

The Stylistic Reciprocity between Aporia and Cohesion in the Preamble of David Maillu's *Broken Drum*

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Although not well known internationally, Kenyan writer David G. Maillu occupies a peculiar position in the African literary canon because of his inclination towards contradictory perspectives.¹ Maillu straddles the serious/popular divide with books ranging from the ideologically engaging to the sexually explicit. A multi-talented individual, Maillu is a self-educated poet, interior designer, self-declared psychic seer, painter, novelist, playwright, actor, theologian, anthropologist, politician, and essayist who is credited as both the originator of the African Bible and the father of African pornography.² Although he is not widely studied, Maillu is such an enigmatic figure that he is vilified by most critics of East African literature, or only grudgingly acknowledged for his sheer range and tenacity as one of East Africa's most prolific writers with over 60 books to his credit in three decades of writing.³ So central is Maillu in the discussion of East African literature (or what African literature should not be) that he is mocked in canonical novels such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* as a purveyor of postcolonial urban prurience.⁴ In this article, I examine the mutual relationship between cohesion and textual fragmentation in the context of omniscient narration by conducting a close reading of the visual and verbal interaction between centrifugal and centripetal textual elements in the preamble of Maillu's *Broken Drum*, an 1121-page epic about shattered identities and the variegation of national and ethnic consciousness. I want to use the complexity of the novel's preamble to problematize some current positions on omniscience, the novel, and the signification of subjectivity, especially in a postcolonial work of art.

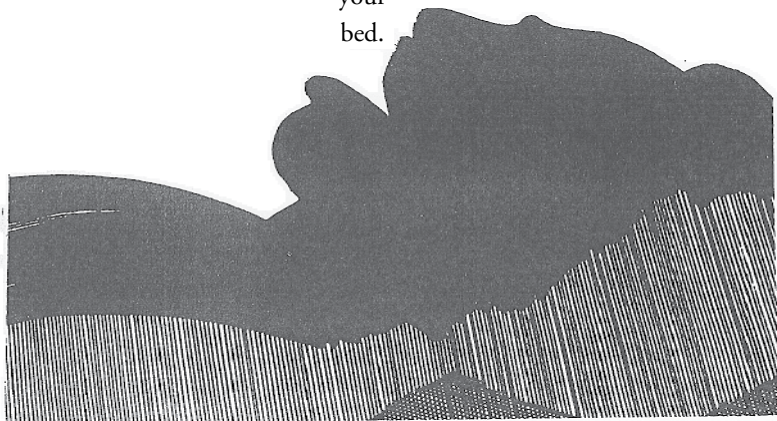
The term "cohesion" is usually seen as a matter of overt linguistic choices while "coherence" involves the comprehensibility of the work's

overall context at the pragmatic level. But, as Katie Wales remarks, the two terms are “difficult to distinguish” in practical textual analyses (74). In this article, I treat these terms the way Roger Fowler (69) and Halliday and Hasan (7) do: as mutually defining and as umbrella terms for the ways different relations of meaning are linguistically or paralinguistically interlinked to enhance a text’s intelligibility. I use the term “aporia” in the deconstructive sense to mean diversions, ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions that occur when the text moves from its main topic or language of discourse. By looking at aporia and cohesion as mutually enhancing in Maillu’s work, I want to argue for the need to consider the link between textuality and the rank and gritty politics in a novel’s relation to society.

What is most striking is the author’s use of the visual illustrations, including a painted preamble that frames the novel and presents the narrative as coming from a sleeping narrator. In this enigmatic preamble, in the form of an epigraph, Maillu paints a human figure in a lying position with words coming out of the narrator’s mouth in an inverted pyramid.

This visual representation gives the text a self-deconstructive efficacy that is sustained throughout the story by conflating cohesive and fragmenting techniques of narration in order to suggest the multiple and fragmentary status of postcolonial history. The preamble sets the stage for the presentation of a primarily urban space where postcolonial identities are in flux. This uns(ec)ure identity is signified by a tension between forces of cohesion and forces of textual dispersal. Through Maillu’s use of an omniscient narrator, elements that would lead to textual cohesiveness instead aid in suggesting textual dispersal and the way in which textual diversions complement cohesion in a textual process, thus expressing the self-reflexive ambivalence of subjects in formerly colonized regions. The preamble, then, is indicative of the direction that the discourse in the rest of the novel takes; it foreshadows the self-deconstructive efficacy of the narrative. The mutual relationship between opposites in the linguistic and paralinguistic elements deployed in the preamble signals the novel’s overall mission—namely, to refigure postcolonial identities as unsettled, disrupted and in search for order, and as resistant to any traditional or foreign totalizing impulses.

The bus stages were again, as usual, disturbingly overcrowded by people waiting for their transport home. Another evening rush and push and panic and despair as had become the routine of Nairobi. But then, when the day's work had been done and the job seekers and shopkeepers and window-shoppers and strollers and conmen and bird-watchers had exhausted the day, what else remained to be done except to go home? Home is where you belong; where you go to rest your tired joints and boiling mind, wash off your dirt and sleep your experiences or melancholy. And perhaps, pay a visit to the land of dreams . beyond your bed.



The preamble of Broken Drum. Used with permission.

As Maillu's most accomplished work, *Broken Drum* has an epic scope in terms of its temporal and geographical setting and it is told from the perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator, one who is able to pan over a wide temporal and spatial range beyond normal human abilities and one who observes events and characters' thoughts without di-

rectly participating in the action. Set in the early 1980s, but going over two hundred years back in time through its characters' reminiscences, *Broken Drum* revolves around a well-travelled and erotically talented African man, Boniface Ngewa; his riotous modern black wife, Vikirose; and her European potential co-wife, Sheila. Ngewa comes from a community with a deep veneration for a heterosexually adventurous man and he seems eager to meet ingrained expectations, thus winning envy from fellow men who do not manage to seduce as many unique women as he does. His British girlfriend, Sheila, having left her homosexual former lover, is now the cause of sensation in the up-market Nairobi where possession of a foreign wife—not to mention a white one—is no mean feat, even if that spouse is nothing but trouble at home.⁵

A modern African couple, Vikirose and Ngewa inhabit an urban post-colonial space yet to be fully westernized, where tensions between urban and rural life haunt their marriage. The city is a mosaic of texts in which the rural, the western, and the global conglomerate. Maillu uses Nairobi as a site where, against traditional African expectations, modern women are seen to be lording over men, engaging in prostitution, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, where even Ngewa's wife teasingly threatens to make him pregnant. Vikirose speaks strongly in favour of modernity and abandonment of her 'primitive' former self and the 'pagan' beliefs of her people, while Ngewa roots for the traditions and customs of his Kamba community. For her part, Sheila, whom Ngewa first met as a child in colonial Kenya, is now disillusioned with the postmodern West and is trying to reconnect with life by coming back to postcolonial Africa, which is also moving towards the kind of modernization from which she has fled. She is bitten by the love bug, and it is only Ngewa who can give her what she is looking for—and he does. Vikirose will not take Sheila's encroachment onto her territory lying down, and she has support from many quarters including Ngewa's father, who hates Sheila with a passion because she is white and whites tortured him thirty years ago in the 1950s struggle for Kenya's independence. In dramatic moments, Vikirose threatens Sheila with death in an attempt to reserve Ngewa for herself, although she is tormenting him all the time and claiming to hate fellow Africans and their cultural ways. In an ambiva-

lent denouement, the story ends with Vikirose missing her flight back to Britain. It is suggested tentatively that Vikirose is moving towards reconciliation with Ngewa.

To foreground the theme of marital anxiety that runs throughout the novel, Maillu opens the story with a scene in which Ngewa tensely tries to rush home to avoid a quarrel with Vikirose for arriving home late. But his homebound journey is slowed down by the evening traffic jam that defines the postcolonial city. The quarrels with his assertive wife leave Ngewa enervated, and in order to reassert his threatened manhood, Ngewa calls forth memories of the glorious past of his ancestors in the form of a narrative of family achievements that spans two hundred years. The reconstruction of his family history triggers off a panoramic exploration of his family's, and by extension the Kamba's, Kenya's and Africa's, interaction with other communities. These reflections allow Maillu to explore the impact of the West on Africa by dramatizing the interaction between the Kamba community of Kenya's Eastern Province with the Arabs, the Portuguese, and the British. Ngewa is strongly critical of the West's destruction of African heritage, but his criticism is somewhat compromised by his attempts to marry Sheila, the daughter of an English colonial woman who sponsored his education. As the novel comes to an end, it is clear that we are inevitably contaminated with that we consider as our opposites. Epic in scope, *Broken Drum* explores cultural and political conflicts in modern Africa, global exploitation of the continent by the West, race and sexuality, and marital problems in modern Africa. While there are instances of explicit sexual description, the novel is subtler in its presentation of intimacy than Maillu's smaller books of the 1970s.

Broken Drum presents events from various narrative points of view that reflect the overall disruption of perspectives on self in postcolonial Kenya. This type of narrator is multiple, observing and narrating events using a plurality of voices and standpoints that blend and clash. The omniscient narrator uses narrative techniques that tend to decentralise the text, to blur its perspective and foci, and thus to entice the narrative towards self-deconstruction. The privileges that the omniscient narrator enjoys usher in a chain of other decentralizing techniques such

as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue because the narrator has access to character's thoughts and license to present them to the reader in a supposedly unmediated format. Internal monologue and stream-of-consciousness present a disorderly play of observations, feelings, reminiscences and ideas as filtered through the characters whose complex minds the omniscient narrator has the liberty to enter. The omniscient narrator also has access to the intimate letters the characters write to each another in their privacy. Further, dialogue is used to disperse the unitary voice of narration among different discourses in the text, thanks to the omniscient narrator's supposedly perfect ability to memorize the exact words that the characters are supposed to have used in a conversation. Despite the resultant congeries of diverse self-deconstructing voices, foci and perspectives, *Broken Drum* presents itself as a coherent piece of discourse.

Digression *per se* is not objectionable—unless it is irrelevant, superfluous, and inexplicable within the work's context. Digressions, looseness and disjointedness of structure can be used strategically, as is the case in *Broken Drum*, to signal the content and the politics of the work and therefore to deepen coherence and organic unity of the text. This is the position that has been taken by Catherine Lord when she argues in her "Organic Unity Reconsidered" that it is only realistic that a literary creation should be "expected to exhibit accidents" (264). A similar view was expressed during the Symposium on Literary Style in August 1969 in response to a paper presented by Tzvetan Todorov where the discussants note that "no matter how haphazard an arrangement of sentences in a text may be, one can always treat it as organism, a unity, and can attribute some law of composition to it" (Chatman 39). If we agree with Aristotle that, even in its most mimetic mode of coding, a work of art can simulate ugliness without being ugly itself, it would be clear that a text such as *Broken Drum* simulates fragmentation without being incoherent. Toni Morrison aptly expresses this narratological sentiment when she, reading African-American representations that depart from chronological narration, argues that instances of disintegration in a literary work would sometimes "indicate a loss of control in the text that

is attributed to the object of its attention rather than to the text's own dynamics" (69).⁶ If instances of textual disjointedness cooperate with elements of cohesion to invite the reader to contextualize disjointedness within the semantic mission of the text, this disintegration becomes a coherent and integral part of the text's framework. Yet, in *Broken Drum*, it is those elements that enhance cohesion which invite us to see the text's diversionary tendencies. The reciprocity between disjointedness and unity lends the text the power to signify undesirable fragmentation, thus undermining the very mimetic status that it claims for itself.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin views omniscient narration as disadvantageous to the desire for novelistic heteroglossia. Bakhtin seems to limit his sense of omniscience to the realist mode of writing he admires in Dostoyevsky, ignoring the avant-garde modernist writing that exploits omniscience to undermine the direct correspondence of a text with real life. Employed for modernist purposes, omniscience in *Broken Drum* serves not as an anchor of the monoglossic, but as one of the avenues of the dialogic impulse. The omniscient consciousness is hybrid, and uses its own privilege to demote monoglossia and admit myriad contestation of voices and perspectives. In Maillu's text, the narrator uses a godlike narrative point of view that accommodates a hodgepodge of other perspectives within it. This enables the author to expose the thoughts and feelings of the characters, as well as to intrude editorially. The novel rejects the monoglossia of omniscience by invoking a Maasai proverb which insists that wisdom comes from different sources, affirming its opposition to a single dominant voice to convey its message (209).

In a self-reflexive vein, Ngewa and his story as told in *Broken Drum* are mutually generative replications of each other because he sees himself as a story too. He first says that he feels as though he were a "little unpunctuated story with little suspense but overloaded with much ambiguity as often characterizes [his] daily life" (11). Later, he says he is "one long, long sentence beginning from 1770s up to date ... a tale from antiquity to infinity" (16). This shows that Ngewa is a story that is long and short at once; he becomes a site upon which the long/short dichotomy is destabilized by the narrative that starts off in the 1770s;

hence there is a parallelism between it and what Ngewa takes himself to be. Ngewa's life is characterized by ambiguity: he is a modern, formally educated man who highly prizes precolonial African values. In him, the binary dualism that places Western modernity and precolonial traditions as hierarchical opposites is deconstructed. Ngewa and *Broken Drum* are therefore miniature versions of each other. The ruptures in his life and what he terms his inability to "live above contradictions" (771) is a replication of the novel's ostensible ambiguity. Just as Ngewa incorporates opposites (short and long) at once, so is the story longwinded and cohesive at the same time. Ngewa straddles two worlds, as does the novel by combining modern modes and methods of narrating with traditional ones to create an interface between oral and written literature and thus deconstruct the written/oral dichotomy.

To appreciate the interplay between opposites launched by the preamble within the larger postcolonial context, it is opportune to turn to Homi Bhabha's understanding of the postcolonial self, the type allegorized in *Broken Drum* by Ngewa, his story, and the society presented through his interactions and observations. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha sets out to explain why the postcolonial subject occupies an 'in-between' a space between contesting opposites. In Bhabha's formulation, citizens of formerly colonized nations are marked by in-betweenness where rigid essences are impossible and perhaps undesirable. The postcolonial subjects occupy a space between the colonial and indigenious identities. *Broken Drum* presents cases of precolonial identities that are not likely to survive the onslaught of modernity. A story of postcolonial history that is at once a retelling of itself, *Broken Drum* presents its own cohesion and errancy as foils that contradict and enhance each other, making Ngewa and the story overlap with what would be considered as their opposites. The ambivalence in Ngewa and the structural elements in the story signify the struggle of the postcolonial subject to constitute an identity within a liminal space, expressed in the preamble as the site where wakefulness and dream, among other binary opposites, intermingle. Gabriele Schwab explains this phenomenon cogently when she reminds us that "while the capacity to differentiate between self and other is bought at the price of cleavage within the subject, the very im-

aginary functions that enabled the differentiation may later be used to temporarily suture this cleavage" (25). Interestingly, while *Broken Drum* uses centrifugal forces to strengthen the centripetal pulling together of the text in a temporary unity, it is the centripetal forces themselves that suggest the dispersal of the text. The result is the formation of a protean subjectivity that appears incomplete.

The fact that the degree of omniscience is a creation of omniscience itself has eluded many narratologists. John Morrell urges us to critique the theory of communication which claims that the omniscient narrator transmits information to the reader; Morrell proposes that the notions of omniscience and the communication theory of fiction be "dropped from our discussion of literature" because, in his view, omniscience is a myth—"what has often passed for a narrator's omniscience is really a kind of omnipotence the author has in creating the story" (434). I am persuaded by Roland Barthes's argument that the omniscient narrator is a creation of the author who may undermine the author and the narrating persona himself/herself. The text communicates information that the narrator and the author may unconsciously register as the narrative progresses. The omniscient narrator further creates other centers of consciousness that may also register to the reader more than they are aware of.

Maillu and his narrator are not superhuman beings policing, and in full control of, the content of the narrative they enunciate. For instance, Kathambi's name in *Broken Drum* is a coinage from *Nthambi*. The new name is not only a diminutive pet-name that indicates fondness, but its inadvertent replacement with *Nsiza* in *errata* that run through several pages of the novel has some linguistic explanation. Both names suggest cleanliness, *Nsiza* being the Kamba language word for "one who shines" and *Nthambi* deriving from the Kamba word for "bathing or cleaning." Maillu had a childhood girl-friend called Nthambi, an engagement that had been arranged by his and the girl's parents, as is the fictional engagement between the main characters in *Broken Drum*. Here, she is unconsciously inserted into the text.

Jonathan Culler posits that the idea of omniscience gives the impression of an authoritarian force that claims to command knowledge of everything:

I do not think the idea of omniscience is obscene, but I *have* reached the conclusion that it is not a useful concept for the study of narration, that it conjugates and confuses several different factors that should be separated if they are to be well understood—that it obfuscates the various phenomena that provoke us to posit the idea. (22 emphasis original)

Culler's disapproval of the concept stems mainly from what he views as its association with an all-powerful dominating power that evokes "the author (who) creates the world of the novel as God created our world" (23). To be sure, Culler concedes that he has no problem with the practices ascribed to the omniscient narrator; it is the term that he feels does not match the phenomenon. He thus calls for the abandonment of "critical vocabulary that does no service to us or to the narrative" (32). Although I support Culler's concerns about a superhuman, totalized system of knowledge performatively entrenched by the theocratic implications of the term "omniscience," *Broken Drum* can be seen as exploiting its omniscience to demote its narrator from the divine status of an author-god who creates the world in the text and beyond. In the novel, the omniscient narrator has the capacity to range from unfocalized objective narration to focalized subjective narration through the characters, thus creating other voices that subsume the omniscience of the third-person narration.

The omniscient narrative voice in the novel exploits the privileges inherent in its omniscience to limit the latter and sometimes to push itself to the periphery. This process is effected, for example, by allowing itself access to the minds of the characters to convey their unmediated thoughts and feelings from their own perspective, as opposed to that of the omniscient narrator. Omniscience uses the infinite knowledge conferred on it by its almost god-like capacity to deconstruct itself and disperse its authority among other voices, while still retaining the privilege of monitoring the direction in which the narrative is moving. The omniscience itself does not have complete command of the narrative, as is evidenced by the inadvertent misspelling of Nzisa's name as Kathambi nine times at one point in close proximity (391–92). This error uncon-

sciously sneaks the novelist's own boyhood girl-friend, Nthambi, into the story, a fact Maillu was unaware of until I pointed out the discrepancy to him in an interview. This scene, itself relating happenings in the unconscious, supports Culler's skepticism about the existence of a superhuman author and narrator who knows everything that happens in the narrative s/he brings forth.

It is because of this combination of antipodal textual elements that the opening offers itself as an excellent test case of how the omniscient narrative voice is a decentralizing device, which is at once an agent of textual cohesion in *Broken Drum*. It can be argued that the opening of the story comes from a sleeping implied author who is graphologically illustrated on the printed page in a lying posture. This implied narrator is a fictive creation of the omniscient narrator. The use of the third-person pronoun shows that the narrator is not a participant in the events the text depicts, but the recurrent use of *you* claims for the narrator a presence in the arena where the story is being read or listened to. The pictorial illustration of the speaker on the printed page suggests that the consciousness speaking in the text is created by a higher heterodiegetic narrator [a narrator who tells a story not about himself] portraying the speaking consciousness itself. Evidence of the prelinguistic essence of the speaker is therefore only within the omniscient narrator's fictive conjuration. The whole of the story, then, can be seen as an act of internal focalization, "where the narrator perceives and knows only what the central consciousness perceives and knows" (Phelan 54). It is possible that the sleeping figure is Ngewa narrating himself into existence and distributing his voice and focalization to the various characters that he creates to tell his own story. Ngewa serves as the kind of focalizer noted by Gerald Prince to be "endowed with the capacity to perceive other entities' reflections and feelings" (48). By ceding agency to a sleeping Ngewa, the omniscient narrator re-establishes omniscience because Ngewa, as the story, is able to present to us the feelings and private discussions of other characters. However, this does not affirm totalized perspective in the sense that Ngewa is asleep and his interlocutor, as shown presently, is supposed to be asleep.

Alternatively, but with similar results, it can be argued that the omniscience of the narrative voice allows the narrating consciousness to de(-)scribe itself by scribing its own voice and figure on the printed page. Hence, by advertizing self-reflexivity, it calls into question any prelinguistic essence it may claim in the text. Self-deconstruction further comes into play when the narrator takes the odd liberty with elementary logic by presenting speech as a scribal and visual group of printed words coming from a corporeal body. The errancy caused by the omniscient narrator's creation of a sleeping narrator is enhanced by the use of collocation. Collocation is a cohesive device involving a set of semantically congruous words that tend to turn up in close proximity within the text. In the context of *Broken Drum*, the word *sleep* collocates with *bed* and *dreams*. There is mutual expectancy among these three lexical items. The visual illustration of the speaking consciousness in a sleeping position complements the collocating words to suggest that the story is told by a sleeping narrator. The dream motif recurs in the remainder of the narrative to remind the reader of the importance of the subconscious in explaining human relations and activities. The collocation of the words, which have semantic complementarity and association, indicates cohesion, but it decentralizes the story by foregrounding a deviation from the common sense expectations of a reader who, naturally, would not trust the narration of a sleeping person. The words that collocate to indicate cohesion are also the same ones used to advertize the fictionality of the text and disperse its illusion of reality.

While subverting logical reality, the text also demotes the possibilities of total fictionality by strategically using various cohesive devices to recuperate the novel's coherence. First, through the omniscient narration, the author mediates the gap between the speaker in the text and the reader outside it by creating an implied narratee addressed by the narrator using the second-person pronoun *you*. According to Leech and Short, the explicit "you" acts as an intermediary, thus alienating the reader from the narrator (266). But, pragmatically speaking, the instability creates cohesion. The lexical repetition of the pronoun *you* and its possessive form, *your*, creates cohesion by strategically strengthening a personal bond between the narrator in the text and the reader outside it,

under the pretext that the former has an addressee within the text into whose shoes the reader can fit.

If Gabriele Schwab reads un verbalized intersubjective communication between characters in modernist fiction as instantiating “an interior dialogue, a dialogue based on a new form of abstract and recurrent poetic images that does not unfold within characters but between them as a form of unconscious dialogical interaction” (19), *Broken Drum* attempts in the preamble to initiate intersubjective communication between the reader and the narrator by creating the impression that the two are sharing the unconsciousness of each other. To enhance the intersubjective unconscious communication, the sleeping narrator creates further rapport with the reader by presenting the implied reader as sleeping as well. Through the use of *you*, the reader is invited to “pay a visit to the land of dreams ... beyond your bed” (1). The dream in which the reader joins the narrator would allow for the textually errant wandering that the narrative stages. The lexical repetition of *you* and *your* both increases the gap between the reader and the narrator by creating an intermediary between them, and also brings them closer through direct address.

Alternatively, it can be argued that the use of the second-person pronoun *you* in a speech addressed to no visible interlocutor could be an exercise in self-address reflecting the split personality of an ambiguous narrator. *You* could also be generic, referring to anybody dwelling, or who has the potential to dwell, in the city. The word *you* thus indicates lack of identity among city dwellers. With all these possible meanings of *you*, the pronoun both enhances and frustrates cohesion at once. The second strategy used to frustrate absolute fictionality already fomented by omniscient narration is the use of the definite article *the* in the description of the bus stage. This article has both exophoric and endophoric references. Let us begin with *the* as used in the situational, contextual sense in which it refers to *bus stages* as phenomena outside the text. The definiteness of the article presumes the reader's knowledge of the bus stages. According to Leech's felicitous observation about the definite article in a pragmatic context, it would express the idea that we share knowledge of the bus stages with the speaker by assuming that the bus stages are uniquely identifiable as the same by both the narrator and the

reader (90). The article reinforces what Broek and Gustafson call “referential inferences” that “allow readers to recognise the identity of persons or objects in texts” (20). We are made to recognize the bus station as if we all knew it before the narrative began. We are enlisted in what Lanser terms a “mimetic participation in the text” in which we help the narrator reconstruct a referential world outside the narrative (124).

Theoretically, the exophoric use of the definite article in a text makes us establish a familiar and stereotypical world. In the context of *Broken Drum's* preamble, the use of *the* in an exophoric sense—where information not given in the text is presumed to be known by the reader—enfolds us in the narrator's familiarity with “*the* bus stages.” This sense of familiarity indicated by the definiteness of the description is strengthened further by the use of collocating words. These are *again*, *another*, *usual* and *routine*, all of which suggest repetitiveness and thus familiarity. Graphologically these words are in close proximity and easily recall one another because they are also semantically linked. The agreement between the definiteness of the description and the juxtaposition of collocating lexical items concretizes, in a subtle way, the habituality and conventionality of the actions taking place: it is a stereotypical situation of waiting for transport home at a crowded city bus stop.

Graphologically, the words in the preamble are errant because, instead of representing the normal arrangement on a printed page, they are constructed in the shape of an upturned pyramid. This deviation is an aspect of coherence at the pragmatic level. It not only captures the overturning of edenic rural values, but it also anticipates the subversive project of the novel. Examples of subversion anticipated in this pyramid abound in the text. The novel constantly overturns the Eurocentric belief system by questioning the supposed superiority of the West. Vikirose not only overturns the time-honoured hierarchy of the traditional value-schemes of her ethnic community (the Kamba), but she also upsets the firm patriarchal myth of superiority by threatening to make Ngewa pregnant and rebelling against his patriarchal habits of sleeping with other women (22). Further inversion of the patriarchal order is also suggested by Mama Muthamia, Vikirose's friend, when she reports having told her husband to conceive and bear their child himself (287).

The inversions persist up to the last page of the book, where Ngewa, by insisting on marrying Sheila as a second wife and defying his father, inverts the very Kamba customs he purports to uphold against all odds. As the novel closes, Sheila rebels against the Eurocentrism and racism of her colonialist parents by choosing to stay over in Africa. There is promise of inversions going beyond the text's plot as epitomized by the possible marriage between Ngewa and Sheila and also the possible undermining of the Ngewa–Sheila relationship by the reconciliation between Ngewa and Vikirose. The ostensible deconstructive subversion in the text is strategized as a cohesive agent in the sense that, with every inversion of accepted values, we are referred back to the opening of the novel and to other inversions within the text.

D.C. Muecke's *Irony and the Ironic* notes that irony is synonymous with deconstruction, and anticipates that the entrenchment of deconstruction in critical analysis of texts "will probably lead to recognition of the decreased usefulness of the term 'irony'" (101). Although Muecke's prophecy has not come to pass, Cannery and Combe have also noted the link between deconstruction and satire, a mode of artistic representation that involves a humorous deployment of irony (5). In *Broken Drum*, the deconstructive inversions lead to an ironic satirical tone. For example, we laugh at the incongruous behaviour of Vikirose when she subjects herself sexually to not only the executive Mr. Wahome, but also to the drug-addicted Mbithuku in order to retain Ngewa as husband, all the while claiming to be an independent-minded woman. Because inversions pervade the text, irony and satire are also constantly present in the story, and the uniformity of tone produces cohesion at the paralinguistic level.

Strikingly, it is overt linguistic devices of cohesion that concatenate the graphologically separate preamble with the rest of the novel. This connection occurs when the omniscient narrator shifts from the voice of the sleeping narrator to another kind of "wide-awake" consciousness. The novel proper opens with the sentence: "Ngewa, so tense this minute he could break, was going home too, but indirectly" (2).

The subjunct *too* could be focusing the noun *Bonifas Ngewa* or the verb clause *going home*. Whichever way we look at it, *too* is an additive subjunct binding Ngewa and his action to the motley of urban people we have already met, who have nothing to do “except to go home” (1). The subjunct *too*, therefore, refers anaphorically to the “job seekers and shopkeepers and strollers and conmen and ...” or their action of going home. The use of *and* five times in the preamble’s list of six lexical items referring to sorts of people in urban areas (one *and* between the last two items would be enough and the rest be replaced by commas) typifies the teeming over-abundance of the city population to which the subjunct *too* adds Ngewa.

It is important at this juncture to remind ourselves that the main character’s name in *Broken Drum* derives from the Kamba word for story (*ngewa*). By analogy, the character’s journey home anticipates the story’s tardy movement to a close, indirectly, by using digressions. The use of the verbless subclause *so tense this minute he could break*, as a non-restrictive parenthetical element that delays the completion of the sentence not only concretizes the delay caused to Ngewa by the tardy traffic jam, but it also anticipates the interpolation into the story of elements extraneous to the novel’s plot. Like the verbless subclause that cannot convey meaning on its own, but nevertheless gives important details, the diversions intercalated in the main story are only micronarratives subordinate to the main narrative, without which umbrella-frame they would lose semantic salience. The omniscient narrator uses the delays to Ngewa and the indirectness of his way home to thematically offer structural cohesion by anticipating the detours and deviations that *ngewa*, the story, will go through before coming to a close.

It is also in this decentralized parenthetical element that we have a lexical item that recalls the title of the book. The word *break* not only reminds us of the “broken drum” of the title but also presages the structural ruptures and the splits in Ngewa’s fragmented life. The article *the* used in the preamble in a situational sense in the expression *the bus stages* becomes endophoric on reading the beginning of the story proper. I use the term ‘endophoric’ in the way M.A.K. Halliday and Raquaya Hasan have deployed it to designate reference to a phe-

nomenon within the text. The article is cataphoric: that is, it refers to something that is yet to come within the text. We encounter the bus stages when the omniscient narrator, through Ngewa's perspective, shows us around to see, for example, "that unusual crowd of people at the Kencom House." The preamble, then, provides cohesion by cataphorically anticipating the crowded bus stages to be described later in the text. The use of *the* here indicates shared knowledge between the reader, the narrator, and Ngewa, through whose center of consciousness the story reaches us.

The omniscience of the narrator, it is important to note, allows the narrating consciousness to have a non-essentialist, ambiguous gender, ethnic and racial basis. The instability caused by this lack of essence exerts strain on the cohesiveness of the text while also inviting unity at the pragmatic level. This tension is possible because, as observed above, the stylistic reciprocity between aporia and cohesion in *Broken Drum* owes its prevalence to the omniscience of the narration itself. Suffice it to say that the omniscient narrator in the novel destabilizes the text while making every effort to unify it. This coexistence of opposites encapsulates the overall mission of the novel. The narrator is mounting the argument that the seemingly antipodal nature of the West/African binary split can be transgressed and transcended. In a manner similar to the way the novel employs decentralizing elements without losing its coherence, the African can adopt aspects of Western culture without losing Africanity.

To conclude: the cooperation between antipodal linguistic elements in the preamble of *Broken Drum* presages the rest of the narrative and enhances coherence. The disruptive techniques are strategized to enhance cohesion at the pragmatic, contextual level. There is an attempt to retain coherence even when the text uses decentralizing techniques that tend to blur its unitary perspective. This produces a discernible commingling of aporia and cohesion that demotes the monoglossia associated with omniscient narration, in favour of positions that combine opposites and produce a diversity of interpretations. We have seen that the notion of omniscience as used in literary analysis frees itself from a theological

force that polices everything that happens in the narrative. In *Broken Drum*, omniscience functions against the imposition of a totalizing and essentialized voice that would muffle localized and personalized viewpoints. It accentuates this desire for freedom by self-reflexively presenting its narrator narrating himself as the story about a person who is himself a story.

Notes

- 1 This paper is part of a longer project that has received tremendous support from different people. I acknowledge with gratitude comments and advice from Professor Henry Indangasi of the University of Nairobi. Thanks to David Maillu for taking time to answer my questions. J. Roger Kurtz of State University of New York, Brockport, generously sent me texts at a time I could not access them from Nairobi and other locations. Many thanks also to Tunji Osinubi and Gordon Collier for reading earlier drafts and giving me very useful feedback. Thanks to Brenna Stuart for her editorial input. I am, of course, responsible for any errors and lapses in this article.
- 2 The use of pornographic materials in Maillu's works, especially the mini-novels and narrative poems he published between 1973 and 1977, can be seen as a subversion of the hypocritical puritanism of postcolonial Kenya. At the same time, the works subvert the more serious novels on 'big' issues such as the celebration of new nationhood in African countries. The 'pornographic' novels are physically small and easy to take to offices, hidden in a handbag or pocket.
- 3 Academic writers and critics have focused more on Maillu's earlier and presumably prurient works to indicate the dangers of escapist literature in emergent African art. Lindfors, a scholar of international stature, has quite exceptionally devoted considerable attention to the writings of Maillu. Explaining Maillu's popularity with urban civil servants despite what he views as Maillu's vulgarization of canonical writers, Lindfors claims that Maillu's books are not only "topical and moralistic, [but] they teach as they entertain" ("Basic Anatomy" 113). In "Basic Anatomy" Lindfors provides another study of Maillu's earlier works; he sees Maillu as belonging to a group of writers who lack the ideological maturity and artistic sophistication displayed by the more mainstream writers from the continent. Lindfors's "David Maillu" admires the flexibility with which Maillu responds to social and economic changes. Wanjala's view of Maillu's earlier works is generally unfavourable. Wanjala calls Maillu's works and other popular writing "trashy and scabrous imitation of brothel and low life" (*Season* 135). Banned in Tanzania in the 1970s, Maillu was largely seen to employ "abusive language in his discussion of sex," and it was suspected "that in his specific attention to female organs, he might damage the attitude of children towards sex" (*For Home*

241). Much of Wanjala's criticism was conducted in the 1970s, and it predates Maillu's later writing, which has been seen as didactic and moralistic enough to be, to use Kurtz and Kurtz's words, "taken up by mainstream publishing houses" (124). Imbuga and Indangasi are discerning and perceptive in their brief studies of Maillu's later work. Imbuga particularly notes some change in the popular author towards a more acceptable form of writing (128). For his part, Indangasi notes in a sympathetic biographical sketch of the author that *Broken Drum* as "Maillu's crowning achievement" (157). The sophistication of *Broken Drum* lies in the way opposites commingle, even at a formal level.

4 In *Petals of Blood*, a head teacher mocks postcolonial intellectuals who ostensibly want to replace canonical writers like Shakespeare with David Maillu. In the context, the teacher is sarcastically exaggerating the demand for nationalization of the curriculum as a call for the replacement of Shakespeare with African trash. Although Ngugi does not endorse the head teacher, it is clear from the context that Maillu is equated with junk art. In *Devil on the Cross*, the politically underdeveloped secretary is presented reading Maillu's work alongside what is seen as escapist literature. In a strikingly similar scene in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, the more politically conscious secretary is not reading Maillu but the Swahili translation of Ngugi's *Devil*.

5 Although heavily homophobic and heterosexist, Maillu's earlier works were seen by Wanjala in *For Home* as encouraging homosexual desire in some readers. Maillu could be responding to such criticism by aligning himself against homosexuality while doing very little to change the earlier sexist presentation of women.

6 It is along a similar line that Fairclough avers that coherence "does not preclude indeterminacies and ambivalence" (134).

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