

NARRATIVE TIME IN ALI SMITH'S *AUTUMN*

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Abstract

Autumn is the first fictional work in a four part series of novels. It is the first post Brexit novel and is an exploration of time. The author Ali Smith is asking the question what time is and how people experience it through this narrative. The interrogation about time is not a novel concept. There is the clock time and the subjective time. It is not easy to know how other people experience time. The narrative exhibits the peculiar relationship between Daniel Gluck, a centenarian and Elisabeth, a lady in her early thirties.

The distinguished repetition within perceived irreversible change can be referred to as time. In both story time and text time what is being stated is the linear depiction of temporality. The most noteworthy theorist of text time is Gerard Genette, who postulated three major aspects of temporal manipulation in the transition from story to text—order, duration and frequency. Rimmon Kenan, Jakob Lothe and Toolan also viewed narrative time in three respects: order, duration and frequency.

Ali Smith published her novel *Autumn* in 2016. When the narrative begins Daniel Gluck is a 101 years old man staying in a care home who is often visited by Elisabeth Demand a 32 year old Arts lecturer. The narrative time here is specifically weaved so as to create a particular aesthetic spirit. The narrative shifts between Daniel's dreams as he is approaching death and Elisabeth's reflections about their early friendship, that her mother had objections with. "And I'm supposed to ask about what it was like where the neighbour grew up what life was like when the neighbour was my age. People's lives are private, her mother said." (Smith 44-45) The scale of time in this narrative is wide ranging and as natural as the seasons are rolling on. It is the play with time to get into Elisabeth's world that facilitates the reader to carry on with continuous reading.

Time is inevitable in a story, in fact it is impossible to locate the story in time, and one must tell the story in a present, past or future tense. *Autumn* is told in the past and present time. The analysis of fictional time has three levels, the time that is narrated, the time of action and the time of life. When clock time refers to normal time, narrative time is in connection with events. The narrative here covers 24 years, from the year Elisabeth was eight years old to the year when she was thirty two.

The narrative *Autumn* cling to time factor, otherwise it would have become unintelligible to the readers. There are some narratives in which time is distorted, or altered, but time factor cannot be ignored. Analysis of time in a narrative is concerned with three questions: 'when?' 'how long?' and 'how often?'. "He wasn't old. She was right. Nobody truly old sat with their legs crossed or hugged their knees like that. Old people couldn't do anything except sit in front rooms as if they'd been stunned by stun guns." (50)

The relations between the succession of events in the story and their distribution in the text are discussed under 'order.' Statements about order would answer the question 'when?' in terms like: first, second, last, before and after. The time of narration here is not linear, each segment jumps to different points, sideways, backwards and forward. All departures in the order of presentation in the text from the order in which events occurred in the story are termed anachronies.

Flashback and foreshadowing are the two main variants of anachrony. It is through homodiegetic analepses to Elisabeth's childhood, the readers get understanding about how Daniel could become her mentor. In the narrative world, we have the option to jump backwards and forward and then come back to the present. If we could associate the novels now to the real present time, the novel as a whole has connection to the contemporary world. The four aspects involved are reading time, the moment, the contemporary novel and the contemporary world.

Analepsis is more common in narratives than prolepsis. Interaction between temporality of the narrative and reader takes place, only when the reader is competent to know the state of affairs. Retrospection, memory and archiving of past events are embedded in the narrative theory. Protensions are mind's travels into the future, not reality. Difference exists in actual time and

experience of time. Whenever time moves back or forth, it is connected to anachronist temporal structure of the narrative.

Narrative at the same time is embedded in retrospection and anticipation. Fictional world offers some satisfaction to the readers, which cannot be achieved through real life. In the fictional world, a different kind of time is practiced. In present itself there are three categories—the historical present, the philosophical present and the literary historical present. “Here’s something else from another time, from when Elisabeth was thirteen that she also only remembers shreds and fragments of.” (77) When the mother told her that an eighty five year old man cannot be her friend and why she cannot have normal friends, she replied. “It depends on how you’d define normal, Elisabeth said. Which would be different from how I’d define normal. Since we all live in relativity and mine at the moment is not and I suspect never will be the same as yours.” (78)

The author’s abstract fantasies on the passing of time sometimes sink into a stream-of-consciousness kind of obscurity in the narrative. “But now? The old man opens his eyes to find he can’t open his eyes...he’s got no real way of telling. He can’t move.”(89)

It is these analepses and prolepses that satisfy the notion of time in human mind, where time is experienced as subordinated, and the cosmological to the phenomenological. A narrative presents case study of internal time consciousness. Tense based theory of narrative satisfies narrative consciousness of readers. It analyses the relationship between time and narrative.

In the present Daniel is immobile, confined to bed, his dreams bring to the surface his deepest desires, as he imagines his broken body becoming metamorphosed into a coat of green leaves. After this surrealist blending of old and new, Smith takes us back into the present which is carefully ruled by linearity and fixities.

Whenever a narrative is confronted with anachrony, the separation of time interval small or large, it is the narrative distance. Rhythm of the narrative do not have any yardstick to measure its speed. The narrative distance is less here. The time covered by the series of events could determine the speed and thereby the rhythm. Even when the narrator and the hero are different persons, the narrator knows more about the situations and events. “Time and time again. Even in the increased sleep period, with his head on a pillow and his eyes closed, hardly here, he does it, what he’s always been able to do.” (201)

In order to recognise the term ‘duration,’ the basic distinction that needs to be established first is that between story time and text time. Story time is the fictional time taken by an action, episode or the whole action. Text time is the time taken by an average reader to read a passage, or the whole text. Discourse time can be measured by counting the number of words, lines or pages of a text. Actually, it is difficult in parallel terms to define the duration of the text and that of the story, for the simple reason that there is no way of measuring text duration. More logical dimension of text duration is by dividing the text as its summary and scenes. When the text is summarised the speed is increased as the whole text is shortened by corresponding it to the major aspects alone. There are three segments of twelve chapters each in the narrative.

The length of time in narration varies. It may require no time at all for an event to take place. With the addition of details, expansion of time is possible inside the frame of a narrative. In a narrative, recollection of the past is significant as a recovery of the past. “It was a sunny Friday evening more than a decade ago, in the spring of 2004. Elisabeth was nearly twenty. She was staying in. She was watching Alfie, a film meant to have an appearance by Pauline Boty in it.”(223) Retrospective measure is used as a means of building the gap in the present. These passages are different in attitudes, values and vocabulary as different from that of the present situation.

Smith spoke about the fact that even if we make our own histories in a time frame, its working is not in that way. People hold their own diachronies. We carry our own past, futures and of the people who made us. We always think about the past and future in the present. In fact the nonlinearity of time frame befits the framing of the unconventional relationship between Daniel and Elisabeth in a meticulous way. As told by Daniel in the narrative time travel is real. We do it all the time, each moment and minute.

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