The Formula of Historical Inversion in Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell and the Role of Time Inversion Devices

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Abstract: the author tried to discuss and prove the formula of historical inversion and its structure while researching the works of different scholars. In the meanwhile, a number of narrative and structural techniques used to explore time shift phenomenon in the novel Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell.

Keywords: time, multiple perspectives, non-linear narrative, matryoshka doll, mise en abyme, historical inversion, time inversion, time cycle, flesh back, flesh forward, mosaic novel, chinese box.

David Mitchell, the author of novels and short stories of various genres, who has a special place in the hearts of readers with his creativity and deep thoughts, managed to reveal the highest aspects of his literary world once again with the novel "Cloud Atlas". First, if we look at the novel's form, we will notice that it follows a non-traditional structure similar to that of "Russian doll," "matryoshka," "mosaic novel," "mise en abyme," and "chinese box." These forms of the work go by different names, but they all adhere to the same structure of nesting multiple stories. The purpose of being named after this specific object is that the creator presents a whole big novel in the form of a Russian matryoshka doll consisting of 6 interwoven stories. At the same time, it should be noted that the novel has received critical acclaim for its unusual narrative structure and interrelated stories, and each story is a different genre (thriller, dystopian future, post-apocalyptic) and appearance (diary, letter, story, interview, oral story) and has a complex thematic effect. Half of the second story is inserted into each story before it is completed. In the same way, the second part of the stories is finished. In order to create the nature of interdependence of the novel, the author used Russian doll or multiple perspective storytelling techniques. Due to the multi-layered structure of Cloud Atlas, the experience of unraveling the novel's inner narratives is like the exhilarating experience of unraveling Russian dolls or matryoshka dolls. A Russian doll can be taken as an analogy for the structure of the book. Although this structure can be complicated, but it is exciting to pull the stories apart and eventually make sure that the broken pieces fit together perfectly, which makes up for the complexity of the structure. The structure of the book provides clues that can enhance the overall appreciation of the novel. Thus, as Jonathan Boulter bluntly states, "Any discussion of Cloud Atlas must begin with the structure of the novel."[1] The structure of the novel resists the traditional linear reading process, and non-linear narrative techniques such as flashbacks and flash forwards create a constant state of disorientation for the reader, while the stories are broken and by assembling the parts, the reader relies on more circular reading. This narrative style reflects the fragmented nature of time in Cloud Atlas, a point that Mitchell emphasizes extensively throughout the dramatic shifts in time that occur throughout the action. In the

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[1] Res Militaris Social Science Journal. Waleed Khalid Rzayyig, Marwan Khaleel Yousif, Mohanad Hazim Hakkoosh. Interconnective Narrative in David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas. vol.13, n°3, March Spring (2023)

meanwhile, the writer was able to form the process of historical inversion in the structure of the novel. Naturally, the entire novel's texture adheres to the time inversional shape. The peculiarity of time inversion's poetics is not only the smooth flow of time from the present to the future, but also its turning in the opposite direction, the journey of several centuries over the years in a way that deviates from the chronological order of years, the temporary stoppage of time or interrupting the time cycle between more than one time period and waiting for the same time period to occur over centuries, advancement of the era for many centuries in the future. The whole distinctions of the phenomenon can be achieved by the artist's ability to overcome time. As the Russian scientist Likhachev said, artistic time is the most important and necessary part of the world of a work of art created by an artist.[2] The six different stories in the creation of the work are actually in the form of a fragmented fate of one soul, in which the past-present-future periods are felt, and here the author can see the construction of six different worlds that are not similar to each other. As the first part of the novel, the author was able to stop the moment that each of them occupied during the placement of the story within the story until the second part of the story was finished. So, the first feature of the poetics of historical inversion is that time in each story is stopped at the distance between the beginning and the end of the story by the author's will, and the second feature is the use of non-linear narrative techniques during the placement of multiple perspective stories. The author discovers new worlds over the centuries and writes down their problems and shortcomings. In the first story the reader came across with the first author's world created on the Pacific Ocean, which began in the middle of the 19th century, with smooth Russian doll structure he could create one by one five new spheres which are intervening in different periods like England and America in the 1930s and 70s, or the description of the life and social processes of England at the beginning of the 21st century, while predicting what prospects await humanity in the future centuries of 2144 and 2321 with the pace of the future that has not yet been seen. The six stories created by the artist cover the realities that have prevailed for six centuries, and the author tries to familiarize the reader with all of them one by one using the flash forward technique. It is no exaggeration to say that the skillful transition of periods from the 19th century to the 24th century or the exchange of places (tenses) is a creative miracle in real literature. Also, in order to further enrich the creative product created by David Mitchell and to once again show his non-traditional attitude towards time to his customers in his novel, he used the Russian doll attitude related to the time frame in two places, manifested and perfected the desire of the original goal in a hidden state. Firstly, it appeared in the title of the musical composition "*Matryoshka Doll Variations*"[3] by the English composer Vyvyan Ayres. Secondly, the image of the Russian doll is clearly saw in the theory of time elaborated in Luisa Ray-chapter as follows:

"One model of time: an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments, each "shell" (the present) encased inside a nest of "shells" (previous presents) I call the actual past but which we perceive as the virtual past. The doll of "now" likewise encases a nest of presents yet to be, which I call the actual future but which we perceive as the virtual future." [4]

In this instance, the author presents a theory of time based on the distinction between real and virtual time through the character of Isaac Sachs, highlighting the significance of memories in influencing people's pasts and, consequently, their futures. Sachs's perspective on time and, more specifically, the future, bears a striking resemblance to that of renowned French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Specifically, Derrida makes a distinction between l'avenir, which translates to "the future," and (to come") in his book The Limits of Philosophy. Derrida makes the distinction between the future and the other. The former can be predicted, while the latter arrives unexpectedly and completely transforms everything. "L'avenir," in Derrida's words, is the actual future.[5]

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[2] Лихачев Д.С. Поэтика древнерусской литературы. – М.: Наука, 1979. – С.334.
[3] David Mitchell. Cloud Atlas. – L.: Sceptre, 2004.– P. 49.
[4] David Mitchell. Cloud Atlas. – L.: Sceptre, 2004.– P. 345.
[5] Jacques Derrida. Margins of philosophy. – Chicago. The University of Chicago press, 1982. – P.21. archive.org

In this context, the structure of the Russian doll in this novel suggests reaching the "real future". The predicative future is a whole story interrupted by unexpected breaks, until the reader finally reaches the "real future" by collecting the broken parts of the stories. In addition, the image of the Russian doll suggests a number of similarities. Adam Ewing's Pacific Journal story can be considered the outer shell or puppet of the novel, because it opens and closes the novel, that is, the work begins and ends with the same initial diary-style narrative. Moving on to the opening of the first doll (story), we have letters from Zedelghem, which take turns opening or reading different stories (dolls, time periods, shells) one after the other and finally, the central doll, Sloosha's Crossin, describes the prospects of the future phase. This is based on the Sachs model or timing discussed above. It can be seen that the creator created a formula of historical inversion in the novel structure by treating it with the help of unconventional forms. The study shows that David Mitchell used the setting of the story in Cloud Atlas to form a striking unity that overcomes the notions of time, space and even genre. The six stories in the novel, with their abrupt interruptions, are only one aspect of an overarching narrative that expresses the German scholar Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. The 19th-century German philosopher Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is common in literature, the idea that there is an endless cycle of recurrence as matter and energy undergo a process of transformation, the wheel of time, as in Hinduism and Buddhism.[6] In general, the narrator presents us with the struggle for freedom of a single reincarnated soul over many time periods.

This article focuses on how the author uses narrative synchronicity to tell the story. Placing different types of readers for each story is like a combination of how each reader engages with the text: the disorganized nature of the reading undoubtedly mimics the fragmentation of memory, and in the process reading the novel winter seems to recall the past as an event, while the narrative structure continues to postpone the coming future. When we look at the novel from this perspective, we learn that the process of archiving is ongoing.

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