

## *Mediating the Mechanisms of Temporality in Etel Adnan's Postmodern Narrative Master of the Eclipse*

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### **Abstract:**

Notably, there is an intricate notion of narrative and time in postmodern literature which symbolizes a collection of diverse individual narratives and timeframes, a perception that dismantles the modern philosophical ground. Subjective conceptualizations of time are contingent upon a cultural context and, moreover, upon an individual context. In this sense, temporality is subjectively formed and produced in the literary text. This characteristic is traced back to the postmodern ethos, advocating the claim that reality is fragmented and chaotic, thus mirrored in the conception of time as an intended non-linear construction. In this respect, the aim of this article is to explore the mechanisms of temporality with its effects in Etel Adnan's postmodern narrative Master of the Eclipse (2010), the case study of this research. The novel represents the experimental data set for this investigation conducted using a descriptive analytical method and via a qualitative approach. Subsequently, the findings indicate that the fragmentation of timeline is intended to originate ironic or parodic effects in Master of the Eclipse. Hence, the novel attains a distinct individual style because of the collapse of timeline, where past, present, and future are intermingled.

**Keywords:** Postmodern Literature; Temporality; Etel Adnan; Master of the Eclipse.

ملخص:

تسلط هذه المقالة الضوء على مفهوم الزمنية في سرد ما بعد الحداثة لرواية إيتيل عدنان سيد الكسوف (2010). هناك مفهوم معقد للسرد والوقت في الرواية يرمز إلى مجموعة من الروايات الفردية المتنوعة والأطر الزمنية، وهو تصور يفكك أرضية الفلسفة الحديثة. تعتمد التصورات الذاتية للوقت على السياق الثقافي، علاوة على السياق الفردي. وبهذا المعنى، فإن الزمنية تتشكل بشكل ذاتي وتنتج في النص قيد الدراسة. تُعزى هذه الخاصية إلى روح ما بعد الحداثة، التي تعتقد بأن الواقع مجزأ وفوضوي، وبالتالي ينعكس على الإطار الزمني الذي يظهر كأنه بناء غير خطي. تمثل الرواية مجموعة البيانات التجريبية لهذا التحقيق الذي يجري باستخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي والمنهج النوعي. وبالتالي، نستنتج بأن تجزئة الجدول الزمني في رواية سيد الكسوف تهدف إلى إحداث تأثيرات ساخرة أو محاكاة ساخرة التي تضفي أسلوباً فردياً متميزاً للنص الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية : أدب ما بعد الحداثة : الزمانية : إيتيل عدنان: سيد الكسوف.

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## 1- Introduction

When it comes to empirical research, time is an important subject for experimentation and exploration. Because of its ambiguity (time), it has been a never-ending subject of concern. Notably, the logical flow of time, cause-and-effect correlations in a tale is often disrupted when authors fail to convey events in a chronological order, a remarkable pattern in postmodern narratives. The modernist style sought to emphasize the function of time, whereas postmodernists maximize the activation of cross-cultural relations, and disregard established rules and conventions. Thence, postmodernists perceive the text, as a creative output, that represents a personalization of time conceptualization, which is no longer only a cultural concept. Many have the nerve to assume that the globe is shaped by the flow of time. It is believed that time is a dimension that grants thoughts and acts a sense of stability and chronology. Nonetheless, postmodern literary texts often disassemble the linearity of the timeline to result a fragmented temporality. Logically speaking, the major problem that unfolds in the front is the intention behind collapsing temporality in postmodern literature.

Among the writers who were concerned with the postmodern trend is the American- Syrian writer Etel Adnan. She was born in 1925 in Beirut to a Greek mother and a Syrian father. Etel studied in the Sorbonne University of Paris where she got a degree in philosophy and then she becomes a poet, essayist and also a visual artist. Another significant achievement to Etel is the publication of *Sitt Marie Rose* (2011) which was also awarded the France-Pays Arabes. Her piece of prose *Master of the Eclipse* (2009) marked an international appeal and gratification for it obtained the Arab American Book Awards. It manifests a noteworthy concern and a special attention to the notion of temporality.

*Master of the Eclipse* is full of temporal changes as the author places a high value on the mechanisms of time. Therefore, this study attempts to offer a quick overview of temporality under the postmodern umbrella and to clarify its portrayal in *Master of the Eclipse* using a qualitative approach. The descriptive and the analytical method will be employed, then to apply the postmodern perspective of temporality on the text under study.

Subsequently, the following sub-research questions are being considered:

- How does the postmodern ethos affect the perception of temporality?
- To what extent does *Master of the Eclipse* reflect the distortion of timeline ?
- For what purpose the fragmentation of temporality is created in *Master of the Eclipse*?

Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed and tested:

- Since reality is fragmented according to the postmodern worldview, time is as well regarded as fragmented.

- Master of the Eclipse is a postmodern novel as it scrutinizes and criticizes the master-narratives, such as religion, science, reality and temporality. Time holds a key role in many interpretations of what has come to be recognized as ‘the postmodern condition’. More specially, analysts point to a drastic change in the perception of time and space as evidence of fundamental societal shift in postmodern communities.

-The fragmentation of temporality is created in Master of the Eclipse to reflect the fragmentation of the postmodern psyche that perceives time as fragmented.

Previous related literature were interested in Master of the Eclipse’s postmodern nature, yet they overlook the notion of temporality. Among these research works are:

In his review about Master of the Eclipse (2010), Benjamin Hollander (2009) mentions that “it is a prose of uncanny, elegance and skepticism and conscience which voices what chokes us into silence ... it names the relations between innocence and power, the isolation they mark within our hearts and houses and inside our states”. The above-mentioned qualities (uncanny, skepticism, isolation at the micro and macro levels) assert the postmodern temper of Master of Eclipse.

Another crucial source influenced this research is the dissertation entitled “Historicizing the Arab apocalypse with Walter Benjamin: Etel Adnan’s “Master of the eclipse” and Rabih Alameddine’s The Angel of History” (2018). It elaborates that Adnan and Alameddine are creatively addressing memories from history (using historiographic metafiction) in order to resist the emotional and artistic hazards of quiet, sadness, and dread in the Arabic nations and the continuous historical periods of devastation. Therefore, this source assists the understanding of the function of poetics and literature in healing the calamities of postmodern community.

As far as we observe, no systematic study of postmodern temporal framework has yet been applied on Master of the Eclipse, and this particular topic has garnered minimal attention.

### **1-1-Theorizing Postmodernism through the Lens of Jean Leotard and Frederic Jameson**

Postmodernism may be viewed as a response against modernism conceptions, as well as a characteristic to the phase that succeeded modernism's dominance in cultural thought and practice in the early and mid-20th century.

Skepticism and criticism of absolute principles are all related to the postmodern philosophy. In this sense, postmodernity, according to Jean-François Leotard (1983), is marked by the dissolution of the grand-narratives that had once served to clarify the world in the community or as he calls:

Incredulity toward metanarratives ... this skepticism is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it” (p. xxiv).

Postmodernists also challenged established conceptions like science, religion, subjectivity.

According to Frederic Jameson, a Marxist literary critic, the contemporary period is seen through a critical prism that emphasizes global capitalism and its attendant hazards to human flourishing and survival. The concerns that our society has lost its connection to history and the pain of the downtrodden, as he views them, are also on his list of jeopardy.

Likewise, Jean Baudrillard is another prototypical cultural theorist who contributed to the postmodern trend. He initiates his study with Marxism and evolves what he regarded as “a more radical approach – a society of simulations, implosions, and hyperreality, in which it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish image from reality and in which signs and simulations become or are society” (*Sociology*, 2002). In effect, he distinguished between modern and postmodern period in which the former is known with the challenges of manufacturing, productivity, labor use, exploitation, and accumulation that influenced the structure of the economy and society. It was substituted with a drastic period influenced by computer technology, data processing, multimedia that dominates the structure of the society. The latter produces simulation codes, copies of reality, or copies that have no reference in reality. Surprisingly, the consciousness of the postmodern subject is distanced and isolated from reality.

## 1.2- Exploring Postmodern Literature

The term ‘postmodern literature’ is used to represent a response against the Enlightenment concepts implied in Modernist writing, as well as some aspects of post-World War II literature. In her work *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002), Linda Hutcheon discusses some of the fundamental aesthetic elements of postmodern writing, notably she refers that “parody is unavoidable for postmodernism” (p. 94). It indicates an intentional exaggeration and reproduction of the style of a certain writer, artist, or genre for humorous effects.

In addition, as part of postmodern literature characteristics, ‘pastiche’ which means the incorporation of many genres to create a unique story. It is a term associated with postmodern intertextuality that refers to the process of integrating or ‘paste’ various parts. This might be a tribute to or a parody of previous styles in postmodernist literature.

In order to produce ‘ironic effects’, a very remarkable aspect in postmodern literature, many events might occur at the same time, merging or recurring as part of what is known as ‘temporal distortion’. The implementation of temporal fragmentation results ‘maximalism’ when the piece has a large canvas and a disjointed narrative; in other words, it seems chaotic and overflowing with frivolous vocabulary.

Another distinctive feature of postmodern literature is the usage of historiographic metafiction that denotes works that fictionalize real-world historical events or characters. Novels like Salman Rushdie’s *Shame and Midnight's Children* (1981), Michael Ondaatje *Running in the Family* (1982) and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) by J.M. Coetzee represent historiographic metafiction.

### **1-3-A Theoretical Standpoint: Exploring the Mechanisms of Time in Postmodernism**

To present a postmodernist archetype, examining time distortion in contemporary literature and rebuilding the author's vision of fragmented time are all employed. From both the cultural framework of time in a society and the author's own knowledge of time (self and time-based frameworks), the author's individual temporal image is formed. Postmodern writers are known for their unique handling of a temporal category that is often only implicitly present in texts, but in this case it is feasible to detect the regularity in its presentation and therefore identify a postmodern writing style (Fedosova, p.78).

Among postmodern stylistics is: to play with the narrative, time, and the reader, a multidimensional structure of the narrative, the multiplicity of text meanings and styles. When it comes to literary works and movies, time shifts is one of the most popular ways to generate distinctive and creative storylines. Especially, “the genre of metafiction, blending various stylistic elements, breaks through this boundary between fiction and criticism of postmodern society, and produces the diversity of meaning in the process of text reading” (Wang, p. 2021)

The narrative anarchy is widely known in postmodern writings. It is common for writers to interrupt a chronological narrative with thoughts about people or future events. *Master of the Eclipse* (2010) keeps the reader continually engrossed in the possibility of what can happen to the characters in the story. Her

reminiscences and poetic diversions are also prevalent. The usage of the present and past tenses shows the significance of two temporal tenses.

There are certain significant features of time that are described in different ways. First and foremost, the author is capable of establishing a logical sequence of events due to its consistency and one-way direction. The objectivity and subjectivity of time are two more important properties to consider. For each individual, it is created by several elements (age, worldview, etc.), but it is also psychological in that it is influenced by personal characteristics and circumstances and exists at the level of consciousness, cognition, and feelings.

Head trauma, irritation with one's own awareness, or alienation may all lead to an altered sense of time, a sensation of time passing gradually or hastily, and a sense of the irrationality of one's current circumstances.

Contemporary novelists use these modern technique of splitting consciousness and insufficient time perception as story points. "Thus, throughout Victor Pelevin's writings, there are changes in time owing to the character's shifting awareness" (Pelvin, p. 2001). Omon Ra's protagonist has memory lapses, while taking a soporific, delusions, and shifts in time and space; he travels from one historical period to another. Complex and multifaceted and discrete text time (narrative time, narration time) is unsettled and unpredictable. Mikhaïl Bakhtin's chronotope theory, which describes space and time as one, shows that changes in time also induce changes in space. It gives a vivid demonstration of the author's employment of creative tale structure methods, such as mythological references, literary world transitions, recollections, internal dialogues, and polyphony.

Perception and semiotization (the emphasis on key features and their conceptualization) are two of the most important parts in temporal classification, which also involves choosing a language to characterize a given piece of reality in terms of its time component. Language has a stronger impact on the way we perceive time. Pre-linguistic cognitive structures, such as gestalts and frames, also exist and work in conjunction with the biological genesis of speech.

People's perceptions of time make it much more intricate than it already is, making it even more difficult to understand. That's why works of literature have so many different methods of expressing it. We must keep in mind the complexity and complication that time presents in the postmodern text, which shows how this complex phenomena becomes more difficult in the mind of the author and therefore is expressed in numerous ways in the text, as a result, since it is the product of the author's mind. It is only via the use of plays, experiences, and experiments with awareness that writers may hope to get a better understanding of this phenomena. Postmodern writers' writing style is characterized by the characteristics listed above, which contribute to and separate it from other styles.

### **1-5-Master of the Eclipse: Synopsis and Criticism**

Etel Adnan's *Master of the Eclipse* (2010) is a collection of dozen short stories that contemplate diverse subjects including history, power/discourse, media conspiracies, trans-cultural debates, international warfare and temporality. Adnan's general approach of narration and the multidimensional relationships that develop between her literary and artistic genres (the use of colors and aesthetic language) makes her a distinctive contemporary writer. In each short story, the author utilizes different protagonists and characters including poets, philosophers, and moviemakers ... to unfold her personal experiences and travelling. In a review published by interlink books (2009), it is mentioned that:

Etel Adnan painterly vision, her cosmopolitan flexibility, and her philosophical bent are on full display. This is a woman, after all, trained in philosophy at the Sorbonne, Harvard, and the University of California at Berkeley, who became a painter, and then a poet. Her voice comes to us as something the opposite of her title: She is a master of light and revelation, of language, variety, and color.

It not unusual to Adnan's style, the aesthetic style thriving with colors as remarked affirms her influence with Baudelaire's aesthetic, notably his notion of color as a structural part in painting and poetry.

Our interest in this study lies on the first short story that takes, surprisingly the same title of the novel "master of the Eclipse". The whole piece narrates the author's interesting debate with Mr. Buland, the Tunisian poet, in the summer festival in Italy. The engaging dialogue between the two characters inspects the unstable postmodern times and its apocalyptic temper, historicity and temporality. Their meeting is closed with suggesting the role of the poet as a vigilant angel to cure the injuries of postmodern communities.

*Master of the Eclipse* is a literary piece that belongs to historiographic metafiction. A reconsideration of Saddam Hussein policy and the Iraq war, Prince of Wales' marriage, Mrs. Thatcher's ascension to power in the text justifies the latter. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) Linda Hutcheon demonstrates that historiographic metafiction indicates "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (p. 5). It is a remarkable span of time and place that Adnan covers, stretching from the 1930s in Beirut through the early '60s in San Francisco and the first Gulf War.

### **1-6- Figurative Portrayal of Time in the Novel**

The postmodern worldview, which rejects norms and traditions, is characterized by playfulness and lack of order. For postmodernists, time has a personal nature, which is reflected in their creativity and the output of their work

as a creative artifact. Currie (2011) argues that postmodernism is “the deconstruction of the linear concept of time” (p. 79). It is noteworthy in *Master of the Eclipse* that the author inserts previous events into a current narrative, and reveals new information about the storyline or the motivations of their characters. For instance, she recalls the memories of Iraq war in 1991 when she was in the bus heading towards Sicily. In this sense, she interjects flashbacks into the main story to provide readers a glimpse into a character's background. The Usage of this literary strategy is meant to enhance the understanding of the story's current events or the character's backstory. Then, she suggested a “need for a forward to her story” (ibid). Just after, she narrates her adventure in Gibelina’s festival. This techniques is called flashforwards. They are a great technique to build suspense, boost reader interest, and build anticipation for the story's ending. It creatively enriches a narrative from both a writer and a reader point of view. Hence, the use of flashbacks and flashforwards echoes the postmodern nihilistic temper recognized as chaotic and unstable. Also, Etel attempts to address memories from history (using historiographic metafiction) in order to resist the emotional and artistic hazards of quiet, sadness (Bond, 2018).

At the very beginning, the recollection of 91’s Iraq war atrocities (flashbacks) when riding towards the festival of Sicily is intended to produce ironic effects. It paves the way towards raising doubts about the credibility of the western culture and policy. And then, a few lines after, Etel (2010) describes the exhilarating beauty of festivals “the masters are being played more than ever ... operas are sung nightly in the beautiful concert halls of the western world” and then asks “Are these countries considering culture a remedy? Do they believe it is redeeming? But then, do we have to always think in terms of punishment and redemption?” (4). She recalls again the apocalyptic incident of Iraq war in the middle of watching a movies about it in Gibelina and then she states:

They tell me that Iraq is being crushed under bombs and warn me to be careful, not to show too much emotion, to keep my worries under a lid when they are of no interest to most people. This recurring need for dissimulation creates a kind of a shield, a second self so to speak, that censors thoughts, or sometimes erases them altogether. In Gibelina I have to be an innocent visitor who came to read some poetry (5).

Using her poetic voice and flashbacks, Etel attempts to expose the sensibilities of Iraq war, one of the nightmares of Arab world. In addition, she aims at creating cynicism about the

Supposedly called the western world glory, instead it is a falsified facet reflected in the war atrocities.



Furthermore, figurative representations of time are also used in *Master of the Eclipse*. The concept of time may be grasped, quantified, and depicted: we may convey time via language in many different ways, and native speakers are well-versed in the wide range of linguistic means and methods that can be used to convey chronologically designated claims in our everyday speech. Therefore, “figurative metaphors transferring the representations about time can be divided into the following groups: Time is a live being (it reigns, corrects, heals, demands, runs, flies, goes, marches on, time waits for no one etc.)” (Fedosova, p82). On the other hand, time also can be considered as “an inanimate object: a river, a wheel, a fire, water, mirror etc.” (ibid). In *Master of the Eclipse*, Time is described as being a “giver of existence. It flows through us or passes us by. It runs, gallops, decelerates, and puts itself on full speed. It commands and energizes dictators. It runs, indeed. It takes the shape of a horse. Time is a master of all” (38). Likewise, time is considered as a non-living entity (a river, a wheel, a fire, water, mirror etc.). Another instance of conceptual metaphor of time in the text:

Time is mind, although no one’s mind. It is its own is-ness. It oversees forests, hides in rivers: become the Nile, the Rhine the Mississippi ... it beats the measure for music, meanders in the slums’ corridors. It is steam, it precedes destruction, it’s the atom bomb, it goes beyond it, and it’s the DNA of the universe” (38).

Literary writings often use a variety of metaphors, images, and parallels to depict the passage of time. Images of time are made up of a variety of features and patterns. In many cases, a broad philosophical idea of time is transferred to a personal sense of time. Hence, the author of *Master of the Eclipse* believes that:

Time does not reside in a watch. When you look for it, it has already moved, it has already left. Oh yes, it has power! Transformed into a breeze, it makes love to water, second avatar of its intimate being. Thinner than the trace of a magnetic wave, it does not walk on things, it impregnates them. And when it runs out of patience, its dying dies” (37-38).

Time may be expressed in a variety of ways through linguistic signals; there is a great number of metaphorical and idiomatic phrases that have a time characteristic in languages, and native speakers have a diverse range of language methods and ways to reproduce temporally marked statements. “Time did not create itself; it’s not a creature. Time produces spirit. Spirit oozes from it as acidity comes from a lemon. Time is pure thought. Thought is not time; it’s a product, an artefact of the mind. Whose mind? (38).

Language has a stronger impact on the way we perceive time. There are also pre-linguistic cognitive structures, gestalts, and frames, which operate as an

organic element of the genesis of speech. Additionally, there are pre-linguistic cognitive structures such as gestalts and frames that play a role in the emergence of language organically. Furthermore, According to Etel time possesses power:

Time gave the mind the tools it needs to make use of time, be one with it ... when we take power over time, in the void that surrounds it, joy resembles death ... joy is a visitation that connects us to the gods and makes them become the citizens of time” “My country has defeated time. We have conquered it. Annihilated it. We replaced time with simultaneity, with omnipresence. We made of the present our empire. (39).

Time is depicted in a variety of ways in literature. Personal and classic styles may be found among them. Structures and qualities may be seen in representations of time. In many instance in Master of the Eclipse, there is a general lexical transition from a broad philosophical idea of time to a personal sense of time occurs often.

## **2- Method**

### **2-1-Research Design**

This research which belongs to literary criticism is entitled “Mediating the Mechanisms of Temporality in Etel Adnan’s Postmodern Narrative Master of the Eclipse”. This study will deal with textual analysis of temporality in the novel which based on the theoretical framework of postmodernism. Thus, books, articles, and websites will be used in order to gather data. Hence, the approach to be used in this work is the quantitative approach which will help in answering the research questions. Besides, this study will depend on three methods which are the exploratory, descriptive, and analytical methods to discover, describe, and analyze the novel events.

### **2-2-Research Procedure**

This study firstly follows the above-mentioned steps:

- As a starting point for future study, definitions help establish basic concepts such as "time" and "temporality" as significant terms.
- Temporality is a concept that will be approached via a postmodern framework.
- A short synopsis and other critical criticism about Master of the Eclipse are mentioned.

### **2-3-Research Tool and Data Collection**

Using Master of the Eclipse as a primary key source for investigation concerned with analyzing temporality from a postmodern perspective. This investigation includes answering the main questions and sub-questions and also, verifying the hypotheses to meet the aim of the research which is exposing the purpose behind employing temporal distortion in Master of the Eclipse. Finally,

in order to highlight the study topics connected to temporality in the sample novel, we use references to metaphoric and symbolic representations of temporality in the novel to attain the research goals. Moreover, the researchers of this study collect, analyze, interpret and report data.

### **3-Results and Discussion**

A quick overview of time and how Etel Adnan have portrayed it was the goal of this study, which also aimed to sketch out the varied viewpoints that the author have elicited concerning temporality. *Master of the Eclipse*, a postmodern work, was used as the study's experimental data.

Several authors have chosen a plot development without timeline, adopting a manipulated and a fragmented temporality. To achieve the latter, they interrupt the chronology, requires a particular out of sequence, find incidents from the present back into the past, depict a range of chronological sensations, and construct new conceptions of time. Sometimes writers attribute a thing an event to a period other than that in which it exists, especially a thing that is conspicuously old-fashioned. It may make it hard for a reader to piece together the narrative's events, making it hard to grasp the plot's general structure.

Etel Adnan, for instance, brings us back in time to various occurrences. Readers must connect the many narrative threads that the author has woven together in order to make sense of the story as a whole. Etel Adnan often employs memories in a theatrical manner. The passage of time is reduced to a sequence of chance meetings and occurrences. Time plays a central role in his works, which are an illustration of a wide range of temporal discrepancies. Because they don't follow the normal time stream cause and effect sequence, they appear disorganized; nonetheless, the narrative's unusual structure and the temporal leaps stress consistency. Every one of his stories has a unique perspective on the passage of time, but one thing is for certain: every one of his works exhibits a wide range of temporal variety and plurality.

This leads us to the conclusion that, despite time's inherent complexity and multidimensional nature, people's conceptions of it only serve to exacerbate the problem. That's why literary works have so many different methods of expressing it. There are several ways in which a postmodernist work presents time, and the reader is presented with a variety of ways to think about this complicated reality as an intellectual artifact. When examining postmodernist writings, this is something to bear in mind. Writers may only expect to get a deeper grasp of this phenomenon by the use of games experiences, and research conducted with attention.

#### 4-Conclusion:

In this study, temporality is approached theoretically speaking from a postmodern perspective, then it is applied in Etel Adnan's *Master of the Eclipse*. The major research problem evoked in the beginning of this research is the purpose behind fracturing temporality in postmodern literature. In effect, Etel portrays temporality differently, a distant depiction from its general philosophical conception. Time is regarded a river, atomic bomb or a steam. It is an individual unique and a creative conception of temporality. This technique reflects the postmodern ethos known with individuality, playfulness, inharmoniousness and fragmentation of reality. As proposals for further researchers, we encourage coming studies join the analysis of the dimension of space to the study of temporality in *Master of the Eclipse*.

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