

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

ECHOIC RHETORIC OF IRONY AND REVERSAL OF DESIRE IN “THE ULTIMATE SAFARI” BY NADINE GORDIMER

Amina Mehmood¹, Amina Qadeer², Samra Hafeez³

^{1,2,3}Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology,
Lahore.

E. mail: [1amina.mehmood@umt.edu.pk](mailto:amina.mehmood@umt.edu.pk), [2amina.qadeer@umt.edu.pk](mailto:amina.qadeer@umt.edu.pk)

[3samra.hafeez@umt.edu.pk](mailto:samra.hafeez@umt.edu.pk)

Amina Mehmood, Amina Qadeer, Samra Hafeez. Echoic Rhetoric Of Irony And Reversal Of Desire In “The Ultimate Safari” By Nadine Gordimer-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 19(3), 189-195. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Rhetoric Of Irony, Reversal Of Desire In Irony, Ironic Echoes In “The Ultimate Safari”

ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at investigating the role of irony and reversal of desire in Nadine Gordimer's short story titled “The Ultimate Safari”. An ironically rhetoric title of the story “The Ultimate Safari” suggests the opposing dynamics between the title and the story. The use of irony is echoic in the narrative and suggestive in the progression of the story as it stands out in the end. Since irony and its role in postmodern writing is challenging, it foreshadows the reversal in the story. By relating the ideas of Relevance Theory, this particular research has explored the implicit meanings in “The Ultimate Safari” by tracing the ironic instances in the narrative which lead towards the reversal of desire. By building upon images, metaphors and ironical language, it has discovered that irony generates desires but these desires are meant to be unfulfilled. It has explained the rising of expectations and their reversed and changed reality. This research is concluded by highlighting the ironic opposition and reversal of expectations that unravel the façade of ironical rhetoric in the story.

INTRODUCTION

“The Ultimate Safari”, a postmodern short story written by Nadine Gordimer, offers an ironic view that is enveloped in the fabric of the story. The narrative recounts the plight of a refugee family that flees from its home town due to violence and war-like situation. The family passes through Kruger Park and throughout their journey the protagonist, who is a child narrator, keeps expecting to ultimately reach “home”. The motif of journey is a powerful symbol that raises desires among the characters to reach somewhere in the

end. The narrative of the child also builds expectations in readers to "expect" something to happen. An ironically rhetoric title of the story "The Ultimate Safari" suggests the opposing dynamics between the title and the story. It is seen towards the end that all the expectations and desires built up through the rhetorical use of irony get reversed. The expectation to find or reach the "ultimate" does not only remain unfulfilled but also gets reversed. The ironical language is structurally embedded in the framework of the story that illustrates the discrepancy between what is anticipated to be true and what is actually true. The use of irony is suggestive and echoic in the progression of the narrative. This research tends to define and explore that irony covers not only the cases of direct and immediate echoes but also raises some standard expectations.

By relating the Relevance Theory of Irony, the notion of echoic presence of irony as a postmodern rhetorical motif in writing is traced and focused upon in this research. The title of Gordimer's story "The Ultimate Safari" itself gives an impression that it has an implicit and reversed meaning. The meaning of the title generates desire and raises expectations among the readers as well as among the characters of the story for a final destination. This particular research is a type of implicit criticism which suggests the idea that irony fabricates expectations but these expectations are meant to be unfulfilled. By building upon more cognitive terms, metaphors and imagistic presence in the story, it will discover the facade of irony and its opposite outcome. Moreover, it will explain the rising of desired expectations and their violated reversal and changed reality.

A rhetorically ironic title of the story "The Ultimate Safari" suggests that the framework of the story is structured in contrasting dynamics. This research is particularly focused upon the charisma of irony and its immediate as well as gradual repercussions in the story. Irony, present in the story, urges its readers to see the "ultimate" or final objective. This research tends to show the final desired objective in a reversed order and reality in a subversive manner.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To identify and analyse that how ironical instances in "The Ultimate Safari" generate desire and raise expectations among the characters as well as the readers
- To critically examine the role of irony as a rhetorical device to showcase the reversal of reality in the story

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This particular research is significant in terms of identifying and examining the rhetoric of irony and the element of foreshadowing which plays a dynamic and reversed role in the progression of the narrative of "The Ultimate Safari". It highlights the distinctive role of irony as a literary device that possesses an intrinsic quality of raising expectations and reversing them. The thorough exploration of Gordimer's narrative with the lens of ironical rhetoric makes

this research significant as it foregrounds the effectiveness of irony in the subversion of desires.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Irony is a rhetorical device, a literary technique or a situation in which there is a sharp incongruity or discordance that goes beyond the simple and evident intention of words or actions. In the field of rhetorical studies, irony is a vast subject of analysis. By implying this device, meanings of a particular text can be interpreted in varied ways. A wide range of modern and post-modern theorists and rhetoricians claim its importance and argue that "today, irony is a powerful rhetorical tool whose role in creating meanings should not be underestimated" (Shugart 433). Different linguists, theorists and practitioners of irony, after experimenting with it, do not deny its diversity and complex nature.

By dealing with a challenging topic of study, modern and post-modern theorists have proposed their ideas and structures of irony multifariously. Formation and framework of ironical language is a challenging task to them. According to Wilde, post-modernist irony is "cultivating multiplicity and fragmentation" (qtd. in Shugart 434). By fragmentation, it means that irony is non-cohesive and unreliable. Its unpredictability is shown when it is considered as an "off record strategy" (Brown 211). It is done off record because "it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act" (Brown 211). According to Brown and Levinson irony in this way, is an ideal strategy to avoid any responsibilities.

If on one hand irony does not bear any responsibility, on the other hand, it is the defiance of truth. In the field of linguistics, many linguists have developed their ideas both in its favour and negation. Grice is of the view that irony is an "overt violation of the maxim of truthfulness" (qtd. in Liberman). Ironical remarks are made to disregard the authenticity of truth. Irony in this way does not show truth according to Grice. Irony, by implying opposite words, does show truth. This literary technique is much concerned with truth, validity and relevance to the actual situation, no matter it represents itself through an opposing mechanism.

Sperber and Wilson's theoretical work on the relevance of irony is the key to the fact that irony has a relatable faculty. Relevance Theory theorizes that irony relates the actual truth. Sperber and Wilson are of the view that "every utterance comes with a guarantee of faithfulness" (139). An utterance is divided into implicit and explicit meanings. This generates desires among the readers to expect something as it alludes towards reality yet in the end, it turns out to be the opposite. The essence of irony lies in the fact that it is grounded on opposing dynamics and it works in duality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This research is qualitative in nature. It explores the dynamic and dual role of irony in "The Ultimate Safari" by doing a detailed textual analysis. The theoretical ideas of "Relevance" proposed by Sperber and Wilson support the

concept of finding meanings through ironical instances in the text. The implicit and explicit meanings are interpreted in the story by tracing down the "echoic" and "rhetoric" faculty of irony. According to Sperber and Wilson irony gives an echo of relevance to truth and it also raises desires and hopes. The search for relevance and faithfulness is a basic feature of human cognition. Keeping in view these facts and analysing the "echoes" of irony, this paper makes an effort to show the authenticity of truth, shown in an ironic way. By building upon more cognitive terms, metaphors, imagistic presence in the story, it is analysed that irony reveals reality but it also adds to the fact that though irony fabricates expectations, these expectations are meant to be unfulfilled. Facade of irony generates hopes but reality unveils itself in a reversed, violated and changed form.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Highly rhetoric language bedecks and enhances the flavour of already ironical statements in the course of the story as the narrative proceeds. The title of the story "The Ultimate Safari" is in itself very rhetoric and ironic. The word 'ultimate' immediately suggests that the characters as well as the readers of the story are going to see something in finality and meet their destination. Its relation with the very word 'safari' demonstrates that journey is going to reach its ultimate ending point. 'Ultimate' also echoes of a desire or an expectation, seem to be fulfilling. Sperber and Wilson, in a chapter "Irony and Relevance", state a remark by arguing that ironical statements are "necessarily echoic" (283). In the same chapter, they relate that irony echoes of real and imaginary thoughts and it also echoes of "norms and standard expectations or desires" (284). The "ultimate safari" has urged a desire, undoubtedly, but as the story leads to its progression, this desire does not seem to be fulfilled. During the course of the story, hope is kindled and rekindled to reach a home and find a "roof" (Gordimer 17). When this roof is sought, it is not a final roof. Standard desire and expectation again subverts itself, and journey does not end.

Through an innocent child, story is narrated with hopes; hopes that are not to be fulfilled. Smell of unfulfillment lingers and sense of awaiting in the narration remains in the air of the story. Journey through "Kruger Park" (13) goes on and almost covers the half of the story. "To get there we had to go through the Kruger Park. We knew about the Kruger Park" (13). To reach a final, safe and stable place, an innocent girl narrator, along with her family, has to pass through a "whole country of animals" (13). This animal park is so long that destiny is far and comes very late and the characters are "walking, walking, any time, all the time" (15) and the readers are awaiting, awaiting and looking forward for an end. The sense of wait aggravates the desire of finality and gives an echo of conclusiveness.

The whole scene painted at the canvas of the Kruger Park is full of ambiguities, doubts and ironic proclamations. The aura created in the narration, while at the stay in the park, is fully ironic. In the park, there is no dangerous animal in fact, yet apparently it seems that it is full of animals. "We followed the animals to where they drank. [...] the only food we could eat was what the baboons eat" (14). Human beings eating baboons' food and wishing to "lie down like the lions" (14) suggest that environment is ironic as "in order

for an utterance to be ironic, a speaker must utter in a situation surrounded by an ironic environment" (Utsumi 963). These subtle and deft touches of irony give an impression that characters in the story have lost their identity of being humans and are trying to empathize themselves with animals. From human species, they want to turn into animals because animals "ate, ate all the time" but "there [is] nothing for [them]" (Gordimer 14). Their ironic remarks are actually showing their reality and misery in which they are. Their journey is troublesome and the way out of it is the way out from the Kruger Park where another gloom is waiting for them, in the guise of 'ultimate' or final destiny.

Imagistic presence in the story has also a stroke of irony in it. There is a strong sense of subversion and defencelessness of the characters. Images, apart from being ironical, are also very animal like. They are suggestive of the view that the characters are fragile and vulnerable against the mastery of the Park and the heavy odds of their journey. Characters are forced to leave their 'house' and they run as "chickens [are] chased by dogs" (11). Struck with fear, narrator's little brother is clung against her neck with his legs around her waist "like a baby monkey to its mother" (12). Little narrator is sensitive and very keen in her perception while describing these animal like images. She states that they are forced in the park to "move like animals among the animals, away from the roads. . ." (14).

Portrayal of the characters is animal like and ironic, giving an echo and notion that they are being treated like animals. The young girl narrates that "it [is] hard to be like the animals" (14), yet she wants to "lie down like the lions" (14). Her desire to be brave like a lion echoes that she is not plucky, as she is very young, but she wants a Dutch courage to fight against the inequalities and miseries. Characters ironic depiction, in fact, reveals their true reality. As irony, according to Sperber and Wilson's ideas, is capable of showing reality through contrasts.

There is a volley of metaphors employed in story. Desires and expectations are buried in these metaphors. Hopes and wishes which are unspoken, find their way in a metaphoric language which can be cognitive and perceptive in finding the literal meanings. The metaphor of "roof" appears at the very beginning of the story, ". . . the roof of our houses fell in" (11). Characters are homeless and roofless from the very beginning. Their whole struggle, forceful migration and exile from their homes, is in the need of roof. While passing through the Kruger Park, roof is given to them. First, having lost their own roof, they sleep under the umbrella of open sky in the Kruger Park. Later a tent becomes the roof as the narrator says "of course, there really is a roof—the tent is the roof, far, high up. It's like a sky. It's like a mountain and we are inside it" (17). Tent is both a sky and mountain. It is ephemeral and temporary. The metaphor of tent only shows that their roof is not permanent and it is not given to them for forever and also it is not an 'ultimate' thing. Homeless characters also find a home in the shape of tent, but their expectation related with the idea of home is never fulfilled. It turns out in subversion and again the girl wants to go back to its earlier home. As she says, "I'll go back. I'll go back through that Kruger Park" (20). And she also

expects that her lost mother and grandfather would be there. "They will be home and I'll remember them" (20). Reality of home is reversed in the end.

The real acoustic sense of irony is heard in the word 'safari'. It is now clear that their journey is not 'ultimate'. But 'safari' in itself as a separate entity echoes something more. Safari is defined as a "journey, especially to Africa, in order to watch, take pictures of, or hunt wild animals" ("safari"). In the course of the story, characters, passing through Kruger Park, reach their final destination, which is not 'ultimate' in fact. In their way, they watch animals, but the irony of the situation is that they are being watched and are afraid of being hunted. 'Safari' has a reversed and an implicit meaning that is employed to show the real situation of diasporic characters in the story. They "move like animals among the animals, away from the roads, away from the white people's camps" (14). As animals move away from hunters, in the same way, characters move away, fearful of being hunted. Animals in a safari park are looked at, here characters are afraid to be gazed at. When they 'finally' reach the camp and stay in the tent, their pictures are taken. As the narrator captures the scene and describes "some white people came to take photographs of our people living in the tent—they said they were making a film" (20). In a safari park, photos of animals are taken but in the story characters are being pictured and captured through white people's cameras. The wordplay and pun on the word 'safari' truly plays an ironic role. Identity of the characters is changed through irony. Their expectations are not fulfilled. Instead of finding a final home, they are lingering between a temporary tent and 'not to be found' future home. Reality is, thus, changed and reversed. Expectations remain an illusion and are unfulfilled. What is considered 'an ultimate safari' is a mockery of the real situation.

CONCLUSION:

In short, it is revealed that ironical instances in the story raise desires and expectations among the readers as well as the characters but they turn out in a reversed form of reality. The role of irony in the story strongly affirms the ability of language to mould the perception of the characters and perceive irony as truth. The characters ultimately meet the reversal of their desires and keep lingering in the suspension of disbelief as their "ultimate" desire to find home does not come true.

WORKS CITED

Primary Source:

Gordimer, Nadine. "The Ultimate Safari." *Jump*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991. 11-20.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Brown, R. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. Googlebooks.

Lieberman, Mark. *Is Irony Universal?*. Language Log. Permalink, 22Oct, 2009. "Safari." Macmillan Dictionary. Macmillan P, 2014.

- Shugart, Helene. "Postmodern Irony as Subversive Rhetorical Strategy." *Western Journal of Communication* 63.4 (2009): 433-455. JSTOR.
- Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. "Irony and Relevance: A Reply to Seto, Hamamoto and Yamanashi." *Relevance Theory*. Ed. Robyn Carston and Seiji Uchida. USA: John Benjamins, 1984. 283-294. Googlebooks.
- . . . "Representation and Relevance." *Mental Representation: The Interference between Language and Reality*. Ed. Ruth M. Kempson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 133-153. Googlebooks.
- Utsumi, Akira. "A Unified Theory of Irony and its Computational Formalization." *Tokyo Institute of Technology* 31.2 (1995): 962-967. Project Muse.