

Narrative Techniques in Unimna Angrey's L'exil De Greyan

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Abstract

This study is on the narrative techniques of Unimna Angrey's literary oeuvre *L'Exil du Greyan* (*Greyan's exile*), where the techniques play a crucial role in crafting a rich and emotionally resonant reading experience, prompting deep reflection on the human condition in relation to exile and identity. His narrative style works the reader through the emotional tortures of the hero and emphasizes his personal battles, thereby creating an atmosphere of despair and helplessness in the face of societal expectations. The objective of this study is to analyze the narrative techniques used in the corpus in order to be able to understand how the author tells the story and how it affects the reader. The analysis of narrative techniques such as point of view, tone, writing style, characters, themes, and events will help determine how the author conveys ideas and emotions and how this contributes to the overall understanding of the novel. The study concluded that analyzing the narrative techniques used in the book, particularly point of view, characters, setting, and style helps the reader to gain a more distinct understanding of the authorial intention and enhances the readability of the work.

Key words: Narrative, Technique, Author, Theme, Style, Exile, Identity

Introduction

Nigerian Literature of French Expression is a special domain on the Nigerian literary scene. Since the publication of *Shango: suivi de Le roi-éléphant* by Ola Balogun in 1968, this literature has grown remarkably in its contents and in its thematic inclinations. Madueke posits that

"Nigerian literature, like other postcolonial African literatures, has become a tool for the expression of indigenous identities, experiences, history, ethnic and regional issues" (Madueke, p.5). UnimnaAngreyI a Nigerian writer in French because as Onyemelukwe opines, Nigerian Writers in French...refers to citizens of Nigeria domiciled in Nigeria or partly outside Nigeria, who use French linguistic medium to produce creative writings (poems, plays, novels, short stories), about Nigerians' life and experiences, primarily for Nigerians, and by extension for other Africans and others in the world"(Onyemelukwe,P.89). This definition is apt because UnimnaAngrey who hails from Cross River State in Nigeria and lives there is renowned for his creative writings through which he addresses current realities of the Nigerian nation and proffers solution to some of the problems facing its populace. According to Awoyemi-Arayela, "Nigerian novel is defined as any Nigerian literary work of imagination which is written by Nigerians for Nigerians; it discusses issues that are Nigerian and shares the same sensibilities, consciousness, worldview and other aspects of the Nigerian cultural experience" (Awoyemi-Arayela,p.29). *L'exil de Greyan* is a Nigerian novel written in French where the author shares the cultural experiences of the Kigbor and Ruka people from the Ukpe community in Cross River State in Nigeria. The author argues that there is no specific age for writing and that it is more important to focus on one's unique way of expression. He warns against being overly influenced by others and stresses the importance of staying true to one's own experiences. These arguments provide strong justification for research on the narrative techniques in the corpus. By examining the writing process and the author's approach, we can better understand how the use of narrative techniques expresses an individualistic perspective. Moreover, studying the narrative techniques in this book reveals how the author draws from his own experiences and inner resources to create a unique piece of fiction. In a general sense, the author's arguments suggest that significant insights can be gained from analyzing the narrative techniques in the book through an individualist lens, focusing on how the author's unique perspective shapes the text.

The literary oeuvre *L'exil de Greyan* by UnimnaAngrey is a fascinating creation that deserves an in-depth study of its narrative techniques. This study aims at analyzing the various narrative processes used by the author to build his story and convey his message. The analysis will focus on how the author draws inspiration from the rich folkloric traditions of the Kigbor and Ruka people from the Ukpe community in Cross River State, Nigeria, to construct his fictional narrative. It will be interesting to examine how these cultural elements are woven into the narrative structure and storytelling techniques.

Angrey, just like other Nigerian authors who are known for their use of cultural terms, allusions, expressions, idioms and proverbs explore these literary tools to express his thought pattern and infuse his cultural persuasions on his readers. Through this in-depth study of the narrative techniques used in *L'exil de Greyan*, this study seeks to shed new light on the author's aesthetic and thematic choices while highlighting the richness and uniqueness of this literary creation.

Summary of the Novel

The protagonist is a man named Greyan who hails from Rikgor. He is a hardworking farmer whose labour cannot be juxtaposed with his harvest. He has a wife and a child but finds it difficult to have another child. In the process of time, he lost his wife and his only child who happens to be an imbecile. Hated and despised by his family members especially his mother's co-wives who wants him out of the way, Greyan decides to leave the family house to the neighbouring village for good. His half-brother Abiga, who is so fond of him, decides to relocate and to join him in Ruka. Greyan is forced to move far away from his community alongside other young men who do not want to be swept away by the mysterious deaths that ravaged his community especially the youths later that year. He moves to Ikom where is employed as a work supervisor on the international road under construction there. Greyan becomes the first person among his people to get a job when all others do no other work than farming. He had found what he wanted and would have nothing to do again with his roots. In this way his exile becomes a permanent one.

Key Concepts in Narratological Analysis

In a general sense, narratological analysis focuses on narrative structures, voice, point of view, modes of narration, and temporalities. It examines how authors craft storytelling and how this affects the reader's experience. One of the fundamental concepts in narratology is the distinction between story and discourse. The story refers to the narrative content, the events and actions that unfold, while the discourse refers to how these elements are conveyed to the reader—the narrative techniques used by the author. This dichotomy allows an analysis of both what is told and how it is told.

Another central concept is the narrative voice, referring to the point of view from which the story is told. Different types of narration are identified: first-person narration, where the narrator is a character in the story; third-person narration, where the narrator is outside the story; and omniscient narration, where the narrator has access to all characters' thoughts and feelings.

The notion of focalization is also fundamental. It refers to the viewpoint from which events are perceived and reported. Focalization can be internal (focused on a character's thoughts and sensations), external (focused on actions and behaviors), or zero (where the narrator has unlimited access to the characters' internal states).

Temporal structure is another key aspect. Authors may use analepsis (flashbacks) or prolepsis (flash forwards) to create suspense, gradually reveal information, or highlight causality.

Characterization is also essential. Narratologists analyze how characters are constructed and the roles they play. They may examine types of characters (flat, round, static, dynamic) and the means used to characterize them (physical description, psychology, actions, dialogue, etc.). Narratology also addresses narrative levels—extradiegetic (the narrator's level), diegetic (where the story occurs), and possible metadiegetic levels (stories within stories). These layers can interact to create narrative depth. The concept of narrative mediation concerns the narrator's degree of presence or transparency in the story—whether they remain hidden or appear as a strong, visible voice.

Analysis of the Narrative Construction in *L'exil de Greyan*

The narrative construction of *L'exil de Greyan* reveals a deep exploration of themes such as exile, family loyalty, and societal norms among others. Through Greyan's journey, the work highlights individual struggles within a rigid communal structure. From the beginning, the sentiment of exile is evident "Il s'était déjà décidé à partir loin de ce village qui semblait ne pas vouloir de lui" (1). "He had already decided to move far away from this village that seemed to reject him." (Our translation). This opening line illustrates Greyan's inability to find his place in his community. Exile is thus both physical and emotional, underlining his sense of abandonment and rejection from the village of Rikgor. Greyan is portrayed as a hardworking man, but his efforts yield poor results "Malgré tout son ardeur au travail, sa récolte était très maigre" (2) "Despite all his hard work, his harvest was very meager" (Our translation). This highlights economic structures that can trap individuals in cycles of poverty, where hard work does not guarantee success. Furthermore, marriage is presented as a complex institution, often driven by reasons other than love "Le plus souvent, un homme ne se mariait pas pour amour" (2). "Most of the time, a man doesn't marry for love." (Our translation). Although Greyan has a daughter, he struggles to have a second child. This contrasts societal expectations of fertility and family success. Magic and superstition are central to the narrative. Greyan turns to marabouts and sorcerers to understand his misfortunes. This reflects how cultural beliefs shape personal perception and can reinforce feelings of helplessness. Family relations, especially with his late mother's co-wives, are marked by rivalry "Malgré le fait qu'il était déjà orphelin, les coépouses de sa défunte mère s'en prenaient de lui" (3-4). "Even though he was an orphan, his late mother's co-wives attacked him." (Our translation). This shows how polygamous family dynamics can create tension, deepening Greyan's sense of isolation.

Abiga, Greyan's half-brother, symbolizes loyalty and support. His declaration: "Là où tu vas, j'irai avec toi" (5) "Wherever you go, I'll go with you" (Our translation) shows the power of sibling bonding in a hostile environment. This brotherhood offers hope and solidarity. Greyan's move to Ruka marks a turning point. Their hearts looked in the same direction; their plan was set. This emphasizes resilience and the importance of family ties in the search for identity and belonging. The narrative critiques traditional gender roles in which the husband was the supreme chief to whom obedience and respect were due. This exposes inequality in polygamous families while positioning women as central to maintaining cultural values. In a general sense, the narrative construction of *L'exil de Greyan* invites readers to reflect on individual struggle in a complex cultural context, while celebrating the strength of human relationships amid adversity.

The work employs various narrative techniques to deepen themes of exile, family, and identity. With these techniques the author creates an immersive and engaging atmosphere for his readers.

Third-person narration: Narration in this literary oeuvre is done in the third person where the narrator tells a story that is not his, in this case Greyan's story. With the narration done in the third person, the author offers insight into Greyan's thoughts and emotions. "Il s'était déjà décidé à partir loin de ce village qui semblait ne pas vouloir de lui" (1). "He had already decided to move far away from this village that seemed to reject him." (Our translation). This narrative

choice offers an objective perspective of the condition of the protagonist and reveals the hopelessness within him.

Flashbacks – Provide information on Greyan's past as well as that of his mother. : “Samère, Osapi, venu du village de Bayobri, était décédé éasseztôt” (3). “His mother, Osapi, from Bayobrivillage, died early.” (Our translation). This technique helps the readers to understand the hero's motivation and feelings of isolation.

Detailed Description – The author uses vivid description to portrays the richness of the rural settings: “Danssa case, en toit de chaume, chaquemèretenait des conciliabules avec ses enfants” (3). “In her thatched hut, each mother held discussions with her children. (Our translation).” These details help the reader to visualize the environment and appreciate family relations.

Symbolism – The theme of marriage which runs throughout the novel symbolizes competition, not love “Le plus souvent, un homme ne se mariait pas pour amour” (6). “Most of the time, a man doesn't marry for love.” (Our translation). This symbolism criticizes the societal norms and expectations which surround the family and procreation.

Cultural Elements – Inserting cultural elements like marriage customs and polygamy enrich the narration: “ Avoir plusieurs femmes dans sa concession était normal et était signe qu'on était bien nanti ” (7). “Having many wives was normal and a sign of wealth.” (Our translation). This gives a general background on the societal values and roles of the family.

Recurring themes – The theme of exile runs through the novel and represents the hero's identity quest: “Greyan quitta la concession familiale le lendemain pour s'installer dans le village voisin de Ruka.” (4). “Greyan left the family house the next day to settle in a neighbouring village called Ruka.” (Our translation). This motif underscores his need to find a space where he will feel accepted. From the beginning of the novel, Greyan shows his feelings of alienation from his village. This illustrates his inability to integrate within his community and explains his intention to depart from his village and justifies his desire to go on exile.

Greyan is forced to consult marabouts in order to ascertain what is wrong with him. This shows cultural responses to misfortune. None could say exactly what was wrong with him. Moving to Ruka is a turning point for Greyan. This exile is shaped by societal structures. But even in Ruka, Greyan faces judgment. Some said a curse had been placed on him. Thus, going on exile helps in his quest for identity and self-discovery.

In the novel under consideration, the theme of exile is richly explored with different stylistic procedures which do not only enrich the narration but also play an important role in the way other themes are treated in the work.

Metaphors and Imagery: The use of strong metaphors enriches the text and offers images that reinforce the trope of exile. For instance, land and nature are most often described as elements which illustrate the loss of one's roots. These metaphors allow the reader to share in the pains of

the protagonist and to reflect on the condition of people who are faced with the option of going into exile.

Flashbacks: They are stylistic techniques that enables the reader to explore Greyan's past. In looking at his memories and the reasons for his exile, the novel creates a tension between his past and his present. This manipulation of time accentuates the notion of irreversibility and nostalgia which in turn reinforces the themes of loss and regret.

Analysis of Language Effects in *L'exil de Greyan*

Symbolism: The author uses the symbolism of location to show what is going on among the characters. Greyan's family house symbolizes a prison. Ruka symbolizes a new dawn for Greyan and his brother Abiga who decides to follow him there: "Je tesouhaite et à toute ta famille bienvenue à Rukarenchérit Greyan. Ensemble ,nous allons devoir créer une atmosphère convenable à nous tous" (6) "I welcome you and your entire family to Ruka, Greyan added. Together, we will create a conducive atmosphere for all of us." (Our translation).

Dialogues: Verbal interactions between characters are constructed in a realistic manner so as to capture the nuances of human condition. This realism makes interactions credible and reveals interpersonal conflicts among members of the same community.

"Tais-toi, Abua... viens faire ce que tu dois faire pour qu'on puisse quitter ce coin".

"Mon cher Chef, lui dit Pa Abua, je comprends bien votre décision et accepte ma condamnation" (26).

"Shut up Abua ... come and do what you are supposed to do so that we can leave this corner."

"My dear chief, Pa Abua told him, I really understand your decision and accept my condemnation" (Our translation). This dialogue emphasizes the differences in status and power among the characters.

Sensual Descriptions: The use of the sense of taste by the author especially that of cooked food brings the reader into Greyan's environment. It gives the reader the opportunity to experience what the characters enjoy on daily basis. The author speaks of Abiga's wife's culinary capacities in this way "Chaque fois qu'elle préparait ses sauces succulentes... son mari et ses enfants mangeaient à satiété" (46). "Whenever she prepares her delicious soups... her husband and children eat to satisfaction" (Our translation).

Character Construction: The choice of language and the tones employed by the author contribute to the construction of characters in the work. Each character speaks in a way that is peculiar to him his tone also differs from that of other characters in the novel. For example Abiga uses an affectionate tone when he speaks like in "Quand on a des gens qu'on aime et qu'on comprend bien, on est toujours anxieux de les voir" (16) "When you have people that you love and understand well, you are always anxious to see them". In contrast to Abiga's affectionate disposition, the chiefs of Ruka are known for their distant and hostile tone. One of the chiefs of Ruka spoke to Pa Abua who is also an elderly man in this manner "Ne perds pas notre temps" "Don't waste our time", the other one says "Fais-le alors au lieu de continuer

à discourir" (26). "Do it then and stop chattering" (Our translation). This narrative strategy aids narration and makes the characters multidimensional.

Rhythm: This is a flow of sounds within a literary work essentially created by the author's choice of words (diction). This rhythm can evoke tranquility or chaos according to the situation described by the author. A good example of rhythm in the novel is "Tout d'un coup, c'était tout mon corps qui tremblait." (31) "All of a sudden, I was trembling all over my body." The use of rhythm in narration contributes to the emotional impact of the work and facilitates the engagement of the reader.

Metatextuality: Angrey uses elements of metatextuality to enrich his narration where metatextuality is concerned with how a literary work connects or identifies itself with other works. When the author says "Malgré sa tristesse étouffée, Ugbang devrait se comporter comme si tout allait au mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possible. Il apprit à maintenir une disposition voltairienne" (196) "In spite of his suppressed sadness, Ugbang ought to behave as if all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. He had learnt to maintain a Voltairean disposition". Here an allusion is made to Voltaire's book *Candide* where Voltaire passes his doctrine of optimism to his readers. This technique helps the author to anchor his perspective on Ugbang's expected disposition on a steady ground bearing in mind that the protagonist of the afore-mentioned work had earlier displayed such a disposition. In this way, Angrey places his novel within the confines of its genre.

Conclusion

In *L'exil de Greyan*, the author deploys a range of narrative techniques that enrich the thematic and emotional depth of the work. The narration, though emotionally charged language, allows readers to delve into Greyan's inner struggles while illustrating the challenges of exile and the search for identity. Metaphors and symbols enhance the poetic quality of the story while highlighting the protagonist's aspirations and disillusionment. Realistic dialogues help establish authentic relationships between characters, revealing the complexities of familial dynamics within a polygamous society. The use of repetition emphasizes Greyan's personal battles, creating an atmosphere of despair and helplessness in the face of societal expectations. Furthermore, the alternation of language registers enables a balance between light and serious moments, thereby enriching the reading experience. Sensory descriptions and the rhythmic flow of language promote full immersion in the cultural setting of Rikgor, making Greyan's emotions more palpable. By integrating a subtle critique of cultural norms, the author also adds a reflective dimension to the work, encouraging readers to question the values and traditions that govern community life. Thus, *L'exil de Greyan* proves to be a complex and nuanced work, where narrative techniques play a crucial role in crafting a rich and emotionally resonant reading experience, prompting deep reflection on the human condition in relation to exile and identity.

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