

## BEYOND THE *UTENZI*: NARRATIVE POEMS BY THEOBALD MVUNGI<sup>1</sup>

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Some time ago I came across a tiny collection of poems called *Chungu tamu*<sup>2</sup> by Theobald Mvungi. The author was born in Mwanga province (Kilimanjaro) probably in the Fifties, as he graduated from the University of Dar es Salaam in 1975 and gained his M.Ed. degree in Nigeria (Ibadan) in 1978. He published his first collection of poems, *Raha karaha*, in 1982 and his third one, *Mashairi ya Chekacheka*, in 1995.

All Mvungi's poems deal with social problems, but only those of the second collection are formally innovative. Five of the twenty poems of this collection tell a story and I am going to investigate three of them<sup>3</sup>.

It is striking and quite unusual in Swahili poetry to present the narration itself as another story. However, it is not the first time that it occurs in modern Swahili poetry. In fact, for instance Kezilahabi's poem *Hadithi ya kitoto* (from the collection *Kichomi*, 1974) opens with the scene of the narrator — the grandfather — sitting close to a fire with his grandchildren who want to be told a story, while roasting birds and potatoes. The last two strophes contain grandfather's comment, i.e. a moral message<sup>4</sup>. Thus the narrative act itself is represented, as it often happens in prose fiction. But whereas in Kezilahabi it only opens or frames the main story, in Mvungi the narrator's interferences are intermingled with the main story to such an extent that in fact two parallel stories are narrated. I will call them *the frame story* and *the main story*.

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<sup>2</sup> Theobald Mvungi. *Chungu tamu*. 1985. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.

<sup>3</sup> The remaining two, *Thomas na Doto* and *Fikira za Waungwana*, do not present the main features I will discuss here. (The former, situated in colonial times, is a love story of the son of a colonial officer and a black nurse; the latter is centred on the claim of a wife to have two husbands and it is the only narrative poem in regular *shairi* metre.)

<sup>4</sup> Similarly another Kezilahabi's poem, *Hadithi ya mzee*, opens with a prologue, but this time there is no epilogue.

*Chatu na kuku* employs the animal fable as the vehicle for an extended satire on human oppression. It narrates about the friendship of the python and the chicken, which lasts until the death of *mama Kuku*. Afterwards the python family manages to kill one of the two young chickens and to enslave the other. This story is narrated by *babu* to the young 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, both sitting by the fire and roasting potatoes. From time to time the main story is interrupted while the poet turns to the frame story, mostly describing the reactions of the young listener. See, for instance, the first interruption after the death of *mama Kuku*.

1.<sup>5</sup> *Babu akavunja kiasi,  
Tukaanza kukitafuna,  
Kiasi kitamu sana,  
Nikamwangalia babu akimeza.  
Niliuliza: "Kuku alizikwaje?"  
Ati kuku walichimba kwa midomo na kwa kucha,  
Chatu alitumia meno yake,  
Haya!*

*Kwisha kumeza mafunda kadhaa,  
Babu alinitumia maji ya kunywa,  
Nikayaleta,  
Twala twanywa,  
Raha tupu.*

Another interruption follows the python's decision to seize the young chickens Piku and Paku.

2. *Nilipumua kwa woga,  
Babu kiasi akakimega,  
Mdomoni akakitumbukiza,  
Nilionana kana akiumiza,  
Mithili yule chatu anavyomeza.*

*Nilimuliza babu tena,  
"Hadithi ya kweli?",  
Babu akameza fundi la kiasi na maji,  
Mzee huyu alikuwa na kipaji,  
Cha huu usimuliaji,  
"Itakuwaje chatu azungumze na kuku,  
Ningekuwa kuku si ningepaa?,  
Nikamwacha chatu akilaani."*

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<sup>5</sup> Numbering of the strophes is mine

- 2a *Babu hakujali swali langu,  
Akaendelea kunipasha habari,  
Piku alimezwa huku analia,  
Dua akawaombea chatu wote,  
Mabaya yawafike,  
Wapi kuku akamezeka,  
Paku akafungwa,  
Pangoni akafikishwa.*

Paku is forced to lay and brood eggs as a food supply for the pythons.

3. *Nilimuuliza babu,  
Kuku huyu wa tabu,  
Naona alikuwa koo,  
Alitagaje bila jogoo?,  
Akasema ati si ajabu.*

Finally, the last strophe closes the frame story and the whole poem. At this moment the young listener (the grandson) reveals himself as being the author:

4. *Basi babu akatua,  
Funda akajimezea,  
Mimi tama nimejishikia,  
Huzuni imenialiti,  
Kwa Chatu kukosa dhati,  
Ndipo nikapanga hizi beti,  
Ziwe kama ndiyo hati,  
Ukumbusho wa huyu dhulumati.*

The second narrative poem is *Dakitari Askari*, situated during the war of Tanzania with Uganda. The 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator Adam Kiende is a military surgeon; in a battle he is taken prisoner by the Ugandan army and while working in the enemy hospital he meets his former sweetheart Eva, now a surgeon of the Ugandan army. In another battle it is the Tanzanian army that gains a victory: now Dr. Adam is liberated and Dr. Eva imprisoned. In Tanzania, however, the two may marry.

Dr. Adam is the hero of the story, and at the same time the narrator. He tells his own story, but also offers his comments. This time there is no real frame story, only an introduction, told impersonally, about the beginning of the war with Uganda in 1978. After five strophes, the style changes as the story formally starts with the traditional formula *Paukwa*, followed by

short, crisp sentences in juxtaposition, most of them two-word constructions:

5. *Basi sikiliza..... Paukwa.....!,  
Vita vikaja,  
Damu zikavuja,  
Watu wakatoweka,  
Maiti zikanuka,  
Mali zikatimka,  
Raha ikaaga,  
Vijiji vikawa mbuga,  
Pema pakawa alama ya uovu,  
Mabomu yaliacha makovu.*

The narrator addresses his listeners, or rather a listener, as his address is always in singular.

- 5a *Hadithi hii haidai kiitikio,  
Wewe sikiliza tu,  
Kaziyo kufungua sikio,  
Ukipenda, shika tama,  
Lakini tama halikusaidii,  
Utaonekana kama kinyago cha kuchonga,  
Ati hadithi?!  
Sijui  
Labda ni maelezo au taarifa ya vita,  
Lakini haikutiwa chumvi mitaani*

If we may borrow a term from the analysis of the novel, this is a rather obtrusive narrator who interrupts continually his story with comments, questions, addresses to the listeners etc.

- 5b *Huo mwaka sabini na nane,  
Mie tayari ni Kapteni wa jeshi,  
Lakini mimi ni askari dakitari,  
Umeshituka!,  
Mtu mmoja kuwa muuaji na pia mponyaji,  
Kama ulifikiri haiwezekani, basi yawezekana.*
- Acha na kasumba potofu,  
Hujasikia wezi wakiomba Mungu,  
Kabla ya kwenda huko waendako?  
Au unafikiri askari husali au huswali huko vitani?*

While in the strophe 5a he questions the genre of this composition (*Ati hadithi?! Sijui. Labda ni maelezo au taarifa ya vita*), in the next one he disagrees with the use of the wrong form *mponyeshaji*:

6. *Basi mie ni mponyaji,  
Wasemaje?,  
Aa aa sio mponyeshaji la hasha,  
Mie naponya,  
Kwa hiyo ni mponyaji,  
Mponyeshaji ni yule anayenifanya mimi niponye,  
Jifunze Kiswahili yahe!,  
Si kitu,  
Mimi ni askari dakitari,  
Kapteni,  
Ninapigiwa saluti,  
Usinionee wivu,  
Ukitaka, nawe jiunge nasi,  
Lakini usikubali raha tu,  
Kumbuka na karaha.*

At this point he remembers the past — *Haya yanikumbusha zamani* — and in a flashback tells about his attempt, with some other schoolboys, to become priest, as they have seen their teachers in a catholic school eat much better food than that given to the pupils. Nevertheless, very soon they realize that life in a seminary is hard to endure.

7. *Lahaula!,  
Miaka miwili,  
Magoti yameota sugu,  
Msichana akipita kushoto uangalie kulia,  
Vitabu usome vingi na sana,  
Padiri akisema usibishe,  
Tuliyeyuka kama siagi juani,  
Wazo la mikate na mayai likapaa,  
Seminari ikatukosa,  
Au sisi tukaikosa.*

The last poem I will discuss, *Manzese mpaka Ostabei*, is the most interesting for our purpose. Here the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator is a storyteller, telling the story of other people, whose comments have an important role in building the poem.

While in the first poem the characters of the frame story were two — the grandfather and his grandson — and in *Dakitari Askari* there is no frame story, but an obtrusive narrator commenting to his listener both on his story and on the very act of narrating, *Manzese mpaka Ostabei* features a storyteller and his audience. Even if the listeners are reflected only in the storytellers replies, they have their characteristics: they may be defined as poor male

inhabitants of Dar es Salaam, who have not enough money to pay for an entertainment.

The opening is traditional — *Hadithi njoo*:

8. *Hadithi njoo, uende Manzese,  
Upite Kariakoo,  
Mwisho wako Ostabei,  
Mjini Bandarisalama,  
Wengine wameliita Jiji,  
Kuliita Jiji la salama,  
Yumkini,  
Lakini a!,  
Sijui,  
Je iyo harufu ya dhuluma,  
Je vishindo vya majambazi,  
Je je je ... je nyingi,  
Jiji salama,  
Watu hadaa,  
Yayumkinika labda.*

It seems that the listeners have lost their traditional culture, as they are unable to respond (*kuitikia* properly):

9. *Hadithi kavu isiyo na mwitikiaji,  
Wasemaje?  
Hadithi za kisasa?,  
Basi na vituko vyake pia,  
Wengine hamtaki kuitikia,  
Wengine mwaitikia kizungu,  
Sijui yaah yaah ...  
Ni mamoja kwangu,  
Lakini sikilizeni,  
Kwanza hamna pakwenda,  
Hadithi mtasikiliza,  
Walevi hamna fedha,  
Kwa hiyo baa marufuku,  
Kwanza bia imepanda bei,  
Labda mjifunze kunywa gongo.*
- 9a *Wapenda densi sijui dansa,  
Siku hizi ni fujo na unyang'anyi,  
Wanyang'anywa msichana, hata mkeo,  
Pia wakuibia fedha,  
Barabara zote giza,  
Taa zawaka kwa maringo,  
Jiji lasema hali ngumu.*

- 9b *Watu wanasema hali halisi,  
Kaa usikilize hadithi,  
Maana huna pakwenda,  
Kasuru ali kako,  
Bei yake mshahara wa mwezi,  
Kakivuliwa,  
Utalia kwa lugha ya kwenu,  
Kizungu, Kiswahili wapi,  
Utakuwa majinuni zuge,  
Kaa usikilize kisa cha Manzese,  
Na Ostabei Jijini Daa.*

The storyteller comments on the difficult situation in Tanzania: rising prices, increasing criminality, poor conditions of life in Dar es Salaam. Only at this point the main story starts to unfold. It begins in 1956 with a poor couple, Kitwana and Mtumwa, but the storyteller interrupts continually his narration addressing the audience.

The hero of the main story is the eldest son of the couple, Mashaka.

10. *Ala ala! Hampendi,  
Mwataka hadithi ya vigori tu,  
Za madume hamtaki,  
Basi nendeni huko baa,  
Au kwenye densi,  
Mnazo hela?,  
Densi wanakwenda,  
Wale wenye masurufu,  
Au wale maarufu,  
Kama sarafu,  
Na noti elfu,  
Au, tena au,  
Wale wezi,  
Maana ndio wenye senti.*

At this point begins a long insert about different kinds of thieves.

11. *Wengine wezi wa sinzia,  
Baadhi wezi wa silaha,  
Wale wasiofanya mzaha,  
Kua kwao si karaha,  
Halafu, tena halafu,  
Kuna wezi mikono-laini,  
Mwawaita wezi sijui karatasi,  
Ennhee umesema,*

*Wezi wa kalamu,  
Basi huko densini,  
Wezi wa kalamu na wenzao,  
Wanafanya karamu,  
Unaonaje karamu ya majizi?*

*Naam,  
Itakuwa karamu kabambe,  
Au hata kamambe,  
Mazungumzo yao,  
Yale maelezo ya mbinu za wizi,  
Lakini karamu mbali,  
Je mkutano wa chama cha wezi,  
Usinichekeshe, Ati mwenyekiti  
Atakuwa wa silaha, wa sinzia,  
Au wa mikono-laini?*

The disquisition goes on, but then the storyteller notices that he is boring his listeners.

12. *Aaa lakini hii si hadithi ya wezi,  
Taabu ni nyie,  
Mnapiga miayo,  
Eti nawachosha,  
Ni lipi lisilochosha,  
Muda wenyewe mrefu,  
Na nyie hamna hela,  
Burudani shurti utikise, mhela,  
Ule mti unaotaga hela,  
Mti huo makwenu hauoti,  
Achilia mbali kustawi,  
Basi hadithi hii nawapa bure,  
Taabu ya vitu vya bure,  
Havina thamani,  
Ningekuwa nawauzia,  
Mngenisikiliza na kukariri,  
Maana nisemayo si haba,  
Japo hayajai kibaba,  
Iliyoy, bure haina mahaba*

Finally the main story continues: Mashaka, even if very poor, is a good student, so he enters high school. He is in the same class with Dora, the daughter of a minister (the very rich and important Jonathan Shibe). Here the two stories meet, as the listeners are supposed to know the minister. He is described ironically, with the use of hyperbole:

13. *Jamaa mnamkumbuka Shibe?,  
 Tumbo lake kubwa kama pipa,  
 Kichwa kidogo kama cha chatu,  
 Uso ulimjaa kurutu,  
 Pua fupi lakini pana,  
 Mweusi kama kiatu cha jeshi,  
 Mdomo wake wa juu haukuonekana,  
 Sharubu za kambare zilizawi,  
 Ukiziona sharubu utamfikiria spekta wa polisi,  
 Maana wale hawaruhusiwi ndevu,  
 Kwa hiyo ni sharubu za hamu tu.*

The love story between Mashaka and Dora continues even after they have finished high school. The rich parents try by all means to prevent their marriage, but in vain. Before ending his story, the narrator interrupts himself for the last time.

14. *Hadithi yakimbilia ukingoni,  
 Nimesema sana,  
 Hata soda hamwezi kuninunulia?!,  
 Mwanisikiliza,  
 Mwameza mate,  
 Mkitajwa binti mwafumbua macho,  
 Eboo — namna gani?,  
 Basi.  
 Namalizia, msinisumbue na maswali.  
 Walioana hawakuoana?!,  
 Kwanza hakuna kuoana!,  
 Hakuna.  
 Bwana aoa,  
 Hakuna kuoana  
 Maana mke haoi kamwe.*

The story has a happy end: thanks to a grandchild, Dora's parents accept finally her husband.

### Formal features

Mvungi's narrative poems are cast in free verse, or rather in a sort of irregular metre. In fact, in the collection *Chungu tamu*, besides poems with a regular metre and those in free verse, there are many mixed forms, where the speech is not patterned enough to be a metre, but still deliberate enough to be rhythmic<sup>6</sup>, and where the rhyme is not removed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Roger Fowler, ed.: *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1973, p.102.

In some modern poets, like Mulokozi and Kahigi, the passage from traditional to modern poetry is still visible, whereas e.g. in Kezilahabi the process of creating a substitute form of an accepted prosody is accomplished. Mvungi is closer to the former two poets.

In Mvungi's poems there is a great variation in line-length and in the length of the strophes. Thus *Chatu na kuku* consists of eight pages containing 47 strophes of unequal length — from four lines up to 12; *Dakitari Askari* is 15 pages long and has 32 strophes of even more unequal length: from 3-4 lines to some strophes stretching over 1-2 pages; finally *Manzese mpaka Ostabei* consists of 12 pages, with strophes from 4-5 lines up to one page.

The rhyme occurs quite often; it is the irregular rhyme of free verse, a crucial structural device, suited to capture the heterogeneousness of modern experience. See, for instance, in the strophe 2: *kwa woga — akakimega, akakitumbukiza — akiumiza — anavyomeza; maji — kipaji — usimuliaji*. Strophe 3: *babu — tabu, koo — jogoo*. Strophe 4: *imenisaliti — dhati — beti — hati — dhulumati*. Strophe 9: *halisi — hadithi*. Strophe 10: *masurufu — maarufu — sarafu — elfu*. Strophe 11: *silaha — mzaha — karaha*. Strophe 12: *haba — kibaba — mahaba*.

In the strophe 13, besides the rhyme *chatu — kurutu*, this rhyme (-*tu*) is repeated two lines later in *kiatu*, but not in the end position. The same patterning, i.e. a sort of phonological echo, occurs in the strophe 11, *kalamu — karamu*:

*Wezi wa kalamu na wenzao,  
Wanafanya karamu,*

and in the strophe 6, *raha — karaha*<sup>8</sup>:

*Lakini usikubali raha tu,  
Kumbuka na karaha.*

<sup>7</sup> In fact, the most prominent feature in the traditional Swahili poetry is the metre — a fixed number of syllables in a line and a fixed number of lines in a strophe — while the rhyme is less elaborated than that of Western poetry. So the first traditional element that Swahili modern poets felt the need to do away with was the regular metre, not the rhyme that is not considered to such an extent as a worn-out convention. Therefore there are many free-verse poems without a fixed number of syllables in a line and with a varying number of lines in a strophe, but which exhibit a regular (or almost regular) final rhyme, whereas there is, as far as I know, nothing similar to the European *blank vers* with its regular metre and rhythm, but without rhymes.

<sup>8</sup> Remember that *Raha karaha* is the title of Mvungi's first collection of poems.

Mvungi's narration is not always linear; in *Dakitari askari* he shifts to the past inserting some flashbacks into the main story. His language is simple, but varied: it features many colloquialisms, broken Swahili of Uganda, codeswitching and a distinctively oral style (*kasuruali kako*).

The poet often uses short and simple sentences almost without punctuation. His graphological style is similar to the Swahili convention of commas dividing two hemistichs of a *shairi*, i.e. having only a formal, visual role. In fact, Mvungi's commas and full-stops have no syntactic function, but signal respectively the end of a line or of a strophe. Thus commas occur even after a question mark and sometimes they are put in the middle of a phrase (*mzee huyu alikuwa na kipaji, cha huu usimuliaji; densi wanakwenda, wale wenye masurufu*), or, on the contrary, between two sentences. Full-stops very seldom occur in the middle of a strophe, not even at the borderline between the frame story and the main story (which is somewhat disturbing for the reader).

- 2a. *Babu hakujali swali langu,  
Akaendelea kunipasha habari,  
Piku alimezwa huku analia,*

As the effect of using full stops is to emphasize the autonomy of each piece of information, their absence may mean close interlinking of the two stories. When the full-stop does appear in the middle of a strophe, its effect is of maximum force:

15. *Kukacha,  
Landrova na lori,  
Hukoo kunakoogopwa,  
Wengine mwaita mstari wa mbele,  
Wala hakuna cha mstari wala mchoro,  
Ni mbuga, misitu na fujo,  
Mauti.*

The voice of the poem as a whole is the author's, but in some places he accomplishes the appropriation of the voice of his listeners, in order to better evoke their participation, or of his characters, in order to present them more vividly or to condemn their world view (*Midili skuli* of the minister Shibe). This shift occurs, e.g., in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> strophes.

While the classical *utenzi* is punctuated by purely formal, “dummy” addresses to the listener, such as *sikia, fahamu* etc., Mvungi’s address to the listeners/ readers, represented as a dialogue of the storyteller with his audience, is an important part of his narrative poems. The reactions of the audience are discussed by the narrator, and sometimes (strophe 11) a listener’s hint is reflected in the narrator’s speech:

11. *Mwawaita wezi sijui karatasi,  
Ennhee umesema,  
Wezi wa kalamu,*

The principle underlying all versification is foregrounding. Foregrounding may include all salient linguistic phenomena that in some way cause the reader’s attention to shift from ‘what is said’ to ‘how it is said’, and above all, it includes rhetorical figures. A prominent poetic device occurring in Mvungi’s poetry is chiming. It is the device of connecting two words by similarity of sound so that we are made to think of their possible connections. The phonological bond is most striking when it is between words that are grammatically paired but contrast in reference and in associations. This bond may be alliterative, like *siku ya soko*, or one of rhyme, such as *utoto ni kito, wazuri - kiburi*, or *dunia mviringo wa maringo*. In such cases we speak about horizontal rhymes, as the words are in the same line.

Assonance (identity of vowel sounds) and alliteration (repetition of initial consonants) are combined, e.g., in *mabomu yaliacha makovu* in the strophe 5.

Lexical repetition, one of the essential poetical devices, presents a simple emotion with force by underlining rather than elaborating the message. Free repetition, characterized by an apparent haphazardness or disorderliness in the manner of repetition, has a deliberate rhetorical effect: it is a fundamental device of intensification.

Both categories of free repetition — intermittent repetition (*ploce*), and immediate repetition (*epizeuxis*) — occur in Mvungi’s poems.

Repetition at a distance:

16. *Ilimradi ni kivutio kisichoumiza fikra,  
Hata fikra za masikini.*

*Lakini vita,  
Inayodai watoto wa nyumbani,  
Si kivutio kisichoumiza,  
Kwanza si kivutio kwa raia wema,  
Hasa raia masikini,  
Sijui ni kivutio kwa nani,  
Usiniulize.*

Repetition in contact:

*Mame Dora akaasa akaasa or Ati mchumba, mchumba asiye baraka.*

When the repetition takes place within the framework of a pattern, we speak of verbal parallelism. Mvungi makes mostly use of anaphora (initial repetition) and anadiplosis (the immediate repetition of two terms, the first one situated at the end of a unit, the second one at the beginning of the following unit)

17. *Wote wawili wakaangua,  
Kuku akapata vifaranga,  
Vifaranga wawili,  
Chatu akapata vichatu,  
Vichatu vinne. (Chatu na kuku)*
18. *Nikawaza maraisi wa maisha ni wengi,  
Kuna waliojitangaza wazi,  
Kuna wasiojitangaza, (Dakitari askari)*
19. *Wengine hamtaki kuitikia,  
Wengine mwaitikia kizungu, (Manzese...)*

On the whole, however, the author privileges free repetitions that suggest spontaneity.

Syntactic parallelism:

The term "parallelism" is above all associated with syntactic repetition, like in the examples 20 and 21.

20. *Mtumwa akapungua ubichi,  
Kitwana akachanua kichwani, (Manzese mpaka Ostabei)*
21. *Mwenzangu Manyai kapewa manesi watatu,  
Na pori lake,  
Mie wawili na vichaka vyangu, (Dakitari Askari)*

In the following verses (from *Chatu na kuku*), both syntactic and lexical parallelism appear — parallelism extends to both lexical and grammatical choices.

22. *Kuku ataga mayai,  
Chatu ataga yake,  
Kuku akimkuta panya,  
Anamkonyeza chatu,  
Chatu apata kitoweo.*

*Chatu akikuta matunda,  
Au hata punje za nafaka,  
Amweleza kuku,  
Kuku anafaidi.*

Parallelism may be synonymic, like in the former examples, or antithetic, as e.g. in *Dunia ni raha na tabu*, or in

5. *Vijiji vikawa mbuga  
Pema pakawa alama ya uovu,*

Among other examples of Mvungi's patterning are horizontal rhymes combined with an antithesis (*mapenzi ni mashenzi; watu wakageuzwa vitu; kambi ikajaa vumbi*), and the chiasmus

8. *Jiji salama,  
Watu hadaa,*

Another interesting feature is the antithesis linking the last line of a strophe (9a) with the first line of the next one (9b):

*Jiji lasema hali ngumu.  
Watu wanasema hali halisi,*

Normally these two lines should be part of the same strophe, separated from what comes next, i.e. the direct address of the audience:

9b. *Kaa usikilize hadithi,  
Maana huna pakwenda, ....*

This is a case of foregrounded irregularity, or in other words, of linguistic deviation.

According to Fowler<sup>9</sup>, it means the violation of rules and conventions, by which a poet awakens the reader to a new perceptivity. In fact, as we have said above, the narrator intermingles the main story with his comments (the frame story), and this linking has been made evident even by such formal devices as punctuation, the division in strophes and rhymes.

Mvungi's poems are relatively poor in tropes, i.e. in devices involving alteration of the normal meaning of an expression, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, simile etc.

He does use similes and metaphors, of course, but not to such an extent as other modern poets. Some of his similes are *tuliyeyuka kama siagi juani; nikawa nimekaribisha makofi mithili ya mvua; alilia kama ng'ombe machinjoni*; other examples of simile may be observed, e.g., in the description of the minister Shibe (s.13):

13. *Tumbo lake kubwa kama pipa,  
Kichwa kidogo kama cha chatu, ...  
Mweusi kama kiatu cha jeshi,*

An example of metaphor occurs in the same poem (in the strophe 12) with *mhela* — the tree on which grows money:

12. *Burudani shurti utikise, mhela,  
Ule mti unaotaga hela,  
Mti huo makwenu hauoti,  
Achilia mbali kustawi,*

In *Dakitari askari* the narrator compares military doctors following wounded soldiers to vultures:

*Mie nilivuka mpaka, Januari,  
Ndege mla nyama,  
Nafuata vitoweo,*

In the same poem he "dismantles" a metaphor (in a strophe quoted earlier):

15. *Kukacha,  
Landrova na lori,  
Hukoo kunakoogopwa,  
Wengine mwaita mstari wa mbele,  
Wala hakuna cha mstari wala mchoro,*

<sup>9</sup> Op.cit., p 98

*Ni mbuga, misitu na fujo,  
Mauti.*

.....

This example illustrates one characteristic of Mvungi's style — his fondness for playing with language at various levels, from words to sentences. There are several instances of playing with words in our poems, like *Wapenda densi sijui dansa* (9a), *Seminari ikatukosa*, / *Au sisi tukaikosa* (7), or

14. *Walioana hawakuoana?!,  
Kwanza hakuna kuoana!,  
Hakuna.  
Bwana aoa,  
Hakuna kuoana  
Maana mke haoi kamwe.*

See also the discussion about *mponyaji* and *mponyeshaji* in the strophe 6.

A part of language game is also Mvungi's manipulation of proverbs:

*Vita havina macho,  
Vina miguu.*

12. *Maana nisemayo si haba,  
Japo hayajai kibaba*

To the latter manipulated proverb, a new one is added by the means of rhyme: (*Ilivyo*,) *bure haina mahaba*.

The trope Mvungi uses most is irony (as we have seen in the previous examples);

see, for instance, the irony in the description of the life in the seminary:

7. *Lahaula!,  
Miaka miwili,  
Magoti yameota sugu,  
Msichana akipita kushoto uangalie kulia,  
Vitabu usome vingi na sana,  
Padiri akisema usibishe,  
Tuliyeyuka kama siagi juani,  
Wazo la mikate na mayai likapaa,  
Seminari ikatukosa,  
Au sisi tukaikosa.*

### Conclusion

The author takes seriously his role as a poet, and thus as a critical analyst of his society. His message is contained not only in the stories he tells, but also in narratorial comments. These comments have such an important role that they may form a parallel story, which is tightly linked to the main story even formally.

In all poems the role of narrator is crucial, but every time it is structured differently. In the first poem, the listener (*mjukuu*) tells/ writes the story told by *babu*. In the second poem, the narrator is the hero of the story that he tells to a listener. Finally, in the last poem the narrator, or rather a storyteller, tells to his audience the story of other people.

While the first analysed poem, *Chatu na kuku*, is an allegorical accusation of oppression, *Dakitari askari* is a direct and explicit condemnation of war, and *Manzese mpaka Ostabei* provides the description of poor conditions of life in Dar es Salaam. On the whole, Mvungi presents subjects that are normally treated in prose. So he adopts an informal, down-to-earth style; the poetical devices he uses most are often those stressing casualness — free repetition and irony. To sum up, the force of the message is carried by a minimalist style.

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