



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: Literature, Linguistics & Criticism

The narrative techniques and confessional patterns in Joan Thatiah's *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the confessional narrative techniques used to construct confessional patterns in Joan Thatiah's *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023). The article adopts a qualitative research design and applies Judith Butler's gender performativity theory. The texts are purposively selected and subjected to close reading and textual analysis. The article reveals that Thatiah uses narrative journalism to enhance credibility. Further, the confessions begin *in medias res*, then, by use of flashbacks and flashforwards, it explains the conflict through a cyclical plot, therefore, foregrounding the confessional moment, making confession a quest for meaning. Thirdly, the chapters in the texts are distinct confessions with different confessants and events. The parallel confessional narratives therein aim at archiving Kenyan lived experiences. Finally, the article postulates a tripartite confessional "I" made up of historical "I", narrating "I", and reflective "I". This allows dialogue between the confessant's past and present and an evaluation of one's life. In conclusion, this article demonstrates that confessions are not merely personal stories, but they are dynamic and are narratively established through specific techniques and patterns. This study adds to the Kenyan confessional discourse by demonstrating that narrative techniques are important in literary confessions.

KEYWORDS: Confession, confessor, confessant, narrative techniques, Joan Thatiah

Nairobi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 10, Issue 1, 2026

ISSN: 2520-4009 (Print)

ISSN: 2523-0948 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted 19 May 2026

Accepted: 11 June 2026

Published: 24 July 2026

HOW TO CITE

Kosgey, F. K., Oduor, V. O., & Wesonga, R. (2026). The narrative techniques and confessional patterns in Joan Thatiah's *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023). *Nairobi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.58256/54hxfs96>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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1.0 Introduction and Literature Review

The present paper examines Joan Thatiah's selected texts with the aim of analysing how it is structured and how such structures pattern a confessional narrative. It analyses the structural choices that the author makes in the packaging of confessions. This is important because confessions in contemporary Kenya have since populated the mainstream media and literature, making it a significant form of self-narration and writing. Confession has evolved from being purely religious or legal to one of literary significance. The article observes that St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* (c. 397–400 CE) was the first to write his confessions, using it to divulge his sins and exalt God; therefore, his was religious. It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782–1789) who secularised confessions, using the mode to assert his own vanity and weakness without seeking divine forgiveness. It was his literary confession that elevated personal truths, giving them public legitimacy. Rosenthal (1959) devised the term confessional poetry in his article "Poetry as Confession", where he argued that a confessing poet speaks to his/her time through poetry. It is therefore from this background that we get the term literary confession.

To date, literary confessions have gained traction, becoming a tool of negotiating identity, gender and critiquing social institutions. Kamala Das uses her literary confession, *My Story* (1976), to discredit the colonial definition of Indian Womanhood. Foucault (1978) understood the importance of confessions when he asserted that people have become a confessing animal, and that such confessions are meant to achieve a purpose. This is seen in Anne Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) and Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* (1965), where they speak to silence imposed on women by addressing topics that were previously seen as taboo. The same is seen in Emilie Pine's *Notes to Self* (2019) and Sinéad Gleeson's *Constellations* (2019), where they address the societal power instituted on bodies through legislation.

Gilmore (2019), in her article # MeTooStorytelling: Confession, Testimony, and Life Writing, studies how genres and premises of analysis change when narrators previously relegated to the margin are given voices by new modes of storytelling. She provides a compelling critique of how survivors in the #MeToo (American Twitter blogs that provided spaces for asserting testimony and confessions against the violence perpetrated by men on women's bodies) avowed testimonial truth through first-person accounts. The present study utilised Gilmore's assertion that Life Writing produces confessional literature and is a generous genre for survivors. That genre sets expectations about the type of story we are reading. Gilmore's postulation is relevant to the extent that she elevates confession as a viable object of study; she authorises a confession as a literary data that can be critiqued. Therefore, scholars need to look for narratives like confessions that will give voice to the voiceless in society.

Gilmore argues that confession democratises voice; however, Resnick (2019) explores the nature and content of confessions, advancing a historical approach. He posits that "the confessional in the later 13th century and its contributions to human sexuality and daily life." He observed that confessions give insight into the private lives of the confessants, providing "confessors with data about human actions, especially sexual behaviours" (Resnick, 2019, p. 293). It is thus possible to conjecture that those confessions provide a window into the private and secluded life of individuals in a community.

Matabane (2017) appropriates the autoethnographic approach in her research, where she writes about herself in "the research as an individual, in a social construct." Her research is confessional, confessing about herself in the study. She aims to write as a parrhesia- someone who testifies truthfully on what they know to be true, providing multiple ways of interacting with the liminal self about ethos and other people. The autoethnographic approach opens new positionalities in which to enter the discourse of confessions. As such, the present study shall study the first-person narratives of confessants who confess themselves in the text and how this mediation affects the reading of confessions.

In Kenya, we have the following scholars who have written on confessions. Craolyne Adalla- *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* (1993), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who wrote a prison memoir- *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Kevin Mwachiro- *Invisible: stories from Kenya's Queer Community*, Kinyanjui Kombani- *Dear Mama*, Muthoni Gicheru- *Breaking the Silence*, and Joan Thatiah. This study will focus on Joan Thatiah's texts. Joan Thatiah is a professional lawyer and a Sunday Nation columnist who has authored over 500 articles. She has written over seven books. Some include *Things I Will Tell My Daughter* (2016), *I Am Way Too Pretty to Be Broke* (2017), *Letters to My Son* (2018), *Guilty* (2020) – A novel. *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023).

The article examines how Thatiah utilises various narrative techniques, including narrative journalism, in medias res, parallel narratives and first-person perspective, to create a narrative arc that anchors confessions, not just as an organising principle but as a form shaping a distinct confessional pattern. Jha (2024) argues that analytical works should go beyond what is narrated to how the stories are configured. Thus, the repeated use of certain narrative techniques by Thatiah creates a complex web of relationships between the confessant and the reader, which yields the confessional pattern. Mbonyingingo et al. (2023) argue that a confessional pattern emerges out of the dialogue between the past life of the confessant and the present. Mwangi (2010) emphasizes that the narratological devices like point of view, setting, plot, characters and language are philosophical vehicles used to decode the dynamic and complex lived experiences of characters. In his view, narrative techniques are the primary elements through which stories are constructed and conveyed. It is how a story takes shape and how it is presented, retrieved and interpreted therefore, the present article draws its impetus here.

It is noteworthy to point out that existing studies concentrate on Western contexts, thus failing to consider the Kenyan perspectives on how they deal with confessional narratives (Nyandoro, 2020). There is a gap in how Kenyan works examine how confessional literature is narratively constructed. This study fills this gap by investigating Joan Thatiah's texts, which provide a Kenyan perspective on confessions and how the narrative devices used construct confessional patterns. The present article argues that there are distinct narrative devices unique to confessions which constitute confessional patterns. This paper focuses on the structural techniques and perspective techniques in the *Confessions of the Nairobi Women* (2022) and the *Confessions of the Nairobi Men* (2023).

3.0 Methodology

This article utilised a qualitative textual analysis of Joan Thatiah's *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023) to interrogate diverse information on narrative structure. This research design is relevant in the exploration of how confessions function as narrative devices. It further employs a purposive sampling criterion. This method helps the researcher select samples pertinent to the detailed purpose under study. The data collection for this research was done through close reading of the primary text and a review of related literature. The narrative structure of the text, the scenes, excerpts, and the actions were analysed as data for the study. Close reading was important since it solicited enough data on plot, point of view, characterisation, among others, which structured the confessional pattern.

The primary data sources include the selected texts, that is, *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023). Textual analysis was done to trace confessional narratives, narrative structure, and the patterning of confessions using language. Secondary sources on confessional literature were obtained from appropriate documents, peer-reviewed journals, scholarly essays, theses, and articles. Finally, discursive analysis of the findings of the narrative structure was done. Where narrative devices and confessional patterns intersected with gender, Judith Butler's gender performativity theory was used.

4.0 Findings and Discussion of the Study

This section outlines and analyses the findings of the study.

4.1 Narrative Structural Techniques

The narrative structure of a text influences how readers perceive and analyse the text. The techniques addressed in this section include the structural design and perspective techniques of the texts. The study recognises that these narrative structures are intentional decisions by the author, in a bid to foreground distinct themes and narrative patterns.

4.1.1 Narrative Journalism

Narrative Journalism or Literary Journalism is a type of nonfiction writing that adopts the stylistic features of fiction. In essence, it is neither pure fiction nor pure journalism; it is a sublime form of writing that came into existence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with proponents like Norman Sims, Rhodes Richard, Jane Kramer, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, George Orwell, and John Hersey, among others. This kind of writing seeks to depict real events, real people, and real places that can be corroborated by history. Still, in doing so, it eschews

the dry newspaper reporting mechanism by using techniques, styles, and perspectives of fiction. It is an intense and comprehensive reportage (Wolfe, 1973, p. 15).

Sims (2008) enumerates the various features of narrative journalism, including immersion reporting, use of complex structures, complete character development through emphasis on the commonplace people, and the need for accuracy. Narrative journalists understand the importance of point of view in their work, as there is a need for consciousness in the work through which the objects in view are filtered. As shown in the following breakdown, Joan Thatiah's corpus of literary confessions underscores how personal avowals intersect with literary journalism in the most synchronic way.

The first significant feature of narrative journalism is objective narration, which is a candid description of occurrences. At the heart of the nonfiction is factual reportage; the events should be valid and verifiable. Thatiah recognises this condition and henceforth captures on the cover page that these are 'True stories told to...' therefore, she fulfils this obligation of journalistic integrity. As the compiler of these authentic and candid stories, she is not only a reporter but also an ethnographer tasked with collating personal confessions. This role is in agreement with what Ngetich (2025) calls responsible community-centric journalism. In the *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022), in the preface, Thatiah indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic fuelled her project. Working from home, she toured the vast Nairobi, hunting for stories. She gave interviews to men and women. She listened to them as they answered her numerous questions of identity and personal struggles; dozens of them poured their hearts out. She listened without judgment and dutifully recorded them (Thatiah, 2022, p.1). This procedure places Thatiah's creative art in real-time events and in accordance with the journalistic ethics as espoused by Kipkoech (2019).

The characters in the books are developed fully, and the plot of the story is Character-driven. *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) has 13 chapters, while *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023) has 15 chapters. Each chapter is a complete confession of one person, which means that in all the books, we have 28 composite characters who act as major confessants. We get to understand their deepest secrets and fears, their desires, their stories, where they come from, and their motivations. Their families, friends, and significant others are shown as fringe characters who aid in bringing out their character traits or those involved in their confessions. Through the multiple characterisations, Thatiah reflects Ogola's (2016) postulations that narrative journalism should change simple media reports into relevant societal narratives.

The third feature of narrative journalism evident in Thatiah's texts is her rendition of the stories from the perspective of the ordinary folk. What gives Joan Thatiah's work a lot of traction and popularity is her selection of the ordinary people from ordinary places narrated ordinarily, meant for the ordinary masses. She proposes to project profound facts about society via personal stories. Through individuality of the confessions, Thatiah aims to show how mainstream institutions have affected ordinary folk, rather than focusing on those institutions per se. Example of a monologue, "I got myself into this situation, it is too late, can I go home? What will people think of me? What will I tell my father?" (Thatiah, 2022, pg. 112) This monologue reveals how the social panopticon polices the behaviour of individuals. "I spent my days cleaning, cooking, and tending to the house, and at night, my husband would spend hours pummelling me" (Thatiah, 2022, p. 8). This is a vivid depiction of the routine events of the confessants. It is through the meticulous analysis of everyday events that the reader understands the effects of institutions like marriage, school, church, hospital, and government have on ordinary people. In these texts, we have house managers, students, children, corporate officers, clergy, junior employees, and paupers.

Literary confession is a platform that gives voice to the voiceless; those decentred from power are granted their subjecthood. The subjective experience of the confessants is shown through the use of the first-person accounts. The hidden truths, desires, and guilt of a house manager, cowhand, security guards, employees, among others, are amplified, giving a collective image. Example, "I would like to see you again...fine, I will come. But tone down your expectations" (Thatiah, 2023, p. 58). Thatiah orients the stories. She bridges the gap between fictional and factual writing by incorporating satire, humour, symbolism, and other figures of speech to beautify the work. As a curator of these stories, she decides on which pertinent themes to include, how to frame, and what to highlight; her artistic brilliance is evident. She must also bear the journalistic burden of protecting the identities of the confessants, failure to which she will have breached one of the greatest ethical responsibilities of a reporter, as argued by Ogola (2016).

Joan Thatiah employs immersion reporting (Sims, 2008) in her collection of the confessions. During the spate of COVID-19, when there was a nationwide lockdown in Kenya, Thatiah met people who were deeply burdened. Making detailed observations on them, she examined their conscience through questioning techniques, by immersing herself in subjects' worlds, she frequents bars, makeshift hotels, matatus, and late-night joints, creating rapport with the confessants. This helps her get an accurate description of people, events, places, habits, and mannerisms. It helps her paint the emotional, psychological, and physical landscapes correctly. Setting the mood, state of mind, and general atmosphere just before and after confessions (Thatiah, 2022, p.1). Mboya (2020) opines that immersive reporting is significant in facilitating authenticity of the stories and empathy, since the deeper you listen to the confessant, the confessant might feel truly heard.

Thatiah's writing power is evident in her fusion of literary journalism in the compositions of the confessions. If Thatiah had decided otherwise, her work would have been a long sociological treatise, a report of men and women from Nairobi. It would have resonated with the intellect but failed to appeal to our emotions. Her use of narrative journalism achieves a simulation of reality; the real dialogues and soliloquies provide an illuminative atmosphere for the reader. In the absence of the confessions, the texts would have been fictive, missing the raw and intimate stories that she prides herself on. We would not feel the cultural context and its authenticity. In conclusion, narrative journalism gives Thatiah a vehicle, a tool in which to convey the confessions. As a performative act, Thatiah achieves a witness account of storytelling, the same that John Hersey (2024) got from the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and the same that Capote got from the two Killers of the Clutter family.

4.1.2 *In Medias Res*

Horace discusses in his *Ars Poetica* (Fairclough, 1926) narratives that begin with their climax, a point of conflict, or tension; he uses the term *in medias res* technique to explain how such narratives avoid slow beginnings and dive directly into the middle of the story, an attempt to foreground textual meaning and captivate readers from the beginning. While Aristotle in *Poetics* (Heath, 2013) analyses the plot of stories, he argues that a good story must have a beginning, middle and end; however, it was Horace who coined the term "midstream" for stories that begin in the middle of things. The study finds Thatiah to have persistently utilised *in medias res* as a structural technique since all the stories in both *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023) (C.O.N.M) and *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) (C.O.N.W) begin at the climax, a point of highest crisis. In chapter one of C.O.N.M., 'Too Little Time', it begins:

The day I found my wife, Grace, hanging by her neck from the rafters of the house, we were building in Syokimou, and it looked staged (Thatiah, 2023, p. 2).

The above confession begins with death, thus making the entire confession a search for an explanation of that death. Chapter one of C.O.N.W., 'I Am Thinking About Killing My Husband'

I started thinking about killing my husband ten years ago. A year after that dreadful Sunday morning in January, he came home to bring Baba's gifts. The Sunday, I turned seventeen (Thatiah, 2022, p. 4).

This article samples only two stories for analysis. All stories follow the same pattern: they begin at the point of highest tension, then proceed by use of analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flashforward) to explain what caused the conflict. In the first story of the C.O.N.M., the story fails to start from what prompted Grace to have suicidal thoughts; it does not delve into showing us how Grace planned and committed suicide. It simply begins by showing us a graphic image of a dead body. This suddenly jolts the reader into a world of death. In C.O.N.W., the story begins with a heightened conflict caused by an early marriage of a girl to a man she barely knows and enforced by her father. It is at that moment that she starts to incubate the thought of murder. Kabira (2013) postulate that such a narrative strategy establishes the confession within the immediate lived experience, marking it as the centre upon which the narrative revolves.

It is evident then that the narratives fail to start at the chronological beginning, but at the moment of highest conflict or transgression - the murder, rape, infidelity, burglary, or the flash of violence- this is the narrative pivot. This immediately builds an intoxicating suspense for the reader to proceed with the process of getting the facts of the story. It makes the confession a profound event in the story. The article contends that the confessional narrative develops from the need to make sense of the climax. Thatiah, therefore, begins with the central conflict and then sets out to show how the main character grapples with the tension. A non-linear plot is appropriate in showing the working of memory amidst pain, where the painful experience is recalled in bits and fragments. This structure reflects the psychoanalytic process, in which the analysand gives the underlying problem, worry, or deepest fear first. Then psychoanalysis involves probing the patient through the act of recalling, by using flash forward examples, “I know my wife Emily has been sneaking around with another man”, and flashback examples, “I found out six months ago. His name is Kevin. The day security guard...” (Thatiah, 2023, p. 72). The hidden psychological problems are unravelled. The transgression is the repressed desires made manifest, while the narrative is a journey of finding the source of the underlying problem.

The climactic scene represents the moment the gender script is resisted or subverted (Butler, 1997). According to Butler, the performance of gender is sustained by repetitive acts; when these acts become transgressive, it reveals how gender as a category can be subverted. By commencing with the conflict, the confessions show the instability of the gendered bodies and self. Through the use of flashbacks and flashforwards, which revolve around the central conflict, the narrative seeks to show how the patterns of perfect iteration of gender are broken and contested. It aims to show how the performative failure was possible in the first place; of what urges, oppressions, or repressions in the social script led to this failure.

Thatiah utilises the cyclic plot; there is a non-linear framing of the narrative. Instead of having a plot from point 1 to 10, or point A to Z, there is a scene-by-scene construction of events. From the opening central climax, the plot revolves around jumps and cuts that are tenuously fixed to give backing to the main confession. There is an extensive use of fragmentation to provide a picture of the lives of the main characters in the story. Alluding to the first story of the C.O.N.M., it ends thus:

I don't think I can trust a woman again enough to commit to her. And I still have too many questions. What did I ever do to Grace? (Thatiah, 2023, p. 18).

The C.O.N.W ends:

I am dreaming again for the third time, and dreaming of new dreams. Also, lately, I have started thinking about killing my husband again for snatching me from under my father's roof. Perhaps it has something to do with the baby on the way. And all the things I am afraid could go wrong (Thatiah, 2022, p. 13).

Evidently, the narrative ends by regressing to the opening statements. Grace's husband does not understand what he did wrong or what he failed to do, which caused Grace to kill herself. For C.O.N.W, the no longer teenage woman, still harbours murderous thoughts towards her husband who took her from the safety of her home, but this time the justifications have increased, making the wish more potent. This aspect of coming back to the confession, the central conflict, completes the loop of a confession. This article, therefore, posits a circular confessional pattern whereby confessions begin with a crisis or transgression, then end with the same conflict-affirmed and understood.

The cyclic narrative technique, of beginning with a moral error or a confession, then ending with the same confession affirmed, seeks to deprive the reader as a judge or moral critic to a more affirmative role of the seeker of truth. There is an implicit journey in a literary confession, in which the reader seeks understanding of the context that made such a confession possible. Mwangi (2025) opines that such a technique examines the narrative's consistency and fidelity against the reader's comprehension of an individual's experience.

The Scene-by-scene construction of events, conflict-flashback-flash forward-confession-conflict, affirms,

depicts characters in dramatic scenes as they would happen in the cinematic technique of events. Thatiah uses exact details regarding names of places, time, and occurrences, utilising the cinematic rendition of events. She moves from one episode, then cuts to another, and jumps from one main character to another, flat character to the next confessant. Through the 'Cut and jump' technique that is common in cinematic storytelling, Thatiah develops meaning by building the reader's sequential actions. Example:

Two years ago today, I was on top of the world. I had a ton of respect, a solid bank account and friends. (first scene) Today, I am eating alone. I don't have enough money. (second scene, and conflict). I swear I almost had that seat in parliament (flashback). I will tell you everything...(confession) (Thatiah, 2023, p. 128).

And while things are hard right now (conflict affirmed). I no longer carry my extended family; they do not need me (confession) (Thatiah, 2023, p. 143).

This randomised depiction of events, from one scene to another, and one character to another, reflects the nature of memory. Mboya (2020) argues that our minds cannot recall events in a linear sequence, that one can only remember intense scenes, emotive moments, and the most essential part of our lives. Freud (1920) postulates that the unconscious mind is not governed by linear time or logic. Furthermore, the cyclic plot in which it centres on the transgressive part of the confession, which is constantly mentioned, accords with the Freudian notion of repetitive compulsion, in which the human brain tends to remember and re-memorise a traumatic event to understand it.

In conclusion, in medias res is a performance for the search of personal truth; it is a means of self-examination. As a confessional narrative begins with the climax and sustains the story through a series of suspense, analepsis, prolepsis, and fragmented episodes, it seeks to state that personal experience is disjointed and contestable; therefore, we derive the meaning of life from one's memory and recollections. Each scene embodies a part of a life, in which the reader must join all these scenes to understand the essence of such narratives. These scenes mirror moments where societal expectations and scripts are learned or enforced through human actions. This article argues that the confessional narrative is a quest for the meaning of our lived experiences rather than just a recounting of a story.

4.1.3 Parallel Confessional Narratives

The study observes that the confessions are structured within chapters, and each chapter is a self-contained, independent confession from different confessants. This constitutes a unique narrative structure that the article refers to as parallel confessional narratives- a technique where each chapter has a distinct cast of characters, events, plot and timeline; however, they all share the overall setting of Nairobi city, and they are all about confessions.

C.O.N.W (2022) has thirteen chapters, while C.O.N.M (2023) has fifteen chapters; each chapter stands on its own, with its own protagonists. The chapters have no continuity except for the fact that they are all about confessions. The twenty-eight curated stories change the books from being individual experiences to an anthology of sociological and psychoanalytic annals (Remedios, 2024). It creates a social montage in which the performance and contestation of gender in the urban space are made possible. Each chapter is a unique catalogue of performing gender and constructing identity.

Each chapter centres on one main character, a protagonist grappling with integrating or contesting gender norms. Their confessions are examples of when performance collapses or becomes untenable. An example in the *Confessions of Nairobi Women* in chapter six, "I Like to Think About the Time Before" (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 66-73), talks about a lady, Cindy, whose daughter, Muthoni, was hit by a car. Aisha, her house manager, informed her. This flipped her world upside down. She left her job, lived with post-traumatic stress disorder, and after some years delved into commercial sex work for survival. In the same book, chapter eleven, "When You Place a Human Head on Fire," it is about Law, who stole a car and was consequently burned to death (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 118-126). In *Confessions of Nairobi Men*, chapter eleven, "I Dare Not Have Soft Lips" is about a boy, Chris, who is gay. Due to homophobia in his society- where he was suspended from school, and his friend Kanyi killed- he feared having a boyfriend and falsely projected a heterosexual identity, to his greatest displeasure, just to please

his dad (Thatiah, 2023, pp. 182-196), The supporting characters who are juxtaposed with the protagonists are either the significant other of the main character or the antagonists, in the above examples, Aisha is a fringe character whose role is only to announce the death of Muthoni. Whereas in the second story, the crowd which lynched Law is a communal force that exercises social judgment on Law's malperformance and punishes him. Lastly, the third story of a boy, Chris, whose dad is a fringe character who is an authoritative figure and dictates Chris's life through his tough parenting, the confession is about how Chris navigates a homophobic society. Since confessants cannot operate in a vacuum, the flat characters present are an equivalent of social spectators who congratulate, watch, or upset the main character's gender performance. They stand for social order, ethos, and rules against which the protagonist must operate. Thatiah achieves a collective voice rather than a single narrative. As a literary journalist, Thatiah achieves extensive and varied experiences which mirror the Nairobi society.

While the narratives are independent and noncontinuous, the study reads them independently but treats their thematic concern as a whole, as they symbolise what this article calls the social unconscious- the shared life experiences, challenges and successes that define a community. Their thematic representation of wide-ranging gender issues like poverty and crime (chapter ten), religion and cultism (chapter thirteen), and sexual agency (chapter fifteen) in *Confessions of Nairobi men* (2023). Role of women and men in relationships (chapter twelve), Female genital mutilation (chapter ten), dating culture (chapter nine) in *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022). This kind of thematic montage, Nelson (2007) argues, is a persistent replication of compulsiveness on a communal level, where patterns are repeated, mirrors, society grappling with the same issues rather than isolating confessants. The parallel narratives are set in Nairobi, which seems to be affecting the confessants in different ways, generating pertinent conflicts that not only affect the confessants in an isolated manner but also produce a societal ripple effect. These confessions speak to personal weaknesses and also endemic societal inequities as elaborated by.

The first function of having parallel narratives is that it seeks to de-escalate pressure on individual scrutiny and capitalise on societal introspection. Example in chapter eight, "No Wonder I Want it All the Darn Time," a lady is confessing about her unquenchable sexual thirst, that even on the eve of her wedding, she went out to have sex with Kush, a friend. Yet George, the groom, was waiting at home. She says, "my body count is a lot of men, I began at eleven. I just need to get laid so much. It is like I have a demon inside me. I have no control" (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 84-93). Similarly, in *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023), Chapter fifteen is about a man who has had sexual liaisons with several ladies, including Nyawira, Sylvia, Kendi, and Doreen, and yet he is not satisfied, torn between desire and guilt (Thatiah, 2023, pp. 251-267). Chapter thirteen is a similar story, "Great Love of my life" is about a man who has had sex with so many women that he confesses to it. It was at eleven years that he was enticed by a lady called Mary, at eighteen, he befriended Anita, a rich lady who gave him money, then Ciiku, and finally Bambi. He finishes his confession thus, "I am thirty-one now, I have experienced different women. I don't have much left to try looking for true love or a soul mate" (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 216-232). As Fisher (1995) explains, if we have several individuals performing nonconformity to gender roles, then perhaps the problem may not be about them. We should not pathologise the individual if the problem is societal; we have to interrogate the social structures that produce such behaviour. Consistent conflicts and crises that cut across many confessants may not reflect so much on individual sickness as on societal neuroses. The confessions are asymptomatic readings of the flailing social fabric.

Secondly, the multiple narratives help to paint the correct picture of the larger Nairobi city. By the similitude and contrariness of Nairobi confessions, we get to understand that a unified Nairobi narrative is not possible. To understand the accurate picture of Nairobi, we must delve into the numerous personal interactions and experiences of the Nairobians, and realise that the identity of Nairobians is as varied as its people. According to Eagleton (2011), the structure can only be understood in its entirety; that is, if we are to understand the structural and social underpinnings of Nairobi city, then we must read into the personal space of the Nairobians. Remedios (2024) further observes that having parallel narratives reduces stereotypes and simplification of lived experience since it captures the communal identity. The independent narratives honour and celebrate personal modern urban experience. It grants full agency to different personalities to perform their social realities in ways that please them. It denotes those collective realities as crucial as individual lives. One for all, and all for one, is the practical maxim that seems to bind the corpus of the Nairobi confessions. It

is a reminder that personal truth is equally important in the construction of public and communal truth, thus aligning with Matthews' (2017) notion of democratising storytelling.

Finally, the parallel narrative structure in Joan Thatiah's texts is an appropriate framing, the cornerstone of her work. It is this technique that makes narrative journalism possible, allowing her to demonstrate multiple "doings" of gender in a cultural tableau. It helps her project the factual reportage of journalism mixed with the diversity of literature, making it an adequate representation of Nairobi life. Parallel confessional narratives transform individual stories into a collective social memory of their lived experiences.

4.2 Narrative Perspective Techniques in Confessions

The point of view of a confession is pivotal since it anchors its characters, textual meaning, and the content of the text; it also gives the nexus between the text and the reader. It therefore offers positionalities in which to enter and read the text. Narrative perspective, therefore, influences how we read, understand, and interpret confessions for the reader, and how it is narrated by the confessant. Genette (1980) offers an elaborate narrative theory. He postulates that perspective techniques are not empty vehicles but a conduit through which a reader understands the structure of the text, providing a way through which they can relate morally and ideologically with the text in question.

This section analyses the narrative viewpoints that Joan Thatiah used in her literary oeuvre to render the stories. While the substance of the story, in terms of thematic concerns and literary devices, is important, it is equally prudent to get the various points of view used in the stories and their significance. The perspective or the point of view that orients the confessions merits a scholarly study. It is crucial to get the various ways in which Kenyan Confessions are purveyed and how readers can relate to such perspectives. The perspectives to be analysed are the first-person and the second-person points of view, their various manifestations, and their roles in the narratives.

4.2.1 First-Person Point of View

This is one of the most complex and nuanced points of view in confessions. Smith & Watson (2010) reason that the first-person perspective is 'relational' in the sense that it creates a set of relations between the confessant, who must divulge their secrets, a virtual reader or listener who must consume the confession and a consciousness that processes such a confession. Therefore, a confession is a morally loaded exercise that is ethically and psychologically demanding. With such a critical project, the first-person account saturates a reader with intimate stories of personal struggles, making it an appropriate narrative perspective.

Thatiah frames most of the stories from this point of view. There is an extensive use of the first-person point of view in the C.O.N.M., since all stories are mediated by it. Whereas, the C.O.N.W is a bit variegated with the use of third-person in two stories, that is, chapter two and twelve, use of second-person in chapter 13, and use of first-person in the rest of the stories.

The present section analyses first the first-person central.

First-person central

Herman (2017) observes that the first-person maps the confessant as the subject who acts and is acted upon by circumstances, thus bridging the gap between the central action and the reflection. First-person central takes a significant part in the rendition of Thatiah's confessional works. The confessants immerse the readers deeply into their world, depicting the minutiae of their lives (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). The confessions are anchored by the pronoun "I", the subject of the confessional narrative. According to Fludernik (2009), we get to interact one-on-one with the confessant, such that the reader's individuality is for a moment transfixed to that of the confessant. The "I" of a confession is not a silent character, but a loud presence in which they orient the story for the reader to understand.

According to Watson (2011), the "I" -ness of the confessions is a tapestry of identities. While we might have one character with one personality, the "I" of confession can be manipulated and interpreted to take many forms in the confessant's life. In alluding to one's past, the present, and the future, the confessional "I" accrues many meanings (Smith & Watson, 2010), making it an amorphous creative term. As you read the confessions, one gets the changing perspectives, subtle yet transitory feeling that helps the readers understand the various

personas of the same character.

First-person central can be permuted into three categories, which depict the cycle of the protagonist's life. The study argues that the first-person central in a confession is a product of time and psychological orientation, in that it is not unified and singular but changes over time. Whereas it is possible to distinguish the three selves analytically, the study posits that the confessants transition fluidly and overlap through the three categories; they are therefore not immutable boundaries. These selves manifest in the following interconnected phases: The historical "I", the narrating "I", and the reflective "I", representing the stages through which the confessional subject interacts with their lived experience.

Historical I

Historical "I" refers to the self that lived through an experience being narrated. It is a self, located within the past when the action was done. alludes to Genette's (1980) 'story level'. This is the facet where the action is done, a stage of life where the confessant experienced an event or transgressed the normative script, or had an injustice done on them, thus prompting a confession. It can also be the past life of the confessant. For the transgressive confessions, it is the past; for the victims of injustice, it is the moment when oppression was enacted. This is the persona who executed the transgression of the gender script knowingly or unknowingly. At this stage, the character has not grasped the enormity of their actions or inactions; they are too engrossed in fighting their way through the conflict. The historical "I" constitute our subject of study; it is where the confessions emanate from. As the subject of narration, the flashback and flash forward centre on this cycle. Without the historical "I", there would be no confession.

In *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022), the historical "I" is depicted in the following instances: Chapter one, "I started thinking about killing my husband ten years ago. A year after that dreadful Sunday morning in January, he came to our home with gifts. I was seventeen years. The Sunday Baba wore his best clothes and sat with a group of men. After the meeting, they ordered me to pack my clothes because I was now married. I began crying" (Thatiah, 2022, p. 4). Here, the historical "I" is that of a girl forcefully married. In Chapter Five, "I had weighed on my plan to end things for good for weeks and had made the decision. Tonight was the night. I had given life all I could, and I was depleted. I retrieved the bag of tablets that I had ordered. I smashed them into powder and put it into glass of juice and the other half in Ella's milk bottle" (Thatiah, 2022, p. 56). This is the past of a confessant who, upon suffering the effects of domestic violence, decides to kill herself and the baby.

In *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023), the historical "I" is reflected in the following examples: chapter one, "The day I found my wife Grace hanging by her neck from the rafters of our house, it looked staged. The way her body hung looked unnatural. I touched her toes. They felt stiff and cold. The realisation that she was dead jolted me. My consciousness left me" (Thatiah, 2023, p. 2). This scene sets the stage for the subsequent actions that follow. Chapter five, "I know my wife Emily has been sneaking around with another man. I know. I found out six months ago. His name is Kevin." (Thatiah, 2023, p. 72). This historical finding on her wife's infidelity sparks decisions and actions that later follow. Finally, in chapter eleven, "one afternoon the year I turned eleven, during April school holidays, uncle Morris invited me to his house. We were alone, and he told me he wanted us to play a guessing game. He put something in my mouth while I was blindfolded and told me to suck on it. It was warm and mushy" (Thatiah, 2023, p. 182, 185).

This is the stage of performance; the action must be done here, the gender script must be interpreted through analysable actions; however, the interpretation of the gender script here lacks reflection or ethical introspection (Althusser, 2025). The crisis is set, it is in medias res, a girl is forced into marriage, a boy is molested, unsanctioned sex is solicited for, somebody contemplates murder, a drug is taken, and an instance of infidelity is discovered, just to mention a few examples in the texts. Societal pressure sets in to be a responsible adult, an obedient child, a submissive and respectful wife, and a successful man who provides. Butler (1990) propounds that if these scripts are not performed through perfect, socially sanctioned iterations, then we have a full-blown crisis. We have an action that is no longer meditative, and the institutions of discipline and corrections are thus triggered (Foucault, 1978).

Whereas the historical "I" renders the totality of a lived experience, there has to be an entity or a self that gives voice to that significant past. The experience, thus memory, should be rendered in an intelligible form,

therefore necessitating a transition to a narrating “I”.

Narrating “I”

Ricoeur (2002) comes up with the term ‘emplotment’ to refer to various processes in which disoriented and violent experiences are patterned in an intelligible order of events. In this cycle, the narrating “I” provides the much-needed narrative order. This is the persona in whom we presently get the story. They are the narrator, who provides a detailed confession, giving the answers to the questions: what happened? Where? Why? For how long? Without this persona, we would not get the real story first; therefore, they act as a credible source for the stories. They are the real face of the stories they give, without which we cannot substantiate the validity of the confessions. They speak for the self that transgressed or was deeply wronged, giving us the niche for emotional connection and relativity to the character. In doing so, Smith & Watson (2010) surmise that the confessing subject is seeking trustworthiness through narrative.

The narrating “I” is an active agent who renders the past into life, contrary to the historical “I” who merely lives through an experience; the narrating “I” organises and curates the lived experience into a readable text. Memories which are otherwise disjointed and long are organised into coherent narratives of self. Narrating “I” is therefore the storyteller as seen in the following extracts.

The study follows the earlier excerpts of the historical “I” to see how they transition to the narrating “I”. In *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022), chapter one, immediately after being forced to accompany the man in a suit, ‘her husband’, the narrator began asserting herself. This ushers in the narrating “I”, “I began crying. But if I go with him, how will I sit for my K.C.SE? and who will look after Njuki? I hugged Njuki, bid Baba goodbye and left with my husband” (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 5-13). The confessant then, in the next six pages, explains how she left home for the city. Of how her husband had promised her that he would pay her school fees, and of how this was a lie since she was turned into a house manager. Finally, in chapter five, the narrating I begins thus, “I had sat up late at night on many nights, pondering over the last seven years and wondering where the rain had started beating us. I met Kip at the funeral home in Mombasa. I liked him” (Thatiah, 2022, pp. 57-63). The narrating “I” then sets out to explain how their abusive relationship started and went on and on.

In *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023), the narrating “I” quickly picks up from the historical “I”. Chapter one continues, “A police van arrived at the scene. One look at my bruised hands, and one of the policemen threw handcuffs on my wrists. They cut Grace down. I rode with the police in the back of the van with Grace’s body bouncing at our feet. At the police station I was questioned” (Thatiah, 2023, pp. 3-18). Here the narrator recounts how her wife died, why, the arrival of the police and his arrest. In chapter five the narrating “I” recounts, “I have never been a man who puts a tracker on his wife’s car, or goes through her phone when she falls asleep. I never had a reason to. I had a happy wife, or so I thought” (Thatiah, 2023, pp. 72-88). The narrator then goes ahead to narrate how his wife cheated her with Kevin. Finally, in chapter eleven, the narrating “I” exposes what happened after the sexual assault: “I should have said something at home but I did not. When Uncle Morris was arrested, charged and put in remand, the previous years’ events resurfaced. The memories brought conflicting tensions” (Thatiah, 2023, pp. 186-196).

The narrator performs a central function in confessions; he/she re-enacts the performative self. It is a new enactment of identity, revealing a transition from being a villain, a murderer, or a victim to that of a contrite, resilient survivor, or an introspective person. By giving us the confession itself, espousing on what and how it happened, they seek to control the narrative in such a way that readers desist from judging them or commiserate with them; instead, they understand their situation and celebrate their courage. Freud (1920) comments that the confessant is trying to understand the pain or their transgression, a sort of ‘walk-me through the story first.’

This is a point of recognition, a kind of falling action after the climax. The agency is restored, and for the character who had been subjugated by a system or persons, they now assert their individuality; they claim they know better, deserve better, and look for means of progressing beyond their transgression, beyond their pain. For a failed performance, the confessants look for ways to restore order. In confessing, confessants seek an understanding of their lives; the need, therefore, to appraise the importance of the past experience to the present leads us to the final cycle, called the reflective “I”.

Reflective “I”

This is the resolution stage of the confession. It transforms a story into a confession, with an implied evaluation. The confessant answers the question, why did I do it? How do I feel after the action? What must I do to earn forgiveness? Should I forgive my enemies? What next? It is the insightful voice that processes the trauma, that accepts the eventualities, and that looks for a way forward. It is a voice of reason; this “I” analyses the historical “I”, giving the reader unreserved explanations on the course of action taken.

The reflection stage is where the confessants discuss the merits or demerits of their actions, or silence or inaction. They try to interpret and rationalise their lived experience. It is a stage where the confessants can get narrative closure, or emotional catharsis, or acceptance of their condition, depending on their confessions. The confession then moves beyond recounting a story to that of analysis through moral, emotional and social filters. This stage is key since it seeks to integrate a coherent identity, claim responsibility for the action, apportion blame to external factors, and also process pain. The study argues that it is through the reflective “I” that we get the significance of confessions.

In *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022), chapter one, the confessant reflects thus, “I am pregnant again for the third time and dreaming of new dreams. Also, lately, I have started thinking about killing my husband again for snatching me under my father’s roof. Perhaps it has something to do with the baby on the way. And all the things I am afraid could go wrong” (Thatiah, 2022, p. 13). In chapter five, the narrator philosophises, “I have gone through months of therapy, I am rebuilding, piece by piece. Remember that while I lost almost everything, I am still here and that things can be beautiful again. Am I thinking about dating again? Not quite. As a Nairobi uber driver, I have seen and heard, and I am not eager to dip my feet back in. Not yet” (Thatiah, 2022, p.63). Finally, in Chapter Six, “So why are you a sex worker, Cindy? You ask. Because it is the only thing I know to do. I have only ever been behind a bar counter or pleasuring a man. Sort of like you, you are a writer. It is the only thing you know how to do, right?” (Thatiah, 2022, p. 73). The narrator justifies her nature of work first to herself, and later to the reader. She does not seek redemption nor forgiveness; she wants empathy.

For the *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023), chapter one ends emotively, “I am raising three beautiful children I did not sire but love to death. We are slowly picking up the pieces Grace left behind. Of course, I can never tell them our story. It would destroy them. I am trying to give them a better life. A life which, if they had a choice, they would have picked. I still feel empty in parts of my life. My whole marriage was a lie. What did I ever do to grace?” (Thatiah, 2023, p.18). Whereas chapter five ends, “Now you ask me why I stay with my cheating wife. Because I don’t want my children to grow up in a home where they will have to question their worth, I don’t want my son to ever be someone’s wife’s son” (Thatiah, 2023, p. 88). And finally, chapter eleven ends, “I have come close to telling my mother what Uncle Morris did to me and how that confused my sexual feelings. But she is old and now retired. It will break her heart to know that I am gay. It might even kill her. It is not worth it” (Thatiah, 2023, p. 196).

In conclusion, the confessional “I” begins with the historical “I” that is the past, then to narrating “I” the present narration, and finally the Reflective “I” the evaluation of the past and present action(s). This tripartite process reveals that confession is fluid and is in a continuous process of evaluating our lived experience.

Conclusion

This article explores the narrative techniques utilised by Joan Thatiah in her texts, *Confessions of Nairobi Women* (2022) and *Confessions of Nairobi Men* (2023). The study finds that the confession is structurally and narratively constructed. Thatiah uses narrative journalism to position the confessions as believable stories collated in real-time events and people. All confessions start at the climax, the moment of highest tension, then set out to explain what causes the conflict. The use of *in medias res*, starting at the middle of things and ending with the same opening, constitutes a cyclic plot. Such a structural choice positions a reader to be a detective who looks for reasons, evidence or motivation behind an action or confession. Further, it finds that the confessions are patterned in parallel to each other. Each chapter is a distinct confession with different characters and events; however, all are bound by the same setting, which is Nairobi city. The article argues that such patterning is a reflection of a communal archiving of lived experiences. Such a social montage helps foreground thematic preoccupations of confessions, including those of gender and identity construction.

The article also finds that the confessions are rendered through the first-person perspective. The article

reveals that such a narrative perspective reduces the aesthetic distance between the narrator and confessant, making the confessions easily believable, enhancing emotional connection. The article postulates a tripartite confessional “I” in the first-person point of view of confessions. The “I” of confessions can be read as a set of interconnected and overlapping historical “I”, narrating “I”, and reflective “I”. These confessional selves are dynamic since they require a confessant to remember the past, narrate that past in the present and evaluate the two in a quest to get a meaning of their lived experience. In conclusion, the article contributes to the scholarly discourse of confession, giving some of the narrative and structural techniques used to pattern confessions.

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