

# THE INTERPOLATION OF MEMORY AND NONLINEAR NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SARA BAUME'S *A LINE MADE BY WALKING*

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## Abstract

Narrative structure is a significant literary element which brings a text into an order and manner to delineate the story magnificently. The plot and setting of any work are organised by the narrative structure. This process has been evolved over generations. The fictional writing has changed from chronological sequence to nonlinear structure; stream of consciousness to memory accretion. The effect of the story is determined by the power of narrative structure. Sara Baume is an emerging and zealous writer of contemporary Irish literature. Her recent work *A Line Made by Walking* portrays the conflict ridden young woman Frankie who is struggling to cope with city life and searching for self in her grandmother's bungalow which is located in the country side. This paper aims to recognize nonlinear narration and examine the possibilities of incorporating associative memory in narrative structure found in the novel *A Line Made by Walking* by Sara Baume.

**IndexTerms:** narrative structure, chronological, nonlinear, memory

## I. INTRODUCTION

Narrative is the soul and vitality of a story in a novel. In the article "An Architecture of Narrative memory", Carlos Leon claims "Narrative is not only a successful way of communication, but a specific way of structuring knowledge" (19). His statement renders that narrative is not only used as a medium of communication but it also incorporates itself in the production of core knowledge about the cause of exploring a particular theme or issue in the storyline. The plot reveals the story of a novel and Aristotle stated it as the presentation of incidents in his *Poetics* which means plot is a form of storytelling. The story is comprised of principal characters, settings and events. The function of the story and plot is to vignette the turmoil of a character in certain events which brings great changes in its life and its confrontation towards the predicament. And finally, they portray the endeavour of the character to overcome the conflicts. It is the most concrete and coherent element of literary studies. Today it is untrammelled to literature and it can be found in the fields such as films, advertisements, newspapers, paintings and songs and moreover every individual is the narrator of his/her story. However the term 'narrative' is predominantly associated with literary studies especially to novels and short stories, and besides that literature provides a superior role for narrative structure in presenting the plot immaculately. In the postmodern literary world narrative structure does not describe the story in a mere conceptual way. It elaborates and exposes the truth behind identity crisis, racial issues, consequences of war, gender issues, cognition and human memory which are infiltrated into the story with fictitious or real incidents. By deploying the current hurdles in narrative structure they fulfil the gap in the ancient representation of storytelling. The writers incorporate some real events into the fictional world to express the veracity of social issues. In *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Mark Currie proclaimed that "In more academic contexts, there has been a recognition that narrative is central to the representation of identity, in personal memory and self-representation or in collective identity of groups such as regions, nations, race and gender" (2). This paper aims to explore the development of narrative structure in the postmodern fiction which follows unconventional way of narration

## II. NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Human brain has encountered many significant changes in capturing the complex relationships of universe in the form of narrative structure. The narrative structure is an effective medium for rendering human thoughts and actions. Monika Fludernik, a professor of English literature and culture at the Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg, Germany quoted in the book *An Introduction to Narratology* that "The significance of narrative in human culture can be seen from the fact that written cultures seek their origins in myths which they then record for posterity" (1). From the beginning of Anglo-Saxon period poets used verse form to narrate the story of people and their culture of their era for the posterity. And then drama had played a crucial role in storytelling. Afterwards novels have been dominating the literary world in narrating the heterogeneous issues of people not only in England but also from various parts of the world since modern period and assorted genres have been reigned the literary world. Thus English literature has become a world literature today. In fact a story can be represented in multiple guises by assisting narrative structure as principal element in a novel or short story. Moreover it embraces constellation of themes, symbols, images, characters and events to exhibit the story to reader unequivocally. Gerald J. Prince, an American academic and literary

theoretician, defines 'narrative' in his book *A Dictionary of Narratology* that "The recounting . . . of one or more real or fictitious EVENTS communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES" (58). In the realm of fictional writing authors are free to invent their narrative mode and they are the creators of their story. An author can insert real or fictitious events and also use one or more narrators to expose his story.

### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Narrative structure is developed and diversified into chronological or linear, multi-narrative, dual-narrative, flashback narrative, fragmented narrative and metafictional narration. Chronological structure is the traditional way of storytelling which is uncomplicated and easy to understand. It can be referred as linear structure because the beginning, the middle and the end are organized in a chronological order that is it presents a single story in an order that happened. The dual narrative also arranged in straight line but it explains the story through two different narrators. And multi narrative also has linear structure. Instead of one story it has multiple narrations with different point of views of the multiple characters. It has story within a story and brings them together as multiple story arcs. It helps to intensify the theme and characterization. In the aforementioned narratives the story is considered as chain of events. This paper is attempting to study on fragmented narrative which has nonlinear narrative structure as formed in Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*.

### IV. NONLINEAR NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The nonlinear narrative is not concerned about chain of events rather it emphasizes to scrutinize the action, thought, living experience and feeling of the characters in the story. Thus it forms fragmented narrative. Cognitive psychologists believe that the human existence in the world is determined by his performance, behaviour, cogitation, premonition and expressing social emotions like sympathy and empathy. Therefore the nonlinear narrative structure is primarily focused on the subsistence of fictitious character in the fictional world. In the book *An Introduction to Narratology*, Fludernik emphatically stated that "The emphasis on the 'human' character is crucial. One criterion of what makes a narrative a narrative is the requirement of having a human or human-like (anthropomorphic) protagonist at the centre" (6). Accordingly nonlinear narrative puts the thought of the characters at the innermost core of a story. Consequently the exhibition of the inner world of the protagonist is the ubiquitous characteristic of the postmodern narrative. Thus it becomes possible to understand the action and thought of human beings through fictional narrative and the protagonist becomes a real world character.

### V. UNASSOCIATED TIME OF EVENTS IN NONLINEAR NARRATION

The nonlinear narrative structure is determined by dissimilarity of time and events on the account of story. The Universe has linear functional system which is conflated by past, present and future. Human beings can experience the past, live the present and predict the future. They are disparate entities and it is impossible to connect the disparate time of the universe. Therefore the past events can be retrieved through memory and the future can be unpredictable. However literary works have specific role to make the impossible into possible. An author can bring both the past and present events in the narration which is not arranged in straight order which defines that nonlinear narration does not have chronological system of time. However the story entails meaning making process. The beginning, middle and end of the story are blended fragmentally. The events in a story start with a time which can be past or present and abruptly it jumps to another time of events. The time of both events is disparate in nature. The protagonist consciously and continuously narrates his/her experiences of different time periods. The novel *A Line Made by Walking* by Sara Baume is not sequential and follows a fragmented narration

I've been here in my grandmother's bungalow a full three weeks now. All on my own. Except for the creatures . . . my mother confessed she hadn't called me straight away. And so my grandmother died in the night after all, as one should . . . When I was five, I had the flu. Sitting up in bed, watching my bedroom wall. I must have had a soaring temperature which was causing me to hallucinate, but I didn't know this at the time. (Baume 3, 4, 6)

The narrator and protagonist Frankie was a worker at a contemporary art gallery in Dublin. She begins her narration in the present time where she is living all alone in her grandmother's bungalow. Her grandmother died during a hurricane which happened three weeks before. Then she narrates the happenings at the time of her grandmother's death which is a recent past. Then all of a sudden she explains her experience of hallucination when she suffered from flu at the age of five which is a distant past. The flow of time is nonlinear; it jumps back and forth and the past and present events are intertwined in her narration. When putting all the incidents together one can understand that inconsistent timeline is joined and each event is the progression of other. The narrative is strongly relied on Frankie's experiences in disparate time entities. It showcases that one can create time of his/her own and a story of experiences at the time. The story not only focuses on the present but also consumes the occurrence of past and cherishes it. The unconventional and disordered narrative structure is well represented by interlinking the past and present events.

### VI. MEMORY IN NARRATION

*A man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others. He sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.* (61)

- *Nausea*, Jean Paul Sartre

Human mind has the tendency to construe the narrative naturally in its way which means "human cognition and narrative are tightly connected". Schank and Abelson assert in the book *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry Into Human*

*Knowledge Structures* that narrative is an elegant way of expressing thought but in fact the foundation of narrative structure is interconnected with memory (Schank and Abelson 1997). By the incorporation of memory, the narrative structure becomes neither linear nor logical in sense however the modern fragmented narrative connects the present way of life with the remembrance of past events or information in the meaning making process. Thus memory and narrative have become one domain to present the story in effective way. The modern form of narration is relied on the conflation of past and present experiences of a protagonist. Jerome Burnes, research professor of Psychology at New York University, argues in his article “The Narrative Construction Reality” that human experience and memory can be explained “in the form of narrative” (4). Though human beings have various types of memory authors use explicit memory which contains episodic memory and semantic memory. Both types of memory processes help to recall the life events and the things one learnt during academic period. Memory makes the narrative structure of a story to go beyond consistency and chronological order and it keeps the protagonist mentally active in remembering and connecting the past into the present incidents. Therefore the knowledge of the past transforms the present and renders nonlinear narrative structure. Past is indispensable in the nonlinear narrative. Storytelling of this mode represents the reality of human consciousness because human mind cannot run in a single path but it thinks and rethinks the past in the present and also connects it with present life incidents. Burnes states in “The Narrative construction of Reality” that “An individual’s working intelligence is never solo” it always blends by different identical themes. The novel *A Line Made by Walking* has more narrative elements of associative memory.

Works about Wind, I test myself: Erik Wesselo, *Duffels Moll*, 1997. The artist is trapped to the blade of a traditional windmill and spun for several minutes, a performance. I look it up on YouTube. The camera follows Wesselo’s rise and drop and rise and drop and rise and drop. Yet again, I think, flight and fall. (Baume 16)

Memory is an indispensable component of cognition and is a mental process which entails the act of acquiring; retaining and recalling any information, thoughts and the events of past. Associative memory is the capability of remembering the relationship between unrelated information and incidents. It is more random and spontaneous. Semantic memory creates the link for associative memory. Because this type of memory does not retrieve one’s personal incidents rather it recalls the information one learnt from the surrounding. The narrator Frankie narrates the view that surrounds her grandmother’s bungalow. She feels that “the bungalow is unappealing to house hunters” (Baume 16). Then Frankie sees that the hill near her bungalow is a turbine hill, fully covered with windmills. Her memory retrieves a YouTube video in which an artist strapped to the blade of windmills and spun for several minutes. Throughout the novel she connects her every day activities to unrelated things that she learned from internet, books and television.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the significance of narrative both in fiction and in human mind. It has traced out the characteristics of various narrative structures that are deployed to enhance the style of storytelling. It is also concentrated with the importance of ‘dissimilar time’ in the non sequential narration of Frankie, the narrator and protagonist and her associative memory which connects the unrelated things. Hence it has considered the interconnection of narrative, time, consciousness and memory in the life writing of the novel. The novel is one of the examples for postmodern fiction which has the traits of nonlinear, ontological perspective, incorporation of memory and disparate time narration. The novel is centred on the daily life events of the narrator Frankie who narrates the story in a non sequential order with present, recent and distant past events, and searches for self and identity in the countryside. Therefore the potentiality of narrative structure in postmodern fiction is unique by bringing back the past, creating timeless narration and offering an understanding of human memory in the plot.