

REFRAMING THE I-NARRATOR IN TADE THOMPSON'S *ROSEWATER*: *THE WORMWOOD TRILOGY, BOOK ONE*

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ABSTRACT

This article is grounded on Tade Thompson's *Rosewater*. It investigates the reframing of the I-narrator in this 2018 novel. Its thrust is to demonstrate that the first-person narrator is not always empirically reliable, for it can infringe norms of classical narratology following the rules of postclassical narratology. This assumption is first implemented through the narratorial reliability of the first person which is analyzed by means of both its homodiegetic posture and its limited access to information. Second, the I-narrator's omnitemporality, omnipresence and telepathic potencies epitomize its unreliability. Third, a conclusive critique of the first-person narrator suggests its ambivalent posture : subjective and objective consciousnesses. This critique also encompasses the identity crisis of the unreliable narrator. Based on narratology which is perse the study of narrative categories, this study is mainly anchored in Gérard Genette's poetics. Its objective is to show that the multiplicity of narratorial postures of the protagonist-narrator in the diegesis contributes to the renewal of fiction writing in African literature.

Keywords : I, narratology, postclassical, reliability, unreliability

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'appuie sur le roman *Rosewater* de Tade Thompson. Il étudie le recadrage du I-narrateur dans ce roman de 2018. Son but est de démontrer que le narrateur à la première personne n'est pas toujours empiriquement fiable, car il peut enfreindre les normes de la narratologie classique, suivant les règles de la narratologie postclassique. Cette hypothèse est d'abord mise en œuvre à travers la fiabilité narratoriale de la première personne qui est analysée à la fois par le biais de sa posture homodiégétique et de son accès limité à l'information. Deuxièmement, l'omnitemporalité, l'omniprésence et les pouvoirs télépathiques du narrateur I illustrent son manque de fiabilité. Troisièmement, une critique récapitulative du narrateur à la première personne suggère sa posture ambivalente: consciences subjective et objective. Cette critique englobe également la crise d'identité du narrateur non fiable. Avec la narratologie en filigrane qui est elle-même l'étude des catégories narratives, cette étude est principalement ancrée dans la poétique de Gérard Genette. Elle a pour objectif de montrer que la multiplicité des postures narratives du protagoniste-narrateur dans la diégèse contribue au renouvellement de l'écriture romanesque dans la littérature africaine.

Mots-clés: I, faillibilité, fiabilité, narratologie, postclassique..

INTRODUCTION

Since its outset and throughout the period that saw the glorious centuries of traditional novel, fiction creation has continuously been governed by the “established premises” (Grishakova, 2006, p. 12) of “narratology” that is “the study of narrative structures” (Barry, 2002, p. 222). In this context, the plethora of novelistic works published in that era paid much attention to classical narratology. But, with the recent developments that have ushered in a more flexible approach to narrative, a drift away from the structuralist model of narratology with its canon of predestined laws is getting more and more obvious on the literary scene. As a matter of fact, postclassical narratology which “emphasiz[es] the dynamics of narration”, compared to “classical narratology” that is a “closed system” (Alber and Fludernik, 2010, p. 6), readily paves the way for the reframing of existent narrative categories. These ones focus on the transgression of the first person narrator. Postclassical narratology views this subversion as the narratorial unreliability of the I-narrator.

The debates about unreliable narration has aroused a good deal of attention from authors. Nikolai Gogol in his story *The Overcoat* taunts narrative canon and stands in breach of them, with the I-protagonist-narrator betraying private thoughts. This narrator takes on the traits of a third person narrator by divulging scenes kept unobserved so far. In Marcel Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann*, Marcel (a first person narrator) knows what escapes from secrecy in Swann’s mind as well as any third person narrator could. In the later episodes of *Ulysses*, James Joyce instates a few wandering private thoughts of one individual with the consciousness of an oblivious other. If the aforementioned works predicate the exclusive narratological scope of the first person narrative, other works emphasize its celestial dimension. This is sparked in Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* that is narrated by the deceased I protagonist Susie Salmon who has cognizance of all events occurring everywhere. So far as it is concerned, Marcus Zuzak’s *The Book Thief* is also narrated by an unreliable I-narrative which is Death itself. *Rosewater* (2018) by the Nigerian science-fiction novelist Tade Thompson¹ emulates Sebold and Zuzak. Its narration is told by Kaaro the I protagonist-narrator whose telepathic potencies allow reading other people’s minds and hacking into their thoughts, emotions and memories. Such prowess is possible owing to his connection to the xenosphere: an alternative cybernetic network designed by the invading extraterrestrials.

This paper investigates the double narratological assumption deployed in *Rosewater*. It seeks to show that while the novel complies with ethics of classical narratology, its narratives also infringe this mainstream view and adopts norms of postclassical narratology. This means that the first person narrator is not only reliable but that it is also untrustworthy in Thompson’s fiction. In clear terms, it shows that the homodiegetic and reliable I narrator oversteps the boundaries of reliability and homodiegenity. It therefore becomes untrustworthy and all-knowing narrator. Its unreliability is seen in the fact that it does not operate in accordance with the norms of the implied author². And a good way to expand upon this point is to first labor the reliability of the I narrator. Second, the work tackles its unreliability. Third, the narrative consciousness of the I-narrator is the last focus.

1. POLITICS OF A NARRATORIAL RELIABILITY: THE I-NARRATOR

In studying the narrative categories of the traditional novel, one of the academic preoccupations of narratologists when dealing with the first-person monological fiction is the issue related to the reliability of the I-narrator. According to the immanent epistemologies of the structuralist model of narratology that govern such deterministic works, the I protagonist-character in fiction is “reliable” (Booth, 1961: 158) : its

¹ Science-Fiction is a nascent genre that is developing in the scope of fiction in Africa, and that took root in Nigeria. With his trilogy titled *The Wormwood Trilogy*, of which *Rosewater* is the number one work, Tade Thompson follows suit the pioneering leaders of this Africa’s speculative fiction, viz. his compatriots Deji Bryce Olukotun and Nnedi Okorafor.

² A term coined by Wayne Booth. In the Boothian sense, the complex problem of reliable and unreliable narrators involves the persona or the implied author. The implied author or ‘second self’ is central to the act of effective reading. It represents the sum of all the author’s conscious choices in a realized and more complete self as ‘artist’.

speech or act is in conformity with the conventions of the implied author or persona, which itself “represents the sum of all the author’s conscious choices in a realized and more complete self as ‘artist’” (2006, p. 171) following Peter Childs and Roger Fowler. This implies that the first person narrator is reliable. The reason is that it is dislodged from the narrative scope that is configured by both classical narratology and the canon imprinted by the implied narrator; the latter being the discursive consciousness of the author. A better way of delineating the contours of the I-narrator’s reliability through unflinching devotion to implied author’s ethics can be done through the politics of homodiegetic narration in *Rosewater*.

First, in Thompson’s novel, the first person is homodiegetic category when its opinions, thoughts and understandings of the enviroing world are personal cognitive experiences. His narration emanates from what is given for him to see by the implied narrator. In *Rosewater*, such a contention is buttressed as follows: “I hear draggings [...] I wish I had my gun with me. I examine my phone. I have both charge and signal, so I dial Aminat’s phone. I ignore the many notifications for messages that no doubt come from my boss” (Thompson, 2018, p. 65). The perception of fear and danger instigated by heavy footfalls approaching with slow and retarding motion, augmented by the idea of loss for not having taken a gun illustrates Kaaro’s own experience and the fearful emotions that distress him. Kaaro stands out as homodiegetic first person narrator because he appears to be seized with fright at the knowledge of an imminent attack by enemies. His dull perceptions as well as his troubled emotions and restless thoughts such as suggested in the above statement also confirm his homodiegeity.

In the narratives of Thompson’s *Rosewater*, the compliance with the norms of classical narratology is strongly emphasized. As a proof, the homodiegetic posture of the I-narrator falls in with Gérard Genette’s hermeneutic insight on this narrative category in literary texts. This can be apprehended through the premise that the homodiegetic narrative voice is the one which “takes part in [the story], at least in some manifestation of his self” (1980, p. 225-6). Reading the narratives of *Rosewater* through the lens of **Genette**’s stance may reveal that Kaaro is the like of homodiegetic narrators. For a fact, he takes part in the diegesis by being the protagonist-narrator. Also noted is the contention that Kaaro’s emotions, perceptions of things and thoughts experienced as a first-person narrative voice best epitomize the manifestation of the self as suggested by **Genette**.

Second, a premise that predicates the reliability of the homodiegetic first – person is its limited access to information stored on the minds of the characters. The following situation from the novel is enough telling. On paying Bola a visit in *Rosewater*, Kaaro acquaints with people of whom he has just got information. Here is the quintessence of his narration: “Dele Martinez is rotund, jolly but quiet. I’ve met him many times before and we get along well” and later “Bola introduces the woman as Aminat, a sister, although the way she emphasises the word, this could mean an old friend who is as close as family rather than a biological sibling” (Thompson, 2018, p. 10). This quote shows Kaaro’s speculation about the other characters’ physical appearance and knowledge. This situation means that Kaaro has very little psychological information about Dele Martinez and Aminat. This information is hidden to him since the narratorial clauses of his homodiegeity do not grant him such a privilege. On this account, the narrator cannot give to the reader an account of their unsaid and unraised emotions and feelings.

Through the limited first person point-of-view in *Rosewater*, Thompson seems to be lenient to the sacrosaint ethics. In this work, the classical homodiegetic first-person voices are labelled reliable when they have a restricted point of view. This reductionism prevents them from knowing thoughts and emotions on the minds of characters they exchange with in the diegesis. The Nigerian author seems to hold a brief for Brian Richardson who defines the homodiegetic narrator as “[a] first person narrator [who] cannot know what is in the minds of others “ (2006, p. 6). Furthermore and more interestingly enough, the structuralist model of narrative study predicates the limited point of view the I-narrator upon the deliberate artistic (but also more importantly classical narratological) choice of the author to do so. The following locus from Ivdit Diasamidze gives evidence on the issue expanded upon:

The use of first-person point of view places still another restriction on the voice that tells the story. It involves the author's decision to limit his omniscience to what can be known by a single character. [...] As with limited omniscience, first-person narration is tightly controlled and limited in its access to information. The first-person narrator, while free to speculate, can only report information that falls within his own first-hand knowledge of the world or what he comes to learn second hand from others (2014, p.162).

As a sequel to the foregone idea one may posit that, through the limitations imposed on the point of view of the protagonist-narrator Kaaro, Thompson seems to subscribe to the ethos of classical narratology. And he aligns himself with classical narratologists, as he frames the voice of a homodiegetic, reliable and limited-point-of-view first-person narrator in his narratives. Even if he refers to himself as I in the story, even if he is free to speculate, Kaaro's omniscience is still limited. His telling is "tightly" controlled by the ossified narratological conventions that configure Thompson's craftsmanship.

Truly speaking, the narratives of *Rosewater* are ostensibly permeated with the abundant occurrence of the reliable first-person narrator so as to assert that the novel complies to the "mimetic contract" (Richardson, 2006, p. 1) of the traditional novel. However, a closer scrutiny of the work reveals the defamiliarization of deterministic narratological conventions and pretensions.

2. UNRELIABILITY OF THE I-NARRATOR

While scrutinizing the narratives of *Rosewater*, a striking narratological prowess that is blatantly exposed is Thompson's reframing of the first-person narrator. Whilst being conversant with the Nigerian author's 2018 novel, the literary innovation that is brought in is the narratological unreliability of the I-narrator. At odds with the reliable narrator which is lenient to the ethos of the persona³, the untrustworthy "narrator [is the one] whose values [...] diverge from those of the implied author" (Prince, 1987, p. 701) in the postclassical sense of narratology. Of note is that Thompson's *Rosewater* underscores extreme acts of narration. For a fact, the author refuses to exclusively ground his model of narration on the mimetic epistemologies that govern the first person narrator. That is why in his fiction, the I-narrator infringes the norms of the implied author (those of homodiegetic narrator) and becomes an omniscient narrator. Being an omniscient narrator implies that the first person in *Rosewater* surprisingly emulates the features of the all-knowing "he" narrator of traditional fiction. In *Rosewater*, the taxonomy of the omniscient first-person narrator falls into three categories following Williams Nielles' 2006 article "Omniscience for Atheists : Or, Jane Austen's Infaillible Narrator".

In a first instance, Thompson predicates the first person narrator's omniscience upon omnitemporality. It shows the mobility of the first-person narrator throughout different temporalities. Specifically, omnitemporality indicates that the I-narrator pieces together events from the past and upcoming happenings while standing in the present. *Rosewater* depicts the first-person narrator's omnitemporality through Kaaro's analeptical recountings. On seeing some human bones in a hide-out, Kaaro delves into the past through his connection to the xenosphere by means of which he underscores the truth underlying such deaths. The protagonist-narrator recounts:

I feel for the xenosphere [...] I feel fear, death and predation. I see snatches of faces: black, white, Pakistani, male and female, all terrified. I can feel each person reaching for images of their loved ones. I can tell that they all died in here, some begging, some unconscious, some fighting, all in fear. The last thing they saw was a pale demonic image. Distorted and different for each person, but that is normal as well (Thompson, 2018, p. 129)

In this passage, the narratives are also rife with proleptical occurrences throughout the first-person narrator's omnitemporality. Although he tells us past events, Kaaro is also endowed with the power of foreshadowing events that evolve in a future timespan as the narratives unfold. Such prolepsis occurs as he connects himself

³ Persona is synonymous with the implied author

to the xenosphere. Kaaro is able to presage his girlfriend Aminat's nearly escape from a fire-ridden building explosion. The narrator posits in illustration:

I fly higher than the highest floating person [...] I make a rookie mistake and think briefly of Aminat, and I am taken to her, a black fire with dark tongues of flame that burn. I soar away from this, disconcerted. I do not want to know what she thinks unless she wishes to tell me (Thompson, 2018, p. 25).

The ubiquity or the back and forth movements of Kaaro in different temporal logics suffice to assert that this first-person narrator is endowed with omniscient potency such as advocated by postclassical narratology. In corroboration, David Lodge's assumption that novels showing conspicuously "daring time-shifts backwards and forwards across the chronological span of the action," persuades him "it is perhaps in this respect that authorial omniscience most closely mimics the omniscience of God, who alone knows the beginning and end" (1970, p. 237).

Furthermore, in *Rosewater*, Thompson likens omniscience of the first-person narrator to his omnipresence, that is, his capacity of being everywhere and of seeing everything in single time-frame. Owing to his connection to the xenosphere, Kaaro can mediate several spatial layers at a time. From an unknown "place" where he has been "floating in zero gravity" (Thompson, 2018, p. 348), the protagonist-narrator is skyrocketed to a galactic abode where he has "no idea of travelling in the Milky Way" (Thompson, 2018, p. 348). Then, he lands "in a city, London, right on a park, Hyde Park" (Thompson, 2018, p. 348). Finally, he is thrown into Anthony Salermo's body where he "strip [s] off the skin first, examine [s] hair, nails, organelles, sweat glands, pores, bacteria on the skin, patches of fungal disease, scars, sebaceous glands, tiny blood vessels, tattoos, melanocytes, fat cells" (Thompson, 2018, p. 348).

The foregone lci offer a glimpse into the specific agenda of postclassical narratologists. The latter view the first-person narrator as a category that reports simultaneous happenings located in different abodes, which is an attribute of omniscience. Basing on Joseph Hillis Miller, a protagonist-narrator like Kaaro is conferred with omniscience since he has the ability to "go everywhere and see everything" with complete knowledge of present events and "this perfect knowledge is rather that of pervasive presence" (1968, p. 69), he explains. We can trace, in the ubiquity of Kaaro, very marked changes of judgement and appreciation of narrative places in which he is pervasively present. These alterations and refractions account for the first person narrator's omniscience in the narratives.

In a last instance, the author of *Rosewater* likens telepathy to another category of omniscience. In Thompson's contention, the first-person narrator purportedly becomes omniscient in postclassical model of narratology when he has the capability to directly communicate with other characters through the process of mind reading: "I can read minds" (Thompson, 2018, p. 15), Kaaro exemplifies. From Nelles' insights, the notion of telepathy as expanded upon in the narratives of *Rosewater* transpires. For the critic, "telepathy or mind reading, the ability to narrate characters' thoughts and feelings" is an "attribute of omniscience" (Nelles, 2006, p. 121). In reading Thompson's fiction, one is brought to believe that reporting or summarizing characters' thoughts has a double semantic value. On the one hand, telepathy concerns reading characters' minds and predicts what they intend to do. Kaaro the narrator is a 'sensitive': someone who has developed unequivocal and parapsychological potencies to the point of sensitivity to the minds of other people. This enables him to hack into their thoughts and tell in advance what they are about to do in the coming minutes. Once he consults an internet hacker at Olusosun Dump black market to help him download some secret files, Kaaro unravels the mischief being plotted against himself: "Bad Fish, I can read your mind. I know you intend to keep a copy and will attempt to extort money from me" (Thompson, 2018, p. 195).

As it comes out from the foregoing insights, the protagonist-narrator in Thompson's work is the perfect embodiment of first-person omniscient narrators that are celebrated in postclassical models of narration. This posit takes its impetus from the assumption that throughout all the narratives of the novel, Kaaro stands out as a character who is "able to know what goes on in the minds of one or more characters" (Morris, 2004, p. 88). In fact, as he reads Bad Fish's mind and prophesies the latter's nasty intention, Kaaro appears as an

immanent omniscient narrator likened to “an authentic perfection of knowledge” (Miller, 1968: 64). But he is also akin to “the knowledge traditionally ascribed to God” (1968, p. 64) according to Miller’s terms. This is how the protagonist-narrator knows the most secret thoughts of Bad Fish and reveals his treacherous proclivity to his own surprise.

On the other hand, in reading Thompson’s fiction, one is brought to believe that he predicates telepathy upon the first-person, as its cognitive ability inhabits the mind of other characters and tells their identity. In *Rosewater*, cognitive ability allows the first-person narrator to inhabit the minds of characters and to witness their unseen wrongdoings. Thanks to the xenofoms populating the air, the ‘sensitive’ Kaaro gets linked to the xenosphere and readily dwells in the minds of some Nigerian citizens. The following lines apprise of information he gets from their memory: “I am inside all of them. [...] The woman who sleeps with her son-in-law and feels no shame [...]. The reconstructed sex worker with two phalluses” (Thompson, 2018, p. 325). In the above passage, Kaaro’s narratives intersect the genre of an omniscient narrator. Through his ability to probe the mind of other characters, the protagonist- first person’s narrative is akin to this West African model of cyberpunk⁴ fiction. It is a kind of work in which a protagonist-narrator is so empowered that he is thought to pass beyond his own limitations through the interpolations of other characters’ thoughts within his own mind. In illustration, we can read: “The narrator is free to [...] enter [characters’] minds to explore directly their innermost thoughts and feelings” (2005, p. 58), following to T Japaridze.

From reading Thompson’s work, what seems to lie behind the first-person narrator’s omniscience is the intention to predicate that this narrative voice is not always reliable following the principles of classical narratology. The I-narrator can also infringe narratorial truthfulness to conventions as it is the case in *Rosewater*, and become an unflinching advocator of the epistemologies of postclassical narratology. In implementing his rebuttal to the traditional and deterministic model of studying narrative structures, the Nigerian science-fiction writer willingly empowers the first-person narrator in *Rosewater*. Interesting enough, he does it in the same proportion as the omniscient third person narrator is hailed as the monological voice in traditional fiction. Ergo, in eclipsing the “he” narrator in this experimental narrative, the “I” narrative instance necessarily needs to become unreliable so as to satisfy the norms of narrative voice reframing. In the West African novelistic texts, the first-person narrator’s omnitemporality, omnipresence and cognitive abilities to inhabit the mind of other characters demonstrates that he is an unreliable or “untrustworthy” narrator to borrow Susan Lanser’s terms. From her insights, one can argue that Kaaro, the protagonist-narrator of *Rosawater*, is untrustworthy because “his commentary does not accord with conventional notions of sound judgment” (Lanser, 1981, p. 170-171). The I-narrator’s untrustworthiness rides on the idea that it experiences different temporal paradigms. Its capacity of mediating many abodes at a time also hints that it is not trustworthy. Reading the other characters’ minds is finally for the I-narrative a way of subverting the empirical status of homodiegetic narrators in classical narratology.

3. CONCLUSIVE INSIGHTS ON THE I-NARRATOR’S RELIABILITY AND UNRELIABILITY

After having studied the narrative posture of the I-narrator at two levels of inquiry, through its reliability and unreliability, the opening gambit of the recapitulative scope of this work underscores, on the one hand, the ambivalent consciousness of the first-person narrator. According to the Nigerian author, the foregone insights on the reliability of the first person narrator show that there is ample evidence in the narratives of *Rosewater* to support the claim that the novel suggests the subjectivity of the I-narrator. The contention that the I-narrator has a subjective consciousness is blatant in the following locus:

⁴ Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction which emphasizes computer or information technology, and virtual reality, and juxtaposed with a degree of breakdown or radical change in the social order

When I return from Maiduguri I head straight for the dome. No sign that it ever opened. I try to walk around it, but after an hour and three litres of bottled water, I concede that it has grown since I last tried to circumnavigate it, and I'll need a vehicle (Thompson, 2018, p. 84)

This quotation indicates that the narration of events is entrusted to the internal “I” narrator. The events are told from the first-person, Kaaro’s point of view. His return from Maiduguri and movements around the dome means that everything is seen from his perspective. This situation epitomizes the I-narrator’s subjectivity. In illustration, Diasamidze (2014, p. 162) posits that in fiction narratives, first-person narratives are necessarily subjective owing to the assumption that the only thoughts and feelings they experience are personal, their own. The idea is echoed with much pointedness through what Seymour Chatman terms the “slant”. According to Chatman, the slant “delimits the mental activity on *this* side of the discourse-story barrier” (1990, p. 143), meaning that it confines the consciousness, the mental activity of the I-narrator within the bounds or barriers of subjectivity. In fact, Kaaro can be likened unto a slant because he tells about private events. These personal recountings are subjective in the sense that we are only told what Kaaro knows and sees as personal experiences.

Furthermore, the novel also shows that the objectivity of the first-person narrator’s consciousness is based on its unreliability and omniscience. Reading Thompson’s work may suggest that the first-person narrator has an objective consciousness. This occurs in the diegesis when he is aware of thoughts, emotions and feelings that are not his own, but those that engage experiences that concern other characters in the plot. On this account, rather than revealing personal things, the objective consciousness of first-person narratives encompasses all matters that go on in the minds of other people, that is, their inner thoughts and feelings such as illustrated in the following episode in *Rosewater* : “I connect to the xenosphere. [...] There is violence in this man’s head. I see two men alternate kicks and punches between them while their victim tries to stay upright, using his forearms to shield himself as best as he can” (Thompson, 2018, p. 17). Here, through Kaaro, we can postulate that the mental activity of the first person narrator is geared towards the underscoring of others in the diegesis; what Chatman labels “filter”. For the narratologist, the filter is “a good term for capturing something of the mediating function of a character’s consciousness [...] as events are experienced within the story world” (Chatman, 1990, p. 144). The insight suggests that the mediating function of Kaaro’s consciousness should be understood as its capacity of roaming through other people’s hidden thoughts and revealing them. In this case, as events are experienced not on the subjective sphere but within the story world (the objective sphere) in *Rosewater*, one can argue that the protagonist-narrator Kaaro is assumed to be a filter.

Given that the narratives of *Rosewater* bestride the subjective and objective consciousnesses of first-person narrator, one can spearhead the claim that Thompson’s novel is an innovative and experimental work of fiction. This assumption takes its impetus from the fact that the first-person narrator Kaaro has a double consciousness: subjective and objective. Marina Grishakova (2012, p. 147) gives evidence on the subject. Her view can be substantiated through the posit that the first person narrator is a unique blending of subjectivity and objectivity, serving at the same time as ‘shadows’ or manifestations of the higher-order subjectivity.

On the other hand, another area that needs scrutinizing to get hold of the critique of the unreliable first-person narrator and protagonist is the issue related to identity crisis. In his novel, Thompson seems to predicate that the telepathic I that dwells in other characters’ inner thoughts and memories suggests a protagonist-narrator who questions his sense of self. By entering Anthony Salermo’s mind through the xenosphere and fusing with him, Kaaro happens to be engulfed by the latter to the point of a thorough identity crisis, that is, loss of one’s own self. The novel informs in illustration: “The truth is, I feel myself submerging, my identity in question. [...] When I wake, I usually think I am Anthony Salermo. But I am not. I am Kaaro.” (Thompson, 2018, p. 350), the protagonist-narrator evidences. The syntax of the passage suggests that the narrator, Kaaro pays increasing attention to Anthony’s individuality. The same conflation of memories causing a consequent

problem of identity occurs when the telepathic protagonist-narrator gets out of the mind of a character he had previously sneaked into. When identifying himself with a set of Anthony Salermo's ideas, myths, values, and types of knowledge, Kaaro moves from reliability, usefulness, to verifiability. This confirms the state of troubled selfhood he experiences: "It takes a few minutes for me to establish that I am Kaaro, not Anthony. Not Wormwood" (Thompson, 2018, p. 341), the protagonist-narrator of *Rosewater* illustrates.

In her hermeneutical insights on the identity crisis of protagonist-narrators in works of fiction, Grishakova is of the opinion that the likes of unreliable I-narratives who merge with other characters, get into their innermost thoughts and memories lack self-confidence. For her, they are so troubled and downgraded by the heaviness of self-deprecation that they seem to seek refuge and comfort in other characters' selves and personalities. In Thompson's novel, this way for Kaaro to hide his light under a bushel and search for identity legitimacy through connection with Anthony Salermo's self (Thompson, 2018, p. 350) is the kind of self-effacement and exaggerated humility that Grishakova (2012, p. 172) denounces when she puts forwards: "The 'I' of the story, the protagonist and the unreliable narrator is, [...], diffident, hesitating between megalomania and inferiority complex, anxiously looking for his "reflections" in other people". As it can be observed, the foregoing idea fosters the assumption that in Thompson's novel, Kaaro gets tuned to the xenosphere to inhabit other characters' minds because he distrusts his own abilities to struggle along. He lacks confidence, and to escape this state of frustration, the first-person narrator looks for reflections in Anthony Salermo's self. This engagement with another cognitive identity hints at Kaaro's hesitation: a character in a liminal condition, who wants to escape an inferiority feeling with the view to reaching an unattainable megalomania.

CONCLUSION

In the reading of Thompson's 2018 novel, this paper has shown that the first-person narrator holds a polarized position within the scope of narratological epistemologies. It has revealed that the I-narrative is a bone of contention given that there is an ongoing debate between the ossified conventions of classical narratology and the experimental discourse of postclassical narratology. As a matter of fact, we first examined the I-narrator as reliable and homodiegetic due to its compliance to the rules of classical narrative study. Second, we studied the first person's unreliability and omniscience in connection with its rebuttal to sets of normative narratology. Third, to round off this study, we finally pointed out the ambivalence and the identity crisis inherent of the first-person narrator. In a nutshell, we can assert that the first-person narration now becomes an instrument for understanding life. The objective of this study is to show that the multiplicity of narratorial postures of the protagonist-narrator in the diegesis contributes to the renewal of fiction writing in African literature. But above this, the work also demonstrates that life can be, not just the log of things known, but a voyage of discovery. It also establishes that in life, friends are not always what we believe they are. Sometimes they may appear nice and kind, but at times best friends may prove disloyal and fallible.

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