

**NARRATIVITY AS STRATEGY FOR THEMATIC
MANAGEMENT IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHIE'S PURPLE HIBISCUS AND HALF OF A
YELLOW SUN**

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Abstract

This paper interrogates and evaluates the salient and inherent narrative techniques employed by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her first two novels. The study is predicated upon the concept of realism; with realism of technique being our major thrust. The

paper contends that style and technique have been efficiently used by Adichie as pivotal tools for thematic management in her debut and second novels which announced her literary ingenuity to the world. More importantly, it stimulates the need to look at writing in terms of manner and matter rather than relegating manner to the backwaters. This paper posits that style and techniques are as germane to the success of any literary work as much as themes are. This paper concludes that Adichie's eclectic and vibrant narrative techniques have stood her out and submitting that beyond her dexterity in story telling which cannot be over emphasized, the literary techniques deployment of are a hallmark of her literary craftsmanship. technique

Introduction

Thematic concerns are very important variables in all forms of literature as it is the fulcrum of creative literature. However, there is no denying the fact that thematic validity can be achieved with our efficient employment of narrative technique which this discourse has taken the liberty to refer to as . Thus style and techniques are central and fundamental as well as pivotal in enhancing narrativity in literature. Suffice it to state here that narrativity on its own is the most potent ingredient in thematic realization and management.

Literature in this age and time has gone beyond thematic concerns alone. The manner (Style and techniques) have also taken centre stage in literary praxis and discourse. This treatise does not in any way negate, undermine or down play thematic concerns in literature rather it is an attempt to show that the matter of any literary genre is as important as the manner.

The burden of this work therefore is to critically evaluate how style and techniques have been effectively utilized by Adichie in her two ground breaking novels: *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

It is imperative at this point to state that the work of several authors may share similarities in terms of subject matter or theme but style and techniques constitute a fundamental variable and difference which brings out the peculiarity and distinctiveness employed by any writer.

This study is relevant owing to the fact that too much emphasis has been placed on the matter of Adichie's novels relegating the manner to the background.

Purple Hibiscus and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are both important novels that launched Adichie's writing career. Her debut won her numerous accolades, awards, rave reviews and was nominated for the 2026 Man Booker Prize for literature, while the latter won her the prestigious Orange Broad Prize in literature 2008. This

points to the fact that the manner and matter were judiciously deployed to realize these novels.

Conceptual Definitions

1. Narrativity- refers to the manner, act an/ or process brought to bear in rendering a story particularly in a novel. It is the approach employed in realizing a story which encapsulates the style and techniques. It is in this context that the word is used here.

2. Thematic Management- refers to the efficient deployment of narrative techniques towards effective presentation of the underlining central messages in a story.

This work is approached using the concept of realism as our scaffold. We have chosen to premise this study on realism because Adichie's writings are a reflection of social reality. Realism in literature is the depiction of issues as they occur in everyday life without embellishment. This approach deals with the tendencies of art to mirror or get close to reality. It is an attempt to define life without idealization or romantic subjectivity.

Style and Technique in Purple Hibiscus

Chimamanda Adichie's debut Purple Hibiscus struck the literary world like a thunder bolt; moving Jeane Marie Dauray to observe thus: "This book is a

wonderfully crafted piece of fiction that pulls in the reader immediately...” Similarly Akachi EzeigboAdimora observes that “... this is a book you must return to again and again, reading it draws you deeper into the vast treasures of Purple Hibiscus.” (The Blurb) The novel is very compelling and captivating such that a reader’s attention is immediately caught and sustained.

The descriptive depth and detailed story telling ability employed by Adichie is one of her strengths. It is to say the least awesome and breathtaking.

She is vivid and graphic with detail and description that a reader cannot help but feel involved in her story. We capture in our minds eye all the scenes and issues Adichie raises. This is because vivid description is in itself an element and feature of realism which she successfully puts to optimal use. She creates a world so detailed, evocative, emotionally true and graphic.

The story is set in a dysfunctional family in an equally dysfunctional Nigerian society; she describes so clearly the socio-political setting of Nigeria and her climate. One practically tastes the dust of the village roads on ones’ tongue and smell the cashew trees after a heavy rain. Social customs, taboos and importantly too, the staple, snacks and food of her people. We are also presented the picture of domestic violence, pulling the

reader into the complex political and religious struggles occurring in Nigeria at the time.

One of the very crucial and dominant issues presented in the novel is religious fanaticism and intolerance. From the very first page, one knows that religion will hang like a miasma over the novel.

We come face to face with grim reality that Papa is a religious zealot who can go any length all in the name of religion and serving God no matter how far reaching and despicable.

Papa craves attention from the clergy and he gets it. Fr Benedict believes so much in him and sees him as a model parishioner using him as a positive example for others to emulate.

Adichie describes the MmuoMasqrade festival with so much colour, candour, virgor and enthusiasm that readers can picture it in their minds eye as though they were present in the rich cultural festival. The quaint description is like a vibrant painting that has come alive. The elaborate portrayal of this highly cultural and folkloric festival is breathtaking (85-7).

All through the novel, a reader cannot help but marvel and agree totally that she is a skillful writer armed with uncommon descriptive acumen. Her graphic descriptive ability is in tandem with Ferdinand Asoo's proposition

that “...realism of portrayal on detailed descriptive scenes and situations are further accomplished contrasting delineations.” (56)

Point of View

One of the most effective narrative strategies employed in *Purple Hibiscus* is Adichie’s use of the first-person point of view through Kambili Achike, the protagonist and central consciousness of the novel. The entire narrative unfolds through Kambili’s perception, making the story psychologically intimate and emotionally layered. Through this narrative perspective, readers experience both the external realities of political instability and the internal tensions of fear, silence, trauma, and emotional awakening.

The first-person narration is particularly significant because it mirrors Kambili’s psychological condition. Her voice is restrained, hesitant, and fragmented at the beginning of the novel, reflecting the oppressive atmosphere created by Eugene’s authoritarian control. As the narrative progresses and Kambili encounters alternative spaces of freedom—especially in Nsukka—her narrative voice gradually becomes more confident and expressive. Thus, the development of narrative voice parallels the protagonist’s emotional and psychological growth.

Adichie's use of focalization also enhances thematic depth. By filtering events through Kambili's consciousness, the narrative foregrounds the subjective experience of domestic violence, religious extremism, and adolescence. Readers are not merely informed about oppression; they experience its emotional consequences through Kambili's silence, fear, and gradual self-discovery.

This narrative strategy aligns with contemporary trauma studies, which emphasize fragmented narration and silence as important modes of representing psychological repression. Kambili's limited narration therefore becomes both a stylistic and ideological tool for articulating trauma within the domestic and postcolonial space.

Humour and Satire

Although *Purple Hibiscus* is largely a serious and emotionally intense novel, Adichie skillfully incorporates humour and satire to expose social contradictions and critique ideological excesses. These elements provide narrative balance while simultaneously deepening the novel's sociopolitical commentary.

One important target of Adichie's satire is colonial mentality and the continued valorization of whiteness within postcolonial society. The parishioners of St. Agnes Church continue to refer to Father Benedict as

“our new priest” even after several years, suggesting an exaggerated reverence rooted partly in racialized perceptions of authority. Through subtle irony, Adichie critiques the persistence of colonial consciousness in religious and social institutions.

Similarly, Eugene’s obsession with Englishness and Western validation becomes a source of satirical commentary. His rejection of the Igbo language and preference for English as a marker of sophistication reveal the psychological effects of colonial conditioning. Adichie exposes the absurdity of this mindset through scenes in which villagers are excessively praised merely for attempting to speak English, regardless of fluency or authenticity.

The satirical portrayal of Eugene is particularly effective because it reveals the contradictions embedded in his character. Although he publicly advocates justice and supports democratic ideals through his newspaper, he simultaneously reproduces violence and tyranny within his household. This contradiction underscores one of the novel’s major thematic concerns: the coexistence of public morality and private oppression.

Humour and satire therefore function not merely as comic relief but as critical instruments for interrogating power, hypocrisy, colonial mimicry, and social dysfunction.

Characterization

Characterization is one of Adichie's greatest artistic strengths in *Purple Hibiscus*. The characters are psychologically complex and socially representative, functioning both as individuals and as embodiments of broader ideological tensions within Nigerian society.

Eugene Achike, for instance, represents the intersection of religious fanaticism, patriarchal authority, and colonial alienation. Although he is publicly admired for his philanthropy and moral discipline, his domestic brutality exposes the contradictions underlying his identity. His character illustrates how violence can coexist with social respectability and religious devotion.

Kambili's characterization is equally significant. Her transformation from silence to self-expression reflects the broader thematic movement from repression to liberation. Through her emotional development, Adichie explores questions of identity formation, agency, and resistance within oppressive structures.

Aunty Ifeoma serves as a foil to Eugene. Unlike Eugene's rigid authoritarianism, Ifeoma embodies intellectual freedom, openness, and emotional warmth. Her household in Nsukka represents an alternative model of family and social interaction grounded in dialogue rather than fear. Through this contrast, Adichie

dramatizes competing visions of postcolonial modernity and parenthood.

Jaja's gradual rebellion against his father also symbolizes emerging resistance against authoritarian control. His silence, defiance, and eventual sacrifice reveal the psychological cost of oppression within the family structure.

Adichie's characters are compelling because they are neither idealized nor entirely villainous. They possess emotional depth, contradictions, fears, and vulnerabilities that make them psychologically credible. This realism enhances readers' identification with the characters and strengthens the thematic impact of the novel.

Language

Language constitutes one of the most distinctive features of Adichie's narrative style. Although she writes primarily in English, her linguistic texture is deeply rooted in Igbo cultural consciousness. Her prose reflects what postcolonial critics describe as the "Africanization" of the English language—the adaptation of English to express indigenous experiences, worldviews, and speech patterns.

Adichie's language is notable for its clarity, rhythm, and cultural authenticity. She frequently incorporates Igbo

expressions, proverbs, idioms, and forms of address into the narrative, thereby preserving cultural specificity while enriching the texture of the novel. This linguistic hybridity reflects the sociolinguistic realities of postcolonial Nigeria, where indigenous languages coexist with English in complex ways.

Her stylistic approach recalls Chinua Achebe's advocacy for a "new English" capable of carrying African experience without losing intelligibility. Like Achebe, Adichie manipulates English creatively to reflect indigenous thought patterns and communicative traditions.

The use of code-switching and untranslated Igbo expressions also reinforces the authenticity of characterization and setting. Rather than domesticating African experience for Western readership, Adichie allows cultural meanings to exist within their original linguistic context. Contemporary postcolonial scholarship regards this strategy as an important form of linguistic resistance and cultural assertion.

Furthermore, Adichie's prose combines simplicity with emotional intensity. Her language remains accessible while simultaneously conveying profound psychological and political meanings. This stylistic balance contributes significantly to the novel's broad global appeal.

Structure of the Novel

The structure of *Purple Hibiscus* is carefully organized to sustain suspense, deepen thematic development, and reflect psychological progression. The narrative is divided into sections associated with religious seasons and temporal shifts, a strategy that reinforces the novel's religious undertones while simultaneously charting the gradual breakdown of authoritarian control within the Achike family.

Adichie employs a non-linear narrative structure that moves between past and present. The novel opens in *medias res* with Jaja's refusal to receive Holy Communion—a moment of crisis that immediately establishes tension and anticipates later conflict. The narrative subsequently returns to earlier events to explain the circumstances leading to this act of defiance.

This structural fragmentation mirrors the instability and emotional repression within the family. It also allows Adichie to gradually reveal traumatic experiences rather than presenting them all at once. Such narrative pacing enhances emotional intensity and reader engagement.

The segmentation of the novel into distinct parts further reflects the gradual transformation of the characters, especially Kambili and Jaja. Their movement from Enugu to Nsukka symbolizes not merely physical relocation but ideological and psychological transition from fear toward self-awareness.

Symbolism and Irony

Symbolism and irony are central to the aesthetic and thematic construction of *Purple Hibiscus*. Achebe employs symbolic motifs to deepen the novel's exploration of freedom, repression, identity, and resistance.

The purple hibiscus itself functions as the central symbol of liberation and transformation. Unlike the conventional red hibiscus in Eugene's compound, the experimental purple hibiscus cultivated by Auntie Ifeoma represents freedom, change, and the possibility of alternative ways of living. It symbolizes the emergence of individuality beyond authoritarian structures.

Similarly, Nsukka operates symbolically as a space of intellectual and emotional liberation. It is in Nsukka that Kambili and Jaja encounter laughter, open conversation, cultural flexibility, and emotional warmth. The environment therefore symbolizes renewal and psychological rebirth.

Jaja's refusal to receive Holy Communion is another powerful symbolic act. His defiance represents resistance against both paternal tyranny and rigid religious dogmatism. The act marks the beginning of psychological rebellion within the family and signals the eventual collapse of Eugene's authority.

Irony is also extensively employed throughout the novel. Eugene, who publicly advocates political freedom and condemns governmental oppression, becomes a domestic tyrant within his own household. This contradiction exposes the hypocrisy that often underlies moral absolutism and public respectability.

The deaths of Ade Coker and other dissident figures in the novel further symbolize the dangers associated with authoritarian political systems in postcolonial African states. Through these symbolic and ironic patterns, Adichie connects domestic violence with national political oppression, suggesting that tyranny operates across both private and public spheres.

Ultimately, Adichie's use of symbolism and irony enriches the novel's interpretive complexity and reinforces its critique of fanaticism, patriarchy, colonial mentality, and authoritarian power.

Half of a Yellow Sun

Half of a Yellow Sun remains one of the most significant African war novels of the twenty-first century. Set during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), the novel revisits the Biafran conflict through an intimate exploration of memory, violence, nationalism, identity, and human survival. More than a historical

reconstruction, the novel interrogates the psychological and emotional consequences of war on individuals and communities.

The continued relevance of the novel lies in its engagement with themes that transcend the Nigerian context: ethnic conflict, displacement, political failure, humanitarian crisis, and the fragility of national identity. In this regard, Adichie transforms a specifically Nigerian historical experience into a broader meditation on violence and human suffering in postcolonial societies.

Critics have frequently described *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a contemporary classic because of its successful fusion of historical realism and narrative artistry. The novel demonstrates Adichie's ability to combine political history with emotionally compelling storytelling without sacrificing literary sophistication. Rather than presenting history as mere documentation, she reconstructs it through personal experiences, memories, relationships, and fragmented narratives.

One of Adichie's major achievements in the novel is her use of descriptive realism. Her vivid depictions of starvation, displacement, bombings, rape, and social disintegration immerse readers in the brutal realities of war. The narrative presents not only physical violence but also psychological devastation and moral collapse. Through detailed imagery and sensory narration, readers

encounter the emotional texture of war rather than simply its historical facts.

Contemporary trauma theory provides an important framework for understanding the novel's narrative structure. Scholars of trauma literature argue that violent historical experiences are often represented through fragmented memory, repetition, silence, and nonlinear narration. Adichie employs these techniques effectively to depict the disorientation and instability associated with war. The result is a narrative that is historically grounded yet emotionally immediate.

The novel also demonstrates Adichie's remarkable ability to humanize history. Rather than focusing exclusively on military events or political leaders, she foregrounds ordinary individuals whose lives are transformed by conflict. Through characters such as Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, and Kainene, the novel explores multiple dimensions of the Biafran experience across class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

Language and Linguistic Style

Language remains one of Adichie's most distinctive artistic strengths in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Her prose combines clarity, emotional depth, and cultural authenticity, allowing the novel to remain accessible while preserving its historical and ideological complexity.

As in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie employs an Africanized English infused with Igbo expressions, idioms, proverbs, and speech rhythms. This linguistic hybridity reflects the postcolonial condition in which indigenous cultural realities are mediated through the English language. Her use of untranslated Igbo expressions reinforces cultural specificity and resists the complete domestication of African experience for Western readership.

Adichie's linguistic strategy aligns with postcolonial theories of language advanced by writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who emphasize the political significance of language in African literature. By reshaping English to accommodate African thought patterns and oral traditions, Adichie asserts cultural agency within a historically colonial language structure.

Another important aspect of her language is its emotional precision. Her prose moves fluidly between tenderness and brutality, intimacy and horror. Scenes of war are narrated with restraint rather than sensationalism, which paradoxically intensifies their emotional impact. This stylistic control contributes significantly to the novel's realism and aesthetic power.

Furthermore, Adichie frequently juxtaposes ordinary domestic conversations with scenes of political violence. This contrast underscores the intrusion of war into everyday life and reinforces the novel's thematic concern

with the collapse of normalcy during periods of national crisis.

Point of View and Narrative Technique

One of the most innovative aspects of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is Adichie's use of multiple focalization and shifting narrative perspectives. Unlike *Purple Hibiscus*, which relies primarily on first-person narration, this novel adopts a third-person omniscient narrative structure that moves among several central characters.

The story is largely filtered through the perspectives of Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard, each of whom represents different social and ideological positions within the Biafran conflict. Through these shifting perspectives, Adichie avoids a simplistic or monolithic representation of history. Instead, the narrative presents war as a complex and contested experience shaped by class, ethnicity, gender, and personal memory.

Ugwu's perspective is particularly significant because it captures the transition from innocence to historical consciousness. As a village boy exposed gradually to intellectual life, military violence, and moral ambiguity, Ugwu becomes both witness and participant in history. His development reflects the broader disillusionment experienced during the war.

Olanna's perspective foregrounds the gendered dimensions of conflict. Through her experiences, Adichie explores displacement, sexual violence, motherhood, emotional trauma, and survival. Richard, as an outsider and foreign observer, complicates questions of belonging, identity, and representation within postcolonial discourse.

The use of multiple narrative voices also enhances the historical realism of the novel. Contemporary historiography increasingly recognizes that history is not singular but constructed through competing perspectives and memories. Adichie's narrative technique reflects this understanding by allowing diverse voices to coexist within the text.

Importantly, the novel's alternating chronology contributes to suspense and emotional intensity. The narrative moves back and forth between the early 1960s and the later years of the war, gradually revealing the transformation of relationships, ideals, and identities under the pressure of violence. This nonlinear structure mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory and prevents the narrative from becoming predictably historical.

Symbolism and Irony

Symbolism plays a central role in the thematic construction of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The title itself

derives from the emblem on the Biafran flag—a rising half of a yellow sun—which symbolizes hope, rebirth, national aspiration, and the dream of self-determination. However, the incomplete nature of the “half” sun also suggests unrealized potential and the tragic collapse of the Biafran project.

The recurring images of hunger and bodily deterioration symbolize the broader destruction of human dignity during war. Starvation becomes not merely a physical condition but a metaphor for political abandonment and collective suffering. Similarly, repeated references to rape symbolize both personal violation and the symbolic violation of Biafra itself.

Professor Okeoma, modeled partly on the historical poet Christopher Okigbo, symbolizes intellectual nationalism and revolutionary idealism. His eventual death reflects the collapse of revolutionary optimism and the devastating human cost of ideological struggle.

Irony is equally significant in the novel. Political leaders who claim to defend the people frequently exploit the war for personal gain, while intellectuals advocating nationalism often remain powerless before military realities. Adichie uses these contradictions to critique corruption, elite opportunism, and the moral ambiguities of political struggle.

Religious hypocrisy is also subjected to satirical treatment in the novel. Certain religious figures exploit the vulnerability of displaced civilians while presenting themselves as moral authorities. Through such portrayals, Adichie critiques the manipulation of religion within moments of social crisis.

Plot Structure and Embedded Narrative

The structure of *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflects Adichie's sophisticated narrative craftsmanship. The novel alternates between pre-war and wartime periods, creating a layered temporal structure that gradually reveals the emotional and political consequences of the conflict.

This fragmented chronology serves several important functions. First, it sustains suspense by withholding key events until later sections of the narrative. Second, it allows readers to compare life before and during the war, thereby highlighting the magnitude of social collapse. Third, it mirrors the psychological disorientation produced by trauma and memory.

One of the most significant metafictional elements in the novel is the embedded text titled *The World Was Silent When We Died*. This internal narrative functions as a commentary on historical silence and global indifference toward African suffering. The gradual revelation that Ugwu—not Richard—is the actual author of the text carries important ideological implications. It reclaims

narrative authority for Africans themselves and challenges colonial assumptions about who possesses the legitimacy to document African history.

The embedded narrative therefore transforms the novel into both a story about war and a meditation on historical representation itself. Adichie raises important questions concerning memory, authorship, voice, and the politics of storytelling.

Characterization

Characterization in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is exceptionally nuanced and psychologically compelling. Adichie creates multidimensional characters whose emotional complexities reflect the instability and contradictions of wartime existence.

Olanna and Kainene represent contrasting responses to privilege, gender expectations, and emotional survival. While Olanna is empathetic and emotionally expressive, Kainene is pragmatic, emotionally guarded, and economically resourceful. Their relationship reflects broader tensions involving class, femininity, and personal identity.

Ugwu's transformation constitutes one of the novel's most important character arcs. Initially naive and impressionable, he gradually becomes exposed to the moral ambiguities of war, including his participation in

acts of violence. His development complicates simplistic notions of innocence and victimhood.

Kainene's disappearance near the end of the novel remains one of Adichie's most powerful narrative decisions. The unresolved nature of her fate reflects the incompleteness of historical closure after traumatic conflict. Her absence symbolizes the countless lives erased or permanently altered by war.

Adichie's characterization is particularly effective because her characters are deeply human rather than merely symbolic figures. They embody ideological tensions while retaining emotional credibility and psychological depth.

Satire and Social Critique

Adichie employs satire to expose corruption, opportunism, and moral hypocrisy during wartime. Political elites and military officials who profit from collective suffering are sharply criticized throughout the novel. The narrative condemns the exploitation of humanitarian crises for personal enrichment and political ambition.

The novel also satirizes intellectual elitism and ideological romanticism. Some characters speak passionately about revolution and nationalism while remaining disconnected from the realities of suffering

experienced by ordinary civilians. Through this critique, Adichie questions the ethical limitations of abstract political rhetoric.

Additionally, religious manipulation is presented critically through characters who exploit faith for social influence or personal gain during moments of desperation. This reinforces the novel's broader interrogation of institutional hypocrisy.

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Conclusion

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* demonstrate the centrality of narrativity in thematic realization. Across both novels, she employs sophisticated narrative strategies—including focalization, symbolism, nonlinear chronology,

descriptive realism, satire, and linguistic hybridity—to deepen thematic complexity and emotional engagement.

Her fiction illustrates that literary meaning emerges not merely from subject matter but from the artistic manner through which stories are told. Adichie’s narrative techniques transform personal experiences into broader reflections on trauma, memory, violence, religion, nationalism, identity, and resistance within postcolonial African society.

Ultimately, Adichie’s achievement lies in her successful fusion of historical consciousness, political critique, and aesthetic innovation. Her novels remain significant not only for their thematic relevance but also for their contribution to the evolution of contemporary African narrative form.

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