* to be an interior monologue. Therefore, it has a single character. But Mansfield also uses certain objects as vital characters in the story as the bird, the cage and the pronoun 'you'; the unknown addressee. Katherine Mansfield does not tell the readers any details about the woman as if the woman stands for the writer of the story herself (as an omniscient narrator). This monologue clarifies the inner hidden worlds

of the woman. It also sheds light on her suffering being a lonely woman lived in the society. There is no development in her views or a change in her conclusions because she retells what happened in the past. She repeats the story as if it happened now; therefore, she keeps one state and refers to keep this state in the future. Once she heard her three men describing her as "the scarecrow", she turned to look for a private world that can contain her as well as her feelings of misery. Her private world is shown through her relation with objects as the little house, the garden, and the flowers that respond to her or even the evening star. But her actual world where she finds herself in is the world where the bird exists. The bird is united with the woman as oneself "I hung him on the nail outside while I got my three young men their breakfasts, and I never brought him in until we had the house to ourselves again" (362). This shows how the two are unified together. It reflects how love is important to live in this life. It also shows how perfect company is needed and necessary to people. Without love and without company one's heart becomes hollow as the woman has revealed after the death of the bird. The woman lives in a state of mist and a gloomy environment but the presence of the canary enlightens her life. It makes her appreciate the little things that make her day. She feels the mutual love that changed her and makes her different from others. As the story starts with the nail and the use of present simple tense that is the subsequent of certain past events. Such past events make her present and draw her future. The writer chooses a bird inside a cage to be the start point to have hope in the future. Despite the fact that the canary is caged in that place but it still sings beautifully and amused the passerby. In other words the tunes and the little notes of the bird will be alive in the minds of people as if Mansfield wants to say that she will be remembered by and through her writings. Katherine Mansfield reflects her own pain and sadness and in returns the pain of humanity. The writer succeeds in combining two different cultures and two different worlds in two different times and places; the world of the woman and the world of the bird that are united in the songs of the canary. She does this by the contrast between presence and absence. The presence of the woman and the absence of the bird.

Mohammed Khudhair's "The Swing"

The stories of Mohammed Khudhair are considered critical writings that establish a textual place that tells about unknown people and the unheard voices not only in the Iraqi society but in all places and in all times (Al-Haidari. 2007. "Mohammad Khudhair and Discovering Places"). Mohammed Khudhair believes that a story is written to display obscure people who live in isolated and remote areas. For this reason, he uses a narrative structure that combines between the story that is formed by a set of events and how the story is presented. Time in "The swing" is not only a verbal time but it is created as an absolute time. It has been directed through its effects and connections with the other elements of narrative structure. Mohammed Khudhair presents his story within a time-frame that is condensed throughout describing the present moment. The narrator reveals the character of the story in following up the time of the occurring events. The narrator gives his readers significant signs that are connected with the inner conflict of the main character. This conflict is the product of the character's hesitation in telling events that are unknown for the narrator himself. Such events are not presented on the stage, but they are anticipated from the language of the characters. The description used in the first scene reflects the nature of the conflict between the character's inner world and the outer world; in the conscious and the subconscious of the character. The description of "the shadow / the sun", "the picture / the reality", "the sleep/ the waking" and the life inside and outside the bag are all signs that make the reader think of two stories. The first is the chronology that refers to the present moment of narration whereas the second refers to the time that framed the story and was not told by the visitor but it will be anticipated from his language. Therefore, two time techniques are used: flashbacks to describe the visitor's story and here time is off the actual time of narration. The other technique is divided between flashback and flash-forward. This can be seen in:

Oh! Mother, your son was ...

The woman, who was in black, looked towards the hanging bag while the visitor watched the house and its roof carefully. He looked at the stream of the river and examined the woman's face that was reddening because of the flame of fire. She wondered:

'Is that his bag?'

'That! No, it's mine.'

'He has a similar one...How is he? (*The Black Kingdom*. P.145)

This extract shows the moment when the character of Sattar and that of the absent Ali are interweaved together. Sattar represents the present moment whereas Ali represents the past. This is happened in the use of flashbacks.

The same thing is also clear in:

'What's your name, little girl?'

'Haleema'

'Your father asked me to kiss you, Haleema.'

Also in:

'Wet your body. She always asks her father to do so.'

'Her wish is my command'.

'Mum. Do you know? Consider my presence here as his (147).

Such corporation between the two characters shows how time works in the story. It reflects time relationship between the visitor and Ali and at the same time reveals the relation between the visitor and the family of Ali. The same thing is repeated in the dialogue between the visitor and Haleema. The writer succeeds in transferring the reader to the past time through the use of the swing. It becomes the central symbol of the story and reflects the passage of time as well. The swaying of the swing backward and forward and from the shade zone to the light zone reflects the passage of time from the past to the present and vice versa. The shade becomes the only truth that one has to believe because everything is changeable, unsteady as truth itself.

Again, flashback technique is used to present the separation of these two characters.

The visitor said:

'I was told a lot of things about this tree. Ali told me how he had slept on its branches when he was a boy. He also told me that this tree has a gummy liquid (149)

The bamber tree becomes a symbol to the passage of time. It reflects certain events happened in the past and at the same time represents the untold events that are going to happen. The tree stands for life itself since it is deep rooted in the ground. Despite death, pain, sadness and the deprivation of the family of Ali, the bamber tree keeps blooming. When Sattar tastes the bamber, he feels the presence of his dead friend, Ali. He tries to compensate Haleema the love of her dead father and at this point past time and the present moment are unified and become one unit. Two moments are interweaved together to declare the theme of loss, abandoned childhood and the destruction of the family. As in most of Mohammed Khudhair's short stories, place where events happened seems to be very limited. In spite of this limitation of place, the writer concentrates on reproducing the place mentally (on the tongue of one of the characters). In this respect, the reader becomes able to comprehend and see the place as the production of the character's imagination which is initially the production of the wide imagination of the writer. The question is, why does the writer use such technique and what does he achieve in doing that? In my opinion, such technique is used to give the character freedom to express and reveal its feelings, passions and points of view away from the authority of the narrator who draws its steps. It is a transformation from being an authorized narrator to know very little about his characters. He does this intentionally to violate the scope of the reader's predictions through describing the scene where events take place. Therefore, there is no separation between time and place structures in the story. So, "The Swing" has two structures of the place. In addition to the closed space and an open space, there is what Bakhtin called "chronotope" (1981: 425). It is the fusing of space and time. Such overlapping is shown through the combination of place and time techniques. It means that time revealed in place and vice versa. Place-time becomes a mental unit. It is as a base for the process of reading and writing (Rawayli and Bazi'i. (2002). 171) Mohammad khudhair concentrates on certain repeated images in the first scene of the story to show how place is modified by the passage of time such as the shade, the sleep, the silence and serenity. This can be seen in "On the silence avenue of shaded by the palm fronds, there was a shaved head boy riding his light bike..." (142), such a movement is mixed and intermingled with the silence around. Both silence and movement are unlimited. They are absolute. But silence extends and spreads to the shade zone and the movement extends by the extension of the calmness. Here one cannot recognize between silence and movement because they are intermingled and overlapped and become one thing. Place is modified by the passage of time. It extends with time till they are transformed into a closed and an open space. The avenue is a place that is similar to a breezy way which is limited and crooked but it is an open space since it has an open end. Like the bike, a closed narrow space but still represents the extreme openness. The dichotomy of the shade and the sun represents time. Between shade and the sun there is a time space that is formed according to the spatial space. The visitor passes the dimension of the sun to sink in the shade. As soon as the visitor exceeds this dimension, the action expands and extends to be uncovered to the sun. The reader can think of the spaces that are left in the shade and think of the area that is revealed by the narrator which is drawn under the sun. The same thing is true in using the image of the bag. The bag is the closed space. There is nothing in it but it represents everything. It is the space of the absent character. It is the character of Ali, Haleema's father. The bag represents the spirit and the memory of the dead father. The story is built around the incident of the bag. "Do you know where he is? / In that bag ... Do you see it, Haleema?" (156). The bag is like a tower of pigeons. It is a closed space that is filled with pigeons. The spirit of Ali is like smoke. It is like

the birds Sattar has seen flying away from the tins that are fixed on the walls of the two meeting rooms. Pigeons fly in the sky freely but they return to the ground picking up what they find. So, such tower is like the bag that contains the spirit of the dead Ali. Such spirit frees itself from this bag space and flies in the sky and could be seen by Haleema when she closed her eyes. Here, the psychological equivalent of the bag is the swing. It is the emotional place for the little girl. Haleema is attached to the swing. It represents her happy past life. It is her familiar place since her birthday. It is the place where she used to sleep in the lap of her dead father. But now it becomes more emotional because it is the only place where she can sleep and see the spirit of her father. The swing sways through two places and two times. When it goes out of the shade, the light of the sun falls on Haleema's neck as the edge of the sword. It means that light and day do not send Haleema happiness they are sharp as if the hit of a sword. But when the swing reaches the tops of palm trees it moves backwards quickly to pass through the shade. It is the place and the time of Haleema's sleep. It is the best time for her because she will be happy to see her father. Place becomes an interconnected structure. It appears in a form of circles. The first circle expands to contain the second in a sequence. As soon as one circle comes to an end it draws the dimensions of the other. This means that the action starts from one place after gathering on it. In other words, the visitor carries the bag and all the events that are associated with his journey in delivering the bag to its owners are connected to the bag. So the bag is the closed narrow space where events are gathered and sets up either in the use of flashbacks or flash-forwards. Thus, place-time technique plays an important role in the formation of the characters. In addition to that, Mohammad khudhair adds a psychological dimension to the characters. This means that a character has the ability to redirect the action and then reproduce it through self-contemplation. The character recalls back past events and makes the reader feel that they happen according to the present moment. The visitor, Haleema and the mother of Ali are central characters but they share one dimension. This dimension is formed by the absent character of Ali. The reader knows Ali from the events that other characters recalled. Therefore, remembrance has a vital role in the unification of Ali and Sattar. The writer uses one object, the swing, to be the significant character. The swing represents place, time and the action at the same time. Little Haleema is attached to the swing not only because it is the place that represents love and attachment but it reminds her of the time she spent with her father. It also reflects how life was before the death of the father. It reflects the outcome of war upon society. It is death that leads to deprivation. Death deprived the child from love, protection and security. The writer succeeds in combining two different worlds. The world of inanimate things and the world of the living to reveal the theme of the story that is man has to live in peace and love.

Conclusion

- What distinguishes the two stories is their use of mental narration. Most of the events are not actually occurred in the story but are retold by the theatrical narrator.
- According to the first point, flashback technique is dominated as a time technique. So, the absent time becomes a motive of the events of the present time.
- Both writers use certain indicative symbols as 'the swing' in the story of Mohammed khudhair and 'the canary' in the story of Katherine Mansfield. These symbols have multiple meanings at the levels of time and place and their relations with the characters of the two stories.
- Through analyzing the two stories, one can notice the concern in revealing two place structures that are interacted and produced visionary conceptions. These conceptions are used as an open and closed place in this paper.
- The two writers are much concerned with the psychological narration.

Despite the affinity between the two stories in using various techniques but there is a difference at the level of characters. The characters in the story of Mohammed Khudhair are not attached to one state. Each character develops and interferes with and mingles with other characters. Unlike the characters in the story of Katherine Mansfield. The writer does not pay much attention to the development of the character because as it is said earlier in this paper, the story is of an action not of a character. The events are retold as if they are happened at the present moment. Katherine Mansfield depends on the way of showing when she presents the character more than that of Mohammed Khudhair.

References

- Alyas, Jasim Khalaf. (2010). *The Poetics of the Short Story*. Syria: Dar Nineveh.
- Al-Athari, Tha'ir. (2020). *The Theory of the Short Story*. Amman: Dar Kunooz al-Ma'rifa.

- Bakhtin, Mikhail.(1981). *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. Eds. M Holquist & C. Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Al-Haidari. (2007). "Mohamad Khudhair and the Discovery of Places".
- Iser, Wolfgang. (1993). *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*. London: The John Hopkins Press.
- Khudhair, Mohammad. (1980). *The Black Kingdom*. Baghdad: Dar Culture.
- Mansfield, Katherine.(1953). *Selected Stories Of Katherine Mansfield*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morrow, Patrick. (1993). *Katherine M's Fiction*. New Zealand: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Murtadh, Abdul Malik. (1998). *The Theory of the Novel. A Search in the Narrative Technique*. Kuwait: A'alam al-Ma'rifa.
- Tomalin, Claire. (1988). *A Secret Life: Katherine Mansfield*. UK: Penguin Book.