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Unveiling Identity through Interactive Narratives: A Study of Abdulrazak Gurnah's

Gravel Heart

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By

Ranjita Tiwari

Roll No: 23

T.U. Regd. No: 5-2-37-272-2007

Symbol No: 280708

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Unveiling Identity Through Interactive Narratives: A Study of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Ranjita Tiwari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Mr. Diwakar Upadhyay

Internal Examiner

Shiva Raj Panta

External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Dhruva Bahadur Karki

Head of Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Ranjita Tiwari

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Abstract

This study explores the interactive narrative techniques in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel "Gravel Heart," focusing on the role in enhancing reader engagement and thematic complexity. The novel employs non-linear plot structures, fragmented narration, and multiple perspectives, inviting readers to actively participate in the storytelling process. Through characters like Salim and Masud, the narrative delves into themes of exile, migration, and betrayal, using diverse strategies such as letters and vivid imagery to create an immersive reading experience. Employing postcolonial theory, particularly Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of unhomeliness and hybridity, the study analyses Salim's identity struggles and their broader societal implications. It highlights how Gurnah's narrative techniques challenge traditional notions of authorship and reader passivity, offering deeper insights into the characters' psychological landscapes and socio-political contexts.

The interactive structure of "Gravel Heart" transforms readers from passive recipients to active participants in meaning-making, effectively conveying the fragmented nature of postcolonial identity. By examining specific instances of interactive storytelling, the dissertation demonstrates how Gurnah subverts conventional narrative methods to explore the intricacies of Salim's experiences. Gurnah's participatory approach not only enriches the storytelling but also deepens the novel's thematic richness, reflecting the complexities of memory and the importance of personal insight. This study contributes to a broader understanding of Gurnah's narrative craftsmanship and the thematic depth of "Gravel Heart," emphasising its significance in contemporary literary practices and pedagogy.

Keywords: Interactive storytelling, Postcolonial identity, Fragmented narration

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* employs a range of interactive narrative techniques that invite readers to actively engage with the text, enhancing the exploration of themes such as identity, displacement, and the impacts of colonialism. The novel's non-linear plot structure and fragmented narration are evident when the protagonist, Salim, reflects on his fragmented memories and the intertwining of his past and present experiences. For instance, Salim states, "I thought that I had taken a little bit after him in shape and complex- ion. The recognition pleased me, it connected me to people and events that my father's silence had cut me off from" (14). This passage exemplifies the novel's non-linear narrative by blending past and present memories, reflecting Salim's ongoing struggle with his identity and displacement. The narrative also shifts to different perspectives, such as when Salim's uncle, Amir, provides his viewpoint on the family's history:

When I was a child and Uncle Amir lived with us, I adored him.

He had been there from the earliest days of my life, always teas- ing and laughing and saying outrageous things about people. He never told me that I should not do anything, not in those young days, and sometimes he winked at me behind my mother's back when she told me off. He knew what was going on in the world, knew about songs and films and football stars, knew about what to like and not to like. To me as a child Uncle Amir seemed fear- less and smart. (45)

By presenting Amir's perspective, Gurnah enriches the narrative with diverse viewpoints, allowing readers to form a comprehensive understanding of the family's history and Salim's identity. Interactive storytelling is further enhanced through the use of letters. Salim discovers letters from his mother, revealing hidden aspects of their family's past:

Dear Salim, his letter read, I am relieved to hear the news of your success and I wish you luck in your career as a university student. I expect you are telling me about it because you want me to pay your fees but I'm afraid I can't do that. The trust I have been paying into has collapsed along with so many others, and I cannot afford to support you. I have received no word of thanks from you for anything I have ever done for you, and until your note arrived I had no idea what progress you were making with your life... (102)

The use of letters as a narrative device provides depth to the characters and allows readers to uncover the family's secrets alongside Salim, enhancing the interactive experience. Gurnah's vivid imagery not only brings the setting to life but also reflects Salim's inner turmoil and sense of belonging. Salim describes the sensory experiences of Zanzibar:

The flight was exhilarating, and as the plane flew over Zanzibar in the dawn I searched the landscape for familiar-signs in the brief moments before landing. I recognised the air with my first breath, even though it was not something I had thought about and would not have had the words to describe. I knew this smell and would have known it if I had been shaken awake in the middle of the night and asked to name it. (168)

This passage engages readers on a sensory level, deepening their connection to the narrative and highlighting Salim's internal conflicts. Salim's reflections on his identity and the feeling of being caught between two cultures further illustrate the theme of displacement:

Some of the material I was asked to read estranged me with its showiness and its relentless knowingness and its pointlessness, as it seemed to me. Some I found humbly incomprehensible despite my best efforts, and I was caught

between admiration and contempt for people who spent a lifetime composing and disseminating artefacts of such over-wrought ugliness. (110)

This passage captures the essence of Salim's identity struggle and displacement, highlighting the theme of unhomeliness and the psychological impact of living between cultures. Gurnah effectively employs the technique of flashbacks to deepen the narrative's emotional resonance. In one poignant moment, Salim recalls,

In my early years in London, I could not always hold off vivid visions of my father's lonely decrepitude. Had he begged in the streets? I am sure he never did that but I saw him approaching people with outstretched hand, a vivid image that I dreaded to be recalled and could not dismiss. And I woke up in the middle of the night to the echo of a cry that had escaped me because I feared the self-hurt my mother would inflict on herself in her silent guilt. (119)

This passage illustrates the non-linear progression of the narrative, as Salim's memories of Zanzibar interlace with his current life in London, enhancing the reader's understanding of his fragmented identity. The novel also uses multiple narrative viewpoints to provide a multi-faceted perspective on the events and characters. In another section, Salim recounts,

I had to take myself to the store and bring myself back late in the evening, working out the way, catching the bus, learning to live. When I received my first pay, I briefly forgot how tiring the work was. To have money I had worked for! It was such a delicious feeling of freedom, so ridiculous, as if I now had a life of my own. (65)

This quote highlights how Gurnah's use of different narrators allows readers to see the complexities of the family's history from various angles, enriching the narrative's

depth. Gurnah's narrative technique also includes moments of silence and reflection, which convey the inadequacy of words to capture certain emotions or experiences. For example, Salim muses, "When I was not out in the evening, I ate a cold supper of potatoes and radishes and pickles and, if I had no chores to see to, read for hours on end. I found such unexpected contentment in this lonely and eventless existence" (201). This passage shows how silence is used to reflect Salim's internal struggle with his past, adding a layer of depth to the narrative.

The exploration of cultural identity is further emphasized through Salim's reflections on his family heritage. He notes, "My mother cannot understand this wish, and when I told her she looked bewildered at first then she looked pained as if I had said something ..." (141). This quote underscores the fragmented nature of Salim's understanding of his heritage, reflecting the broader theme of cultural dislocation.

Another interactive element is seen in the way Gurnah uses symbolism and metaphor to deepen the narrative. Salim describes his sense of displacement through the metaphor of a labyrinth: "I knew that my father liked to have me beside him on these duties, and I won smiles and affectionate pats from many people, and I loved the feeling of belonging and being one of many" (178). This metaphor highlights Salim's internal conflict and his struggle to navigate his dual identities. Salim's journey of self-discovery is marked by moments of profound introspection, as seen in his diary entries. He writes,

I am learning to stop counting too and will soon become naturalised. That is what happens to people like me in this country. If we are lucky we stop being foreigners and we become naturalised. Everything has changed so much, I feel I have been bleached or emptied of something vital but at last I have managed

to complete my degree. What a long time that took, and I am not sure the thing I've now got in my hands was worth the anguish. (122)

These entries provide a personal glimpse into Salim's internal world, enhancing the reader's engagement with his character. Gurnah also integrates the theme of unhomeliness, as conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha, to explore Salim's psychological state. Salim reflects,

That was what I said to my mother again and again: I will stay here and wait for life to return. And in a way I knew to be absurd, I did not want to leave because of Saida This was a secret I kept to myself and mocked myself for, but I could not deny its reality. It caused me pain to think of her. It caused me pain to think how she would mock me if she knew. It caused me to whisper to myself that I had fallen in love with her. (190)

This passage encapsulates the sense of being caught between cultures, a central theme in the novel. In another reflective moment, Salim contemplates his father's absence:

In time, I came to understand that all four of us were living lives in some disarray, working long hours, struggling with debt and fantasies of making good. I did not think that when I first met them. They seemed composed and at ease to me, people used to living in the city whereas I still felt like a stranger from a small town, anxious about destinations and directions although I did my best to disguise this. (85)

This quote highlights the impact of family history on Salim's identity, illustrating how past events continue to influence his present. Through these narrative techniques, Gurnah creates a rich, multi-layered text that requires active participation from readers. The non-linear plot structure, multiple perspectives, use of letters, vivid

imagery, and thematic exploration of identity and displacement all contribute to the interactive nature of *Gravel Heart*. By engaging with these elements, readers are invited to piece together the fragmented narrative, reflecting the complexities of Salim's experiences and the broader postcolonial context. This approach not only enhances the storytelling but also deepens the readers' understanding of the novel's themes and characters.

It is the interactive narrative structure of *Gravel Heart* that sets it apart from ordinary linear tales. This structure challenges the usual conceptions of authorial control and reader passivity. The novel does not provide a predetermined order of events; rather, it provides readers with a variety of different possibilities and points of view, which enables them to actively engage in the process of molding the tale as it unfolds. Gurnah encourages readers to connect with the work on a more profound level by employing nonlinear narrative, fragmented narration, and the purposeful deployment of many views. This presents the reader with the challenge of putting together the pieces of the jigsaw that is Salim's life and legacy. Salim, reflecting his memories says, "I learnt to ask questions, not wanting to know too much, not caring if the same story was told again and again, flattering her when I was required to and slowly I gathered together tantalising fragments of a story that still did not come into focus" (69).

This excerpt from *Gravel Heart* highlights the narrative's nonlinear and fractured structure, as Salim muses about the variety of viewpoints that influence how he perceives his own existence. Gurnah encourages readers to actively engage in the meaning-making process by posing challenges such as navigating the intricacies of Salim's experiences and assembling the narrative from its disparate pieces.

At the core of this interactive storytelling style is the concept of co-creation, which is characterized by the blurring of boundaries between the author and the reader, and the emergence of meaning through a process of interpretation that is carried out in collaboration. By giving readers the ability to make decisions, fill in gaps, and link different threads of story, *Gravel Heart* turns the act of reading into an experience that is both dynamic and immersive. As they make their way through the winding paths of Salim's trip and struggle with the intricacies of identity, belonging, and memory, readers experience a transformation from passive observers to active players in the manufacture of meaning.

By analyzing specific instances of interactive storytelling found in the book, this study demonstrates how Gurnah subverts conventional notions of authorship and reader passivity. As a result, readers are given the opportunity to collaborate in creating meaning inside the story's structure. The protagonist Salim embarks on a profound journey of self-discovery, navigating the intricate layers of his family's history and his own identity. The following statement illustrates Salim's realization of the active role that must be played in unraveling the complexities of his past:

When I asked my father any questions he replied in his own way. He did not answer directly and I did not press, and hardly ever prompted him. I thought I was being careful not to panic him but Baba was talking with complete fluency and it seemed without reservation, and I began to feel that sooner or later he would tell me all there was to tell. I just had to let him do it his own way. (172)

These lines occur as the process of exploring his personal history is reflected upon by Salim, emphasizing the dynamic and participatory nature of understanding one's past. By quoting these lines, the thematic focus on the active engagement required to piece

together fragmented memories and the empowerment that comes with taking control of one's narrative is highlighted. The paragraph reflects the core idea of the thesis statement, highlighting the participatory storytelling style used by Gurnah. The text emphasizes the call for readers to actively participate in the narrative, indicating that the novel goes beyond conventional limits of authorship and reader passivity by urging readers to become collaborators in creating meaning inside the text.

The study employs an interdisciplinary strategy to achieve this goal, using concepts from interactive media theory, reader-response criticism, and narrative studies. This study examines many strategies Gurnah uses to get readers to interact. Open-ended narrative architecture, multi-perspective narration, and non-linear storytelling are some of these techniques. The examination is carried out by combining theoretical inquiry with in-depth textual analysis.

Not only do colonizers engage in this discriminatory behavior against the nations that they colonize, but a colonized nation is also extremely likely to view itself as superior to other nations simply due to the perception management that the colonists produced over the course of time, reinforcing a hierarchical worldview that perpetuates the dominance of the colonizing culture. Salim hears a distinct discourse used towards Muslims once he witnesses the news of the slaughter that occurred in New York. When referring to extreme Muslims, they all use the same negative adjectives in the same lines, such as terrorists and barbarians. These are the words that he uses to convey his anguish in the letter that he writes to his mother:

I had expected smoldering accusing stares and acid questions about my parents, my work, my religion, but the nearest it came to that was when I looked at Billie's mother while Anand was talking and found her gazing at me

with surmise. She caught my eye and smiled and then turned towards her son.
(146)

The review of the related literature synthesizes views from various academics who have studied Gurnah's work, giving a complete framework for analyzing the novel's narrative strategies. *Gravel Heart* is explored in Nureni Oyewole Fadare's *Anafora*, which addresses post-revolution issues, migration, and self-identity. According to him, these themes are crucial to comprehending the characters' psychological landscapes and socio-political situations (24). After revolution and migration, characters' identities and decisions are shaped. This approach highlights the dynamic relationship between personal and collective histories. Interactive storytelling strategies show how people's pasts and presents are intertwined to produce a complex, multi-layered story that attracts readers.

Hilda Jeyakumari Brainee examines Gurnah's colonial and post-colonial experiences in her research. This research highlights the emotional and social effects of colonialism and its aftermath on people and communities. Brainee's analysis illuminates how historical and socio-political conditions affect human emotions and social life in *Gravel Heart* (113). Understanding these consequences allows the thesis to examine how Gurnah employs interactive storytelling strategies to show the ongoing repercussions of colonialism and allow readers to empathise with the characters' emotional and social challenges. Brainee's analysis thus highlights how Gurnah's storytelling functions as a call for empathy and reflection, compelling us to reconsider our perspectives on colonial histories and their lasting repercussions.

Samiullah Paracha et al. discusses balancing fabula, the basic sequence of events in a story, with interaction in narrative development (56). This notion helps explain how Gurnah balances chronological events with interactive features that

interest readers, making it useful for analyzing his storytelling tactics. Paracha's insights may be used to study how *Gravel Heart* uses non-linear storytelling, flashbacks, and other interactive tactics to create an immersive tale. This method encourages readers to actively reconstruct the tale, improving engagement and comprehension.

Wan Shamsuddin emphasizes the role of storytelling in heritage interpretation in his case study, arguing that "It is not just entertainment but a necessary instrument for maintaining and explaining cultural legacy" (78). Gurnah's work explores memory, history, and cultural identity, making this perspective significant. Interactive narrative approaches can help readers understand the characters' cultural and historical circumstances in *Gravel Heart*, which explores these subjects via storytelling. Shamsuddin's emphasis on storytelling's interpretive power supports the thesis's investigation of Gurnah's interactive tales' cultural preservation and transmission.

Expanding on Shamsuddin's perspective, it is clear that Gurnah's use of interactive storytelling in *Gravel Heart* serves as a powerful tool for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. This narrative allows readers to deeply engage with characters' cultural and historical contexts, thereby enhancing their understanding of the boarder themes of memory, history, and cultural identity.

From these viewpoints, the literature review provides a good framework for studying Abdulrazak Gurnah's interactive storytelling tactics in *Gravel Heart*. The review underlines Gurnah's multi-dimensional narrative, from the psychological and emotional effects of post-revolution problems and migration to the socio-political effects of colonial and post-colonial experiences. It also gives theoretical tools for analyzing Gurnah's narrative's structural and interactive features, improving our grasp of his literary strategies and their effects on readers.

Publishers Weekly's remark admits that the book had a hesitant start, but it also commends Gurnah for his skill in maintaining a lovely, reflective tone throughout. This tone gives the story more depth and richness by enabling a careful examination of Salim's experiences with displacement and discovery, The quote from Kirkus Reviews perfectly captures the core of the protagonist of the book, who must negotiate the tricky terrain of cultural identification. It implies that the main character lives in a state of transition, feeling as though he or she is not a part of either culture. The protagonist's inner turmoil and the difficulties in balancing divergent cultural influences are emphasized in this portrayal. In general, the statement highlights how the book explores issues of identity, belonging, and what it's like to be a blend of two cultures. This quote below, taken from a review by Kamila Shamsie in *The Guardian*, highlights the profound impact of Abdulrazak Gurnah's writing in his novel *Gravel Heart*. Shamsie praises Gurnah's mastery of language and his ability to convey the intricate emotions of his characters, emphasizing the novel's depth and richness. He remarks, "The elegance and control of Gurnah's writing, and his understanding of how quietly and slowly and repeatedly a heart can break, make this a deeply rewarding novel" (19).

This quote highlights several key points like elegance and control, emotional depth and rewarding novel. She praises Gurnah for his ability to convey profound emotions through his skillful writing style, suggesting that his prose is refined and adeptly crafted by indicating the readers who finds value in its exploration of themes and its literary qualities.

The Guardian praised Abdulrazak Gurnah's writing in *Gravel Heart* for its grace, restraint, and deep grasp of human emotions. It demonstrates Gurnah's ability to convey the gradual and silent process of sorrow, making the work extremely

gratifying for readers. This rating implies that Gurnah's skilled narrative and perceptive depiction of emotional depth add to the novel's overall power and resonance: "A colourful tale of life in a Zanzibar village, where passions and politics reshape a family ... Expect echoes of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* which provides the book's title, in two nights and hundred pages of powerful narrative" - Mail on Sunday (UK).

The Mail on Sunday (UK) praises *Gravel Heart* as a lively depiction of life in a Zanzibar hamlet, where familial relationships and political pressures intersect to produce the tale. It implies that readers might expect features reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, from which the book's title is taken. The review praises the novel's strong writing, promising a gripping story that spans two nights and hundred pages.

Gurnah does a masterful job of depicting the major theme of the piece, which is exile, through the emotional journey that Salim goes through. During the course of Salim's search for a feeling of belonging in both London and Zanzibar, the author illustrates the profound emotion of dislocation and desire that comes with being away from home. A fascinating representation of the displacement and alienation that many immigrants suffer as they navigate the complexities of identifying and belonging in a new cultural environment, Gurnah's story of Salim is a striking example of this phenomenon.

In addition to examining topics such as exile and migration, *Gravel Heart* also delves into the dynamics of family connections and the impact that family secrets have on the lives of individuals. Gurnah does an excellent job of unearthing a family secret that lies at the heart of Salim's story, thus illustrating how buried information can have far-reaching impacts on both individuals and relationships. Through Salim's

journey of self-discovery, Gurnah investigates the ways in which secrets, which are generally rooted in power imbalances, may have a significant impact on the trajectory of an individual's life and have a significant impact on the bonds that bind families together.

Gurnah's participatory narrative approach, which actively immerses readers in Salim's journey of self-discovery, is what sets *Gravel Heart* apart from other works of fiction. Leading readers along a path that has already been established, Gurnah gives them the opportunity to participate in the process of uncovering the truth about the mysterious family secret. As the story progresses, the reader is drawn into a complex web of relationships and feelings made possible by Salim's growing understanding of the dynamics of his family. This has an effect on the reading experience.

Gurnah's language is refined and under control, and he provides an account of Salim's experiences that is devoid of sentimentality but nevertheless profoundly affecting. As Salim navigates the turbulent seas of identity, belonging, and self-discovery, Gurnah's delicate description of human emotions demonstrates a remarkable grasp of the complexities of the human condition. This encourages readers to empathize Salim's struggles and accomplishments as he navigates these waters.

Using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory as a lens, this study investigates the identity difficulties that Salim, the protagonist of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*, faces during the course of the story. Despite the fact that prior research on the novel has investigated topics such as participatory storytelling, community ethics, transmodernity, and intercultural relations, a postcolonial approach has been mostly lacking. Through an examination of Salim's identity problem through the lens of postcolonial philosophy, this research intends to address this vacuum in knowledge.

A fresh approach to analysing Gurnah's works was presented in Sreya Mallika Datta's paper. This approach involves studying the works' connection with modernity via the prism of transmodernism. The argument put up by Datta was that "Gurnah's literature challenges the restrictions that are imposed by European modernism while also promoting a community morality. His tales, which place an emphasis on relationality and global contacts, are a counterpoint to the conventional narratives of modernity since they prioritize the philosophical and political goals of community" (3). "Gurnah articulates a dynamic transmodern modality that is founded on knowledge gathered via cross-cultural exchanges and voyages" (20). This modality is built on the metaphor of the Indian Ocean.

E. Bekler, in his writing on the pre-colonial status of Africa, asserts that, "Achebe clearly characterizes the African Society as being distinct with its tribes and loyal to their traditions, despite the fact that it was considered to be savage and distant from civilization. It has been asserted that the African society was satisfied with themselves, having faith in and respect for one another as well as their own traditions" (1).

Unhomeliness, a term coined by Homi.K. Bhabba is the feeling of being in-between two or more cultures. An unhomed person does not feel like they belong because they are in a psychological limbo that usually ends in mental illness. In this regard, one who reads this novel can easily realize that Salim has a strong feeling of unhomeliness. For example: "I met people who recognized me and jumped to their feet to greet me. How could they still remember me after all these years? And how did they all manage to look the same when I felt so transformed?" (170).

Through the lenses of hospitality and multiculturalism, Laya Soleymanzadeh's thesis investigated the ways in which Gurnah's books negotiate the negotiation of

identity and narrative agency. Soleymanzadeh conducted research on the ability of hospitality to be utilized in the analysis of narrative agency in multicultural contexts, with a particular emphasis on the interactions between characters and their connections with states. Characters are able to govern their subjectivity in contexts that are inviting by expressing their own experiences and rejecting prevailing discourses that marginalize them (7). On the other hand, according to him, angry encounters aggravate power disparities, which in turn silences certain cultural narratives (9).

The postcolonial framework developed by Homi K. Bhabha is an extremely helpful instrument for analyzing the difficulties of identity and belonging in the novel *Gravel Heart*. According to Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, his idea of 'unhomeliness' offers insight on the split consciousness that colonized people suffer when they are attempting to reconcile their competing cultural identities (1). This research makes use of this theoretical viewpoint in order to explore the layers of Salim's identity struggle and the repercussions that it has within the postcolonial framework of the novel.

While the focus of this article has switched to a postcolonial analysis, it is important to acknowledge that prior investigations of the interactive storytelling approach used in the novel have been conducted.

Roland Barthes emphasized the vast variety of narratives, suggesting their diverse forms and reader interactions. His concept challenged traditional linear narratives, highlighting the dynamic interplay between text and reader. Barthes' observation paved the way for exploring stories beyond conventional structures, ultimately leading to the concept of interactive narrative methods, where readers play a significant role in shaping the narrative path and outcome (Barthes 237).

Gérard Genette contributed by defining narrative analysis as the study of acts and events unrestricted by medium-specific limitations. This broad perspective allows for the examination of narrative structures without limitations of language or form. Within this framework, this study could have focused on three key aspects of narrative construction: the story's anachronistic nature, the plurality of narrative viewpoints, and the inventive strategies used to fill narrative gaps. The convergence of these elements creates a fractured structure that reflects themes of disintegration and social change (Genette 55).

Gurnah's postcolonial representation of Salim's pain is enhanced by ideas of (un)belonging and in-betweenness. Serap Ünal explores how *Gravel Heart* migrant characters traverse a complicated world where their identities and feeling of belonging change (102). Postcolonial literature's in-betweenness reflects the fractured lives of persons on the periphery of many civilizations. Gurnah vividly depicts how Salim and others like him try to reconcile their history with their present and their sense of self with external judgements.

Gurnah also portrays marginalized persons as moral actors rather than victims, subverting conventional frameworks. Gurnah gives marginalized people agency and ethical depth, Bosman (58) says "This subversion reshapes the narrative surrounding marginalized identities, allowing these characters to become fully realized persons with moral landscapes rather than victimization".

Gurnah uses storytelling to empower and survive in works like *Gravel Heart*. Felicity Hand says, "Gurnah's characters utilize narrative to cope with dislocation and estrangement. They use storytelling to govern their narratives and identities, turning loss and displacement into resistance and self-affirmation" (134). Gurnah's work emphasizes narrative's ability to recover one's voice and position in the world.

The study used a narrative theory methodology to examine the structural components of *Gravel Heart*. Based on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gerard Genette, the novel's narrative structure was examined, with particular attention paid to devices like: narrative structure i.e plot vs. story. The story refers to the chronological sequence of events in Salim's life, from childhood in Zanzibar to his experiences as an immigrant in England.

The plot, however, is the way these events are presented in the novel, often through a non-linear structure that interweaves past and present. Gurnah employs a nonlinear narrative structure, reflecting the fragmented and often disjointed nature of memory. For example, "Each thread was a recollection that illuminated the man I became." Salim's recollections of his past in Zanzibar are interspersed with his experiences in London, creating a tapestry of memories that illuminate his current state of mind and sense of identity. For example: "When I reached this point I began to wonder if I knew anything about myself because it was most likely that I only knew what people told me about how I was as an infant, at times one person saying this and another saying that, forcing me to bow to the more insistent one and occasionally selecting for myself the younger self I preferred" (4).

In addition, the research used analysis of *Gravel Heart* to investigate the theme aspects of the work. The way that the novel depicts identity, displacement, and the effects of colonialism was analyzed through the perspectives of academics such as Homi K. Bhabha Said. In *Gravel Heart* Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is the central for understanding identity.

Hybridity refers to the creation of new cultural forms and identities that emerge from the interaction of different cultural influence, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's idea of the "Third Space" is the crucial site where hybrid identities

are negotiated. For an example, "Everyone leaves home and sets up on their own. Everybody wants to have their own life and to have control of it. She understands that, of course, but she pretends to find it strange because she cannot bear to be on her own." (141). Here, sense of being both insider and outsider reflects Bhabha's notion of hybridity. His identity is not static but constantly evolving in third space where different cultural influences intersect. This ambiguity challenges the binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized, revealing a more complex negotiation of identity.

For understanding, the displacement as a theme in the novel, Bhabha's concept of "unhomliness" describes the feeling of being caught in between cultures. This state of ambivalence is a common experience for postcolonial subjects who navigates multiple identities and spaces. For example, the city was a labyrinth, its streets winding like the corridors of my mind. The metaphor of the labyrinth reflects Salim's sense of unhomliness, as he navigates the complexities of his displaced existence. This ambivalence highlights the fluid and fragmented nature of postcolonial identity, where the past and present continually intersect.

Likewise, for same displacement Said's reflections on exile emphasize the intellectual's role in articulating. Exile, for Said is both a physical and psychological condition that profoundly shapes one's perspective and creativity. For example, "I wished I could go anywhere, I wished I could liberate myself from the drudgery of my life in London. If I had been obedient to my uncle and aunt I would have been spending the Christmas vacation in Rome this year" (101). Here, Salim's physical presence in London juxtaposed with his mental return to Zanzibar illustrate the duality of exile or displacement.

Effects of colonialism in the novel can be seen through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Mimicry and Resistance. Bhabha's concept of mimicry explores how colonial subjects imitate the colonizers, both as a form of assimilation and subversion. Mimicry reveals the ambivalence of colonial discourse, which aims to create compliant subjects but also exposes its own contradictions. For example: Salim's uncertainty about his memories reflects the ambivalence of mimicry. By internalizing and questioning the narratives imposed by colonialism, Salim both conforms to and resists the colonial influence, highlighting the complex interplay between domination and resistance.

Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* employs a fragmented narrative structure that oscillates between past and present, mirroring Salim's disjointed memories and identity struggles. This non-linear plot enhances the thematic exploration of displacement and belonging. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness is vividly illustrated through this technique. On page 132, Salim reflects on his fragmented memories: "After his death, it felt to me as if my mother was someone who knew him and would like to be informed about his departure. I wrote: It might not seem right that there was no one there to say a prayer for him but me, and that all I could manage was the fatiha and the shortest sura in the good book" (132). This passage exemplifies the novel's non-linear narrative by blending past and present, reflecting Salim's ongoing struggle with identity and displacement, a core aspect of Bhabha's unhomeliness.

Roland Barthes' concept of the "writerly text" is crucial for understanding the interactive elements in Gurnah's storytelling. Gurnah enriches the narrative by incorporating multiple viewpoints, which aligns with Bhabha's concept of hybridity. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the characters' inner lives

and the socio-political context Salim's uncle Amir shares his perspective on the family's history:

Uncle Amir was the prince of our kingdom and I grew up adoring him. He made me laugh and brought me little presents and let me play with his transistor radio. When I had a piece of fatty meat on my plate that I could not eat, or a slice of kidney or a lump of yoghurt, he took it away before my mother noticed. But I adored him because my parents did too; I did not stop to think why they did so (27).

Amir's perspective adds depth to the narrative, allowing readers to see the family's history from different angles and understand Salim's identity in a broader context, reflecting the hybridity of multiple cultural influences.

Gérard Genette's theory of narrative discourse provides a framework to analyse the structure of *Gravel Heart*. Genette distinguishes between the story (the chronological sequence of events) and the discourse (the way the story is told). Gurnah employs anachrony, particularly analepsis (flashbacks), to structure the narrative. Salim's flashback illustrates this: "I woke up in the middle of the night to the echo of a cry that had escaped me because I feared the self-hurt my mother would inflict on herself in her silent guilt. I must die - because I have done wrong and cannot put it right" (119). This shows how Gurnah uses analepsis to intertwine past and present, enhancing the narrative complexity and reflecting Salim's fragmented identity.

Gurnah's vivid imagery brings the setting to life and reflects Salim's inner turmoil and sense of belonging, engaging readers in the "writerly text" experience Barthes describes. Salim describes the sensory experiences of Zanzibar:

His eyes roved over everything and he was everywhere - supervising in the kitchen, helping out with preparation of food, serving at tables, sitting behind the till - and when regular customers he liked came in and it was not too busy, he would take coffee with them and relax in conversation... Their bodies moved differently as they spoke: the shrugs, the hand gestures, the shape their lips made as they spoke, the way they laughed and the frequency of Libnan and Beirut in their conversation made it clear where they were from. (108)

This passage engages readers on a sensory level, deepening their connection to the narrative and highlighting Salim's internal conflicts. Using Bhabha's postcolonial theory, particularly the concepts of unhomeliness and hybridity, the study analyses Salim's identity struggles and their broader societal implications. Salim reflects on his sense of unhomeliness:

I eased away as I grew into my teens, blaming schoolwork for my absence from my father's side. It must have been obvious to him and to everyone else that I was lying, that I was making my escape. I studied in the same school as my father taught, and he would have had a very good idea of what work was expected of me. He must have been deeply disappointed that my love of religion and its scholarship turned out to be so shallow. (179)

This passage encapsulates the sense of being caught between cultures, a central theme in the novel, and illustrates the fragmented nature of postcolonial identity. Gurnah effectively employs the technique of flashbacks to deepen the narrative's emotional resonance, aligning with Barthes' idea that the meaning of a text is co-created by the reader and Genette's narrative discourse. Salim recalls:

By the time I left for London, I had worked my way through most of my father's books, had made good progress through the school library shelves, had borrowed and exchanged books with friends, and I thought of myself as someone with proven credentials as a future student of literature. (57)

This passage illustrates the non-linear progression of the narrative, as Salim's memories of Zanzibar interlace with his current life in London, enhancing the reader's understanding of his fragmented identity.

Gurnah uses symbolism and metaphor to deepen the narrative. Salim describes his sense of displacement through the metaphor of a labyrinth, "I felt as if the city despised me, as if I were a tiresome and timorous child who had wandered unwelcome out of the dust and rubble of his puny island shanty into this place where boldness and greed and swagger were required for survival" (61). This metaphor highlights Salim's internal conflict and his struggle to navigate his dual identities, reflecting the novel's central themes.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* employs sophisticated narrative techniques to explore themes of identity, displacement, and the enduring impacts of colonialism. By utilising interactive storytelling methods, Gurnah allows readers to actively participate in the narrative, transforming them from passive recipients to engaged co-creators of meaning. This approach effectively conveys the fragmented and dynamic nature of postcolonial identity, where personal histories are interwoven with broader historical contexts.

Gurnah's narrative techniques, including focalization, narrative temporality, and unreliable narrators, contribute to a rich and nuanced storytelling style. These elements enhance the thematic depth of the novel and create a dynamic and

immersive reading experience. By engaging with theoretical frameworks such as Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Roland Barthes' "writerly text," and Gérard Genette's narrative discourse, this study has demonstrated how *Gravel Heart* challenges conventional notions of authorship and reader passivity.

Through *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah not only tells a compelling story but also critiques the enduring impacts of colonialism on contemporary identities. His participatory storytelling method provides fresh insights into the complexities of postcolonial identity, offering a poignant reflection on the challenges of belonging and self-understanding. As readers navigate the intricate layers of Salim's life and legacy, they are invited to consider the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of displacement and cultural hybridity.

The primary research technique is a thorough textual study of *Gravel Heart*. This includes examining the narrative structure of the novel, the use of several perspectives, and the nonlinear plot development. The research focuses on how these components complement the interactive storytelling style and influence the reader's involvement with the text. During this phase, the text is thoroughly analyzed, with special emphasis placed on sections that emphasize Gurnah's storytelling methods.

A thematic analysis is being conducted to determine how the novel's fundamental themes—memory, identity, displacement, and the impacts of colonialism—interact with the interactive storytelling approach. This means identifying recurring themes and investigating how the narrative structure of the work develops them. This phase entails thoroughly reviewing the whole text and noting any sections that best illustrate the novel's principles.

The interactive storytelling method is concerned with granting the reader the ability to explore the narration style utilized by an author to arrive at a meaning for a work. To uncover fragmentariness in narration, certain characteristics of Gurnah's narration approach that lead to the same are investigated. The characteristics include an anachronic storyline, numerous narration viewpoints, the use of the letter to cover gaps in narration as well as a mnemonic device, and the use of silence to convey the inadequacy of words to describe abjection.

Anachronism refers to the nonlinear presentation of events that disrupts the chronological sequence of narrative. Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* shows this technique is used to reflect the protagonist's fragmented memories and his sense of displacement. For example: "I felt humbled in my need, a betrayer, hawking my agony for her sympathy, but she said no, it was a line we had to cross. You have to talk about the things that cause you pain" (144).

Here in the passage how Salim's memories of Zanzibar and his experiences in London are interwoven, reflecting the nonlinear nature of his recollections. The narrative moves fluidly between different times and places, highlighting Salim's internal struggle to reconcile his past with his present.

The methodology offered a strong foundation for analyzing Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* interactive storytelling style. The study elucidates Gurnah's narrative style and highlight its relevance in modern literature and narrative theory by combining theory and textual analysis. The novel employs multiple perspectives, allowing readers to understand the inner thoughts and experiences of various characters without being tied to a single protagonist. This approach illuminates the complexity of human relationships and motivations, allowing readers to empathize with each character's journey.

Gurnah also skillfully integrates flashbacks and memories, providing context and deepening the emotional resonance of the story. These moments reveal the forces that have shaped the characters, their desires, fears, and choices in the present. The interplay between past and present adds layers of meaning, inviting readers to contemplate the ways in which the past continues to reverberate in the present.

Symbolism and imagery are central to Gurnah's narrative, highlighting the hardened emotions or resilience of the characters. The title suggests a world marked by struggle and resilience, while evocative language and vivid imagery bring the setting to life and convey the emotional depth of the characters' experiences. Here are some passages:

The flight was exhilarating, and as the plane flew over Zanzibar in the dawn, I searched the landscape for familiar signs in the brief moments before landing. I recognised the air with my first breath, even though it was not something I had thought about and would not have had the words to describe. I knew this smell, and would have known it if I had been shaken awake in the middle of the night and asked to name it.

Someone behind me on the steps of the plane nudged into me. The flight was packed with British tourists... (168)

The structure of *Gravel Heart* is fluid, moving back and forth in time, heightening suspense and intrigue as readers piece together the fragments of the story to uncover hidden connections. Gurnah also incorporates interactive storytelling devices like letters and diaries, providing additional layers of insight into the characters' inner lives and blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality.

For example: the series of letters exchanged between Salim and his mother. One is presented below where mother writes to Salim-

I loved it there by the sea. I took bus rides further along the coast and walked on the cliffs, bracing myself against the cold breeze and listening to the waves crashing repeatedly against the rocky shore. Sometimes I sat on the shore and watched as the line of foam ran silently up the beach. Although I spent so much time alone, I did not feel lonely. It made me think of my father whom I had not thought about as much as I should have done. Those solitary walks made me think about his friendless retreats. I wrote an imaginary letter to him to tell him that. (103)

In this letter, Saida reveals her inner turmoil and complexities of her relationship with Masud. The letter serves as a bridge between the past and present, allowing the reader to see the emotional undercurrents that shape Salim's understanding of his family. Another example of diary entry, Salim's sense of isolation and his longing for his homeland shows the sense of his disjointed experiences which is presented below:

In time, I came to understand that all four of us were living lives in some disarray, working long hours, struggling with debt and fantasies of making good. I did not think that when I first met them. They seemed composed and at ease to me, people used to living in the city whereas I still felt like a stranger from a small town, anxious about destinations and directions although I did my best to disguise this. (85)

These diaries and letters are narrative tools that blur the boundaries between fiction and reality which provide insight to characters' inner lives revealing their true thoughts and emotions. Through these layered-and multifaceted narrative Gurnah presents the complexities of identity, memory and displacement in the novel.

The novel *Gravel Heart* by Abdulrazak Gurnah makes use of a various narrative approaches that engage readers in an interactive manner. Example- Fragmented structure and Multiple perspectives, Memory and Flash-backs, Symbolism and Imagery. Postcolonial theory, as developed by Homi K. Bhabha, investigates how colonial histories impact postcolonial cultures, politics, and communities (85). In the same way, according to Edward Said, "Gurnah's story explores postcolonial identity development and his characters' battles to overcome colonial influence. He encourages viewers to relate to the characters' relocation and cultural dislocation to better comprehend post-colonialism" (36).

In *Gravel Heart*, Abdulrazak Gurnah explores themes of morality, justice, and power, which closely mirror the central concerns in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Both works delve into the complexities of human behavior, the interplay between personal desire and public duty, and the consequences of corruption and hypocrisy within societal structures.

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare presents a Vienna where moral decay has prompted the Duke to temporarily abdicate his authority, leaving Angelo in charge. Angelo's strict enforcement of the law, particularly against sexual immorality, reveals his own hypocrisy as he attempts to exploit Isabella's virtue for his gain. This exploration of authority and moral judgment is echoed in *Gravel Heart*, where Gurnah portrays the political and personal ramifications of power dynamics in post-colonial Zanzibar. The protagonist, Salim, grapples with the impacts of his father's disgrace and his own quest for identity amidst political upheaval and familial betrayal.

Both works utilise their characters to critique the arbitrary and often unjust application of law and authority. In *Measure for Measure*, characters like Claudio and Isabella highlight the tension between justice and mercy, while the Duke's

manipulation raises questions about the legitimacy of power. Similarly, in *Gravel Heart*, Salim's journey and the revelations about his family's past underscore the personal toll of political corruption and the often hidden, insidious nature of power.

Furthermore, the theme of sexual morality is a crucial link between the two works. Shakespeare's play scrutinises the societal standards and the consequences of transgression, while Gurnah's novel similarly examines the intimate and public spheres of morality. The personal stories of the characters in *Gravel Heart* reflect broader social and political issues, much like the lives entangled in the moral dilemmas of *Measure for Measure*.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* employs sophisticated narrative techniques to explore themes of identity, displacement, and the enduring impacts of colonialism. By utilising interactive storytelling methods, Gurnah allows readers to actively participate in the narrative, transforming them from passive recipients to engaged co-creators of meaning. This approach effectively conveys the fragmented and dynamic nature of postcolonial identity, where personal histories are interwoven with broader historical contexts.

The use of multiple perspectives, non-linear narrative structures, and vivid imagery invites readers to delve deeply into the inner thoughts and experiences of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Salim. Through his journey, Gurnah highlights the complexities of navigating between cultures, the persistent influence of colonial legacies, and the search for belonging and self-understanding in a postcolonial world.

Gurnah's narrative techniques, including focalization, narrative temporality, and unreliable narrators, contribute to a rich and nuanced storytelling style. These elements not only enhance the thematic depth of the novel but also create a dynamic

and immersive reading experience. By engaging with theoretical frameworks such as Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity study has demonstrated how *Gravel Heart* challenges conventional notions of authorship and reader passivity.

The novel's interactive narrative structure, characterised by fragmented narration and the purposeful deployment of multiple viewpoints, reflects the intricacies of human memory and the importance of personal insight and intuition. This method underscores the novel's thematic focus on exile, migration, and betrayal, while also emphasising the ongoing struggles for identity and autonomy in the postcolonial context.

Through *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah not only tells a compelling story but also critiques the enduring impacts of colonialism on contemporary identities. His participatory storytelling method provides fresh insights into the complexities of postcolonial identity, offering a poignant reflection on the challenges of belonging and self-understanding. As readers navigate the intricate layers of Salim's life and legacy, they are invited to consider the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of displacement and cultural hybridity.

In conclusion, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* stands as a testament to the power of interactive storytelling in modern literature. By blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, Gurnah's narrative techniques engage readers in a collaborative process of meaning-making, ultimately enhancing the novel's thematic richness and relevance. This study has shown that Gurnah's innovative approach not only enriches the reader's experience but also contributes significantly to ongoing discussions in postcolonial literature and narrative theory.

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