

Narrative Time in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*: A Genettian Perspective

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Abstract

This article utilizes Gérard Genette's (1972/1980) narrative discourse theory in order to explore the temporal narrative strategies deployed in *The Hunger Games* (2008), the first novel in the popular series by the American writer Suzanne Collins. Though Genette's comprehensive theory includes such elements as *time*, *mood*, and *voice*, the main focus of the study will be narrative time, whose elements *order*, *duration*, and *frequency* and their subcategories are first defined and then applied to the analysis of this novel. Genette's theory of narrative discourse has almost invariably been considered as a purely formal one, a highly systematic classification of terms designed to describe narrative structures, without focusing on the social and cultural factors. In contrast, the present analysis aims at exploring both the formal and the communicative components of Genette's theory, with a view to bridging the gap between old classical and current postclassical narratology.

Keywords: Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, time

1. Introduction

Appearing toward the end of the structuralist era, Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1972, trans. 1980), unlike most of the structuralist theorists' works, which were concerned largely with the formal aspects of the "story level", focused on the signifying level of discourse. In this way, Genette was able to explore the relations between the narrated story, the narrative text, and the narrating act. Structuralist notions such as a well-defined terminology and a scientific methodology are now difficult to maintain in the face of the continued diversification of postclassical narratologies which are culturally and politically oriented. Since the turn of the 21st century, narratologists have paid increasing attention to the contextuality of the different modes of narrative representation, expanding it to include a wide range of disciplines: feminist, cognitive, postmodern, and rhetorical narratology, etc. However, this tendency has been significantly offset by the work of some theorists and critics of narrative theory such as Phelan and Rabinowitz (2005) who constantly draw on classical structuralist narratology of the 1970s and 1980s, especially Genette's theory. Recognizing the structuralist roots of contemporary narrative theory, Phelan and Rabinowitz (2005: 3) maintain that structuralist narratology "is still an enormously vital area of study, and it's still producing illuminating work". This article focuses on the three temporal aspects of narrative identified by Genette, namely "order", "duration", and "frequency" and their application to Suzanne Collins' novel *The Hunger Games* (2008).

2. Literature Review

The Hunger Games (2008) is a postmodern novel which has often been analyzed from many perspectives including political, social, psychoanalytical, feminist, and cultural approaches, etc., but less so from a classical narrative perspective. To give only some examples, Pharr and Clark's (2012) collection of critical essays on *The Hunger Games* trilogy provides critical discussions of the series' main ideas, characters, and themes. Dunn and Michaud's collection of critical essays (2012) comprises several articles that draw on the works of some outstanding philosophers so as to explore the themes of *The Hunger Games* series such as sacrifice, love, and moral choice. Henthorne (2012: 35) opines that Collins' trilogy can be read as a bildungsroman, though an unconventional one.

Tan (2013) investigates the series in regard to its representation of childhood and violence, stating that *The Hunger Games* "critiques and reflects our own society" (71). In Hudson's (2013, para.3) interview, Collins asserts that *The Hunger Games* series is "a reality television program" and intended to be a social critique that raises awareness in young readers. Ann's (2020) book focuses on the theme of "agency" within the text of the series "by looking directly at individual agency, how it is gained, exercised, lost, and reclaimed" (3). However, none of those articles and books or the author's interview discusses the novel's narrative time structure.

Bland and Strotmann (2014) study the novel from an ecocritical perspective. Their article also contains some useful remarks about narration in *The Hunger Games* showing how the novel uses some flashbacks narrated in the past tense in contrast with other parts narrated in the present tense (25). In her essay, Brewster (2014: 169-188) adopts a rhetorical approach to examine *The Hunger Games* as a novel and as a film adaptation. Though she applies Chatman's (1978) communication model as a framework for her study, she makes only scanty reference to Genette's structuralist model of narrative discourse, even though she occasionally makes use of some of its terminology.

While *The Hunger Games* has attracted a lot of scholarship, it has not received due research in the area of classical narratology. Therefore, there is still a wide scope for academic research to be conducted on this novel in light of Genette's theory of narrative time.

3. Discussion

In his *Narrative Discourse*, Genette (1980: 27) divides a narrative into three aspects: *discourse*, *story*, and *narrating*. Whereas "discourse" refers to the text of a narrative, "story" refers to the chronologically organized events included in the discourse, and "narrating" addresses the action of producing a narrative through narrator/s and narratee/s. Genette's categorization of the structural properties of a narrative discourse is based on the interrelationships among those three aspects. Genette also works out a typology of narrative categories that include *tense*, *mood* (*aspect*), and *voice*. Briefly summarized, "tense" refers to the relationships between the temporal aspects of discourse and story; "mood" signifies the particular ways of expressing the story in the discourse; and "voice" refers to the situation of narrating (29). This paper investigates the application of "tense" to Collins' selected work.

Under the category of "tense", Genette (1980) makes a precise analysis of the three elements of time, namely *order*, *duration*, and *frequency*. Genette (48) uses the term "anachrony" to describe the contrast between the chronological order, the sequential occurrence of events as they happened (story), and the textual order, the way in which events are represented in the text (discourse). Details of the main types of discrepancy between story-order and text-order or what Genette calls "anachronies" (48) are given below.

Order

According to Genette (1980:48), *order* refers to the relation between the actual chronological sequence of events and their occurrence in the discourse. Order encompasses two categories of narrative presentation: *anachrony* and *achrony*. As for anachrony, Genette identifies two main types: *analepsis* (flashback) and *prolepsis* (flashforward) which are determined through their relation to what he calls the "first" (primary) narrative. When the discourse narrates an event that happened prior to the present moment in the first narrative, there is an analepsis; when it relates an event that alludes to the future, it is a prolepsis (49, 67). Both analepsis and prolepsis have *reach* and *extent*. Reach is the distance backward or forward in time, and extent is the duration of the past or future event. Genette explains that anachronies occur inside the first narrative and consequently "disrupt" it, creating thereby a "second" (subsidiary) narrative.

Genette (1980:208) distinguishes three main types of analepsis: external, internal, and mixed analepses, "depending on whether the point to which they reach is located outside or inside the temporal field of the first narrative" (61). An *external analepsis* presents an event occurring before the beginning of the first narrative and forms a pre-history to the first narrative. Its main function is to inform the reader about something that happened earlier (49-50). *The Hunger Games* opens with an obviously external analeptic beginning. The events of more than five years concerned with Katniss' family and her friend Gale are summarized in a few pages before the narrative returns to the current events regarding the "reaping". This means that a small part of the events of the second narrative is narrated earlier than the current events, while the bulk of the second narrative is told after the start of the first narrative, and is therefore analeptical or posterior to the primary storyline.

After the initial start of the second narrative, the action in the novel continues to develop through a combination of a chronologically-ordered narration and alternating anachronies of analepsis and prolepsis. Throughout the novel, the reader can see how these two narratives are developing concurrently and jointly, using present, past, and future tenses, depending on the way the events unfold. As the events of the first story are not recounted all at one time, we find that many of them have been left out and remembered/recounted later to fill in some missing temporal gaps in due course.

Collins's *The Hunger Games* narrative begins on the day of the reaping, the day when each of the twelve Districts must select its two tributes as their representatives in the Hunger Games and ends several weeks later when Katniss and Peeta arrive back in District 12. The novel contains two main storylines that run parallel to each other: first, the episodes involving Katniss' family background, her adventures in the woods, and her relations with her friends Gale and Peeta, developed mostly through the device of anachrony, and second, the episodes centering on the 74th Game, which unfold presently, mainly through a chronologically-ordered sequence. The first storyline occurring before the reaping constitutes the second narrative and the episodes dealing with the current Games represent the first narrative.

Genette (1980) treats two subcategories of external analepsis which he labels *homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic* analepses (50-51). In an external homodiegetic analepsis the narrator tells a story of personal experience as he/she is also one of the story's characters. Accordingly, any references to events, characters, or storyline in which the protagonist/narrator plays a role are called homodiegetic. A clear example of this subcategory occurs when Katniss repeatedly remembers Peeta and his kindness when they were young school children, giving her a piece of bread so that she and her family would not starve (34, 35, 37, 69, 366). Other instances of this type include Katniss' frequent recollections of her hunting trips with Gale, her remembrance of the death of her father in a mine explosion five years ago as well as her life with her sister Prim and her mother.

By contrast, in an external heterodiegetic analepsis, the story is told by a narrator who is not present as an experiencing character in the narrated events. Thus, those events in which Katniss does not act as a participant can be called heterodiegetic. A good example of this type is when Mayor Undersee tells part of the history of Panem and recalls a time when the thirteen districts rose up against the Capitol and how, following the defeat of the twelve districts, a treaty was signed to establish the Hunger Games as a punishment for the uprising (20-21). Another one is Gale's recalling of a past incident in the previous Hunger Games when a lot of the tributes froze to death and since then, the Capitol officials have always chosen a location with wood (45). Such instances of both subcategories of external analepsis take the reader back to an earlier time in the story and highlight the significance of some events from the past against which the current or

future events can be better understood.

Internal analepsis deals with a past event that occurred after the starting point of the first narrative or narrated for the first time at a point in the text later than the place where it is due. Genette (49-50), differentiates between *internal homodiegetic* and *internal heterodiegetic* analepses. Internal homodiegetic analepses “deal with the same line of action as the first narrative” (51). *The Hunger Games* abounds in instances of this subcategory of analepsis. For instance, during their stay in the cave, Peeta reveals that his feelings for Katniss date back to their first day of school together and that his father was once in love with Katniss’ mother, but she chose a coal miner as he could make the birds listen to his singing (53). A second example is when Katniss remembers during the Games an earlier incident when Peeta gave her the bread (104). Another instance occurs when Katniss meets Rue, the young black female tribute from District 11, who reminds Katniss of the primrose after which Katniss’ sister Prim is named (114). The information about naming looks to be overdue for it could have been mentioned sometime earlier.

Internal heterodiegetic analepsis, on the other hand, refers to “a story line ... different from the content ... of the first narrative” (Genette, 1980: 50). Genette further notes that internal heterodiegetic analepses often take on an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past (50). In the novel, the recollections of Haymitch’s role in the 50th Hunger Games provide a good example of internal heterodiegetic analepsis, as these originally fall outside the first narrative but are reintroduced to add some information about a character taking an important role in the first narrative. Haymitch is an alcoholic who is intoxicated most of the time in order to cope with the trauma and remorse he suffered as an impact of the previous Games in which he was a tribute. The heterodiegetic episodes regarding Haymitch are recalled from a previous story, but they join the first narrative and continue to blend smoothly with it until the very end.

Mixed analepsis begins before and ends at a point after the starting place of the first narrative. For Genette, “This class consists of external analepses prolonged to rejoin and pass beyond the starting point of the first narrative” (61). As Rimmon-Kennan (2002: 50) explains: “If the period covered by the analepsis begins before the starting point of the first narrative but at a later stage either joins it or goes beyond it, then the analepsis is considered ‘mixed’”.

Furthermore, Genette discerns two types of mixed analepsis: *partial* and *complete analepses*. A mixed partial analepsis is an interruption in the narrative which ends on an ellipsis without rejoining the first narrative, thus creating a gap between the end of the analepsis and the beginning of the first narrative (62). In *The Hunger Games*, there is a portion of the heroine’s life about which nothing is known. From a narrative perspective, Katniss’s early childhood seems to be irrelevant as it has no direct bearing on the first narrative, which deals basically with the period in which both Katniss and her sister are eligible for election to the Games.

Conversely, a mixed complete analepsis is an external one which rejoins the first narrative and becomes part of the narrative discourse without any gaps between the end of the analepsis and the beginning of the first narrative (Genette, 1980: 62). An example of this analepsis occurs when we are told that Katniss and Gale had agreed a year ago to take care of one another's families in case one of them is selected in the reaping (40). This analepsis started before the beginning of the first narrative and then joins it and continues throughout the story, as reflected in Katniss’ repeated recollections of Gale’s help for her mother and sister (126-129, 314-318). Had Katniss’ early childhood years been recounted, this could have been a case of mixed complete analepsis, as it would join the first narrative without any gap between the two sections of the story.

As aforementioned, Genette postulates *prolepsis* as the other type of narrative anachrony. It is “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later” (1980:40). As analepsis interrupts the narration to take the reader into the past, prolepsis does so to take the reader into the future. Genette adds that the frequency of prolepsis in narrative is less than that of analepsis (67). Since prolepsis refers to a future event that has not yet come, we have to wait for some time or second readings before we can determine whether an event had been anticipated earlier in the text (67).

Genette (1980, 68) identifies two main types of prolepsis: *external and internal Prolepses*, depending on whether the event takes place without or within the first narrative. An example of external prolepsis is when Gale, speaking of the divisive and oppressive policy of the Capitol vis-à-vis the twelve Districts, tells Katniss: “It’s to the Capitol’s advantage to have us divided among ourselves” (16). Gale’s words alert the reader to the humiliating way the Games officials will treat the people of Panem. Genette further explains that an external prolepsis often go beyond the scope of the first narrative and do not interfere with it for these would relate to episodes that take place after the closing point of the first narrative and “function most often as epilogues, serving to continue one or another line of action on to its logical conclusion” (68). However, nothing of this type occurs in *The Hunger Games*.

Internal prolepsis happens when the chronological order of the story is interrupted and future events in the first narrative are narrated to reveal later events before continuing the current narration process. An example of internal prolepsis is when Peeta gives Katniss two loaves of bread against his mother’s wish (35) and saves her life, as this act anticipates his true love for her in the future.

Internal prolepsis can take two forms: *internal homodiegetic prolepsis* and *internal heterodiegetic prolepsis* (Genette, 1980: 71). However, Genette ignores this category because “the problem of interference, of possible useless duplication between the first narrative and the narrative taken on by the proleptic section ... is nil, whether the anticipation is internal or external” (:71). In other words, the anticipation would have a different interest than the first narrative.

As far as internal homodiegetic prolepsis is concerned, Genette perceives two categories: *completing prolepsis* and *repeating prolepsis*.

Completing prolepses are “those that fill in ahead of time a later blank” (1980:71). A good instance of completing prolepsis in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* can be illustrated by the following passage:

“Anyway, if we make it back, you won’t be a girl from the Seam, you’ll be a girl from the Victor’s Village,” he says.
That’s right. If we win, we’ll each get a house in the part of town reserved for Hunger Games’ victors.

.....
“But then, our only neighbour will be Haymitch!” (357)

Peeta points out that if he and Katniss make it back, Katniss “won’t be a girl from the Seam” anymore, and Haymitch will be their neighbour. When the novel concludes, details about the future dwelling place of both Peeta and Katniss do not appear again, indicating thereby that the earlier anticipations raised serve to offset any future ellipsis, thus providing an instance of completing prolepsis.

Repeating analepses are “those that double, however slightly, a narrative section to come” (Genette, 1980: 71). An instance of repeating prolepsis happens when Katniss is pictured anticipating some events that will take place in the future when she tells the injured Peeta: “You are just going to have to last the others, Peeta. They’ll cure it back at the capitol when we win” (312). After what appears to be the lapse of a few days, Peeta is seen on-stage looking healed having recently undergone a successful surgery on his hurt leg and after he and Katniss have won the Hunger Games as here anticipated (421).

Genette (1980) further asserts that repeating prolepses “refer in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place”, adding that they “play a role of advance notice” and that “the canonical formula for them is generally a ‘we will see’ or ‘one will see later’” (73). These prolepses are by definition explicit, especially when they are placed at the end of a chapter to “disclose the subject of the following chapter by adumbrating it” (73-74). Genette cautions against confusing “advance notices”, which are explicitly stated, with “advance mentions”, which are basically simple markers without anticipation and which perform the “classic art of ‘preparation’” (75). Advance mentions, he explicates, often occur in the form of “having a character appear at the beginning who will really step in only very much later” (75). Despite Genette’s caution against confusing advance notices with advance mentions, it is often very difficult to make clear distinctions between them, as “what seems to be an anticipation for one person, may just as well be an advance notice for another” (De Villiers, 2004: 134). Consequently, any judgement of them may become a matter of conjecture or personal opinion.

In *The Hunger Games*, advance notices do not seem to occur and advance mentions are only scantily used. A good example occurs when arrogant President Snow makes his first debut to give an address to the participating tributes (82) and later emerges again to place the two crowns on the victors’ heads (425). The early reference to Snow serves as a preparation to his latter appearance where his disregard for Katniss comes to the fore.

As mentioned earlier, Genette (1980) notes a second possible relation between story-time and discourse-time, which he labels *achrony*. This rare category of anachronous sequences as Chatman (1978:65) observes: “allows no chronological relation ... between story and discourse”. Genette views achronies as “events not provided with any temporal reference whatsoever, events that we cannot place at all in relation to the events surrounding them” (83). He argues that since achronies are not attached to some other events that can define them as being earlier or later but belong to the atemporal, they become unplaceable (83). Whereas anachrony subsumes the subcategories of analepsis and prolepsis, achrony refers to the narratives that defy the traditional notion of time. Genette uses the term *syllipsis* (taking together) as a narrative device to study chronical structures where different temporalities merge to form “anachronic groupings governed by one or another kinship (spatial, temporal, or other)” (85).

Although Genette (1980) cites many achronies from Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, one cannot find such disturbing occurrences in Collins’ work. Indeed, none of the narrative segments is “sylliptically” narrated and none of the narrative anachronies fits with Genette’s definition of achrony as a form of anachrony “deprived of every temporal connection” and ultimately is “dateless and ageless” (84).

Apparently, Genette’s treatment of anachrony is not an abstract categorization but a view of narrative as a communicative act. Prolepses and analepses in a narrative are not mere technical terms; rather, they become the past, present, and future of the realistic experiences of the characters. Hence, the mixing of different types of temporal order in *The Hunger Games* yields a more exciting and more complex plot. By their pointing backward and forward in time, anachronies create a sense of continuity and structural unity for the whole narrative and bring about a sense of suspense and curiosity that attract the reader’s interest. While retrospection can provide an explanatory role about the characters, events, and background, anticipation can arouse the reader’s expectations by partially revealing information that will culminate later.

Duration

The second element of time discussed by Genette is *duration*, a term which he uses to refer to the speed of the story in comparison with that of the text. According to Genette (1980:87-88), “The speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)”. In other words, it is the relation between the time the story events lasted and the time it takes to read their corresponding narrative text. Asserting that there is no tool of calculating the duration of a text except by the time it takes to read, which varies from one reader to another, Genette uses “steadiness in speed”, “the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension” as the norm against which to examine degrees of duration (86). Accordingly, Genette introduces four basic variations of narrative movement for the

measurement of narrative discourse: *scene*, *summary*, *pause*, and *ellipsis* and discerns two modes of temporal variation: “acceleration” and “deceleration”, the increase or decrease of the speed in the discourse in comparison with the story (87).

Genette (1980) views *scene* as a “narrative movement”, most often in dialogue, which “realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story” (94). Scene means using the theatrical performance convention in which the event theoretically has the same duration as the staged narration, that is, an apparent equivalence between story-time and discourse-time. Genette argues, that the earlier tradition, “made scene into a place of dramatic concentration almost entirely free of descriptive or discursive impediments, and free even more of anachronic interferences” (111). Nevertheless, he adds, a typical Proustian scene “is almost always inflated, indeed encumbered with digressions of all kinds, retrospections, anticipations, iterative and descriptive parentheses, didactic interventions by the narrator, etc.”(111). It is, therefore, only by convention that one speaks of temporal equivalence of story and text in dialogue, as interruptions prolong the duration of any scenic presentation and make story-time and tex-time not really equal.

Narrative scenes in *The Hunger Games*, unlike their drama counterparts, are not based solely on dialogue or a specific topic covered in the narrative. Quite often, they overlap and may include authorial or narratorial comments, some verbs to describe the events or to introduce characters, and a partial reporting of the action besides a certain amount of dialogue. The following extract is quoted to illustrate the argument:

“Who’s left again?” I ask.

“The boy from District One. Both tributes from Two. The boy from Three. Thresh and me. And you and Peeta,” says Rue. “That’s eight. Wait, and the boy from Ten, the one with the bad leg. He makes nine.”

There’s someone else, but neither of us can remember who it is.

“I wonder how that last one died,” says Rue. (244-245)

The passage above contains two modes of presentation: scene, when the author presents events in dialogue and the words and lines on the page are thought to correspond directly to the speeches of the characters (by having the same tempo) and summary, where the narrator intervenes to provide a brief explanation. The excerpt presents a dialogue between Katniss and Rue, but it is also interrupted by the narrator’s separate comment and includes verbs such as “ask” and “says” that indicate the speaker’s manner of expression. By containing supplementary material such as narrator commentary and reporting verbs, the passage effectively demonstrates Genette’s view that “a scene with dialogue has only a kind of conventional equality between narrative time and story time” (1980:87).

Summary is “the narration in a few paragraphs or a few pages of several days, months, or years of existence, without details of action or speech” (Genette, 1980: 95-96). In summary, the space given to the incident/s is rather short, so that text-time is always less than story-time, resulting in the acceleration of the narrative pace. Genette maintains that the brevity of summary “gives it almost everywhere an obvious quantitative inferiority to descriptive and dramatic chapters” (96). Nevertheless, he argues, summaries are necessary for the flow of the narrative and traditionally functioned as “the most usual transition between two scenes, the ‘background’ against which scenes stand out, and thus the connective tissue par excellence of novelistic narrative, whose fundamental rhythm is defined by the alternation of summary and scene” (97).

In *The Hunger Games* we often find many sequences of events briefly recounted via summary. A typical passage is: “In the remaining hours before nightfall, I gather rocks and do my best to camouflage the opening of the cave. It’s a slow and arduous process, but after a lot of sweating and shifting things around, I’m pretty pleased with my work (326). In a few sentences which can be read in a few-seconds-time span, the writer summarizes the arduous work of several hours. Similarly, details of the age-old Panem society and the past history of the Hunger Games are summarized by the principal narrator or by other characters in some pages scattered over the whole narrative.

The degree of condensation can vary from one summary to another, producing variable degrees of acceleration. Throughout the novel, the dialogues of the first narrative in particular are often interrupted to give room to characters’ remembrances of past occasions and incidents. Short and long summaries are also used between scenes as a means to move the story forward. Those summaries are often placed at the beginning or at the end of a chapter, but may also appear in the middle of a scene, without interrupting the flow of the action.

The third duration movement listed by Genette is *pause* which he identifies as a segment where narrative discourse corresponds to zero story duration, as in descriptive passages (1980:95). Genette (99-100) asserts that descriptive pauses of the iterative type as frequently used by Proust contribute to the brevity of the narrative by their “synthesizing several occurrences of the same sight into one single descriptive section”. He also envisages pauses to be neither very numerous nor very long so that they do not hamper the continuity of the narrative (90). Indeed, these descriptions do not bring about a complete pause in the narrative nor suspend the action of the story as they “become absorbed into narration” and the narrative soon returns to its normal progression (105).

Some of the descriptive passages in *The Hunger Games* include those which depict the Capitol, the woods, the Seam, the arena, and the fights. An example of pause is the paragraph below that delineates the tunnel and the mountains that lead to the Capitol since it does not develop the action but dwells on giving a detailed description of the rural scene:

The mountains form a natural barrier between the Capitol and the eastern districts. It is almost impossible to enter from the east except through the tunnels. This geographical advantage was a major factor in the districts losing the war that led to my being a tribute today. (67)

In the passage above, four lines are allocated to the description of the tunnel and its strategic role during the war between the Districts and the Capitol. The events in the story are briefly “interrupted” and the rural setting is depicted. Coming just after the long journey to the Capitol and following the tension in the previous chapters, this pause serves to slow down the tempo of the action and give the readers time to reflect on the previous events.

Another representative pause in *The Hunger Games* takes place when the main narrative seems to have come to a halt to give some details about the Seam, the poorest area of District 12 where Katniss’ family lives: “Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many of whom have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails and the lines of their sunken faces. But today the black cinder streets are empty” (4). Pauses like this and many others help decelerate the story before they give way to a text developed, for the most part, through an alternation of scene and summary.

The fourth possible relation between story-time and discourse-time is *ellipsis* which Genette (1980) considers as the narrative “movement” with the highest speed, for discourse-time here is zero and story-time may consist of some long periods of time. Genette regards ellipsis as time in the story not accounted for in narrative discourse: “From the temporal point of view, the analysis of ellipses comes down to considering the story time elided” (106). This time period, he adds, can be either precisely stated (*definite ellipses*, e.g. “two years later”) or roughly indicated (*indefinite ellipses*, e.g. “many years”) (106). Furthermore, Genette identifies two subcategories: *explicit ellipses*, which appear from an indication of the passage of time like the above mentioned and *implicit ellipses*, those not indicated in the text but which can be inferred by the reader when a chronological gap occurs in the narrative continuity (108).

Applying Genette’s views on ellipses to *The Hunger Games*, we can find several instances where the discourse halts, though time continues to pass in the story. For instance, after being stung by the tracker jackers, Katniss is unconscious and she cannot tell how long she has been asleep or what incidents took place during that time, believing that “more than a day has passed, even two, possibly” (229). This is an example of indefinite explicit ellipsis because the passage of time is mentioned but it is still unclear. Similarly, when she awakes from her slumber after being sedated following the end of the Games, it seems that days have passed, but we do not know exactly how many nor what happened during this lapse of time. Instead, Katniss explains this by stating that “there’s usually a lag of a few days between the end of the competition and the presentation of the victor” (408). Consequently, we have to deduce the duration of this lapse from the context in which it is accounted for.

Moreover, some of the events that presumably happened over long periods of time are skipped over or are not fully accounted for in the discourse. For example, not much is said about the long history of the previous Games or of Panem or of the war between the Capitol and the districts. In such cases, the reader has to work out for himself/herself that some indefinite or definite periods of time have elapsed without being explained in the text.

Ellipses, like those cited above, or at least some of them, appear to be deliberately done and perhaps for certain purposes. Fludernik (2009: 33) rightly notes that “narrative ellipsis is mainly used to create suspense”. So, the writer might have omitted some events or details so as to arouse the reader’s curiosity or to focus on others in order to highlight their importance or to give the story a greater depth. Even more, some events and details might have been left so that the reader can fill in the narrative gaps and interact with the narrative to make the story more interesting. As a result, those gaps allow readers to create their own interpretations.

Apparently, an ellipsis may be combined with other duration movements. The following passage from *The Hunger Games* has been quoted for illustration: “My father knew and he taught me some skills before he was blown to bits in a mine explosion. I was eleven then. Five years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run (6). This passage is a composite of summary and ellipsis. It is a summary because a five-year period passes so quickly when rendered in the narrative discourse. It is an ellipsis because the mine explosion and the father’s burial are presented without details, resulting in an explicit ellipsis of the definite type.

Following our discussion of duration, an important question arises: What is the proportion of story-time to discourse-time in Collins’s novel? Though not directly stated, the actual Hunger Games last for seventeen days as some researchers have shown, (e.g. Kenatz, 2009: n.p.). The Games are said to have been preceded by six more days extending from the reaping day until the beginning of the Games and followed by additional six others which elapse before the victors reach home (Kenatz, 2009: n.p.). The average number of the pages of the novel itself comes to about four-hundred pages. Hence, the ratio of story-time to text-time is roughly twenty-nine-day story-events to more than four-hundred-page reading. Roughly speaking, the number of pages given to the first six days is about one-hundred seventy (chs. 1-10); the pages allotted to the Games are about two-hundred and thirty (chs. 11-25), and the remainder, which is about 30 pages (chs. 26-27), is devoted to the return journey. Additionally, the subsidiary narrative which runs concurrently with the primary narrative is covered by a relatively small number of pages but extends to a time span of more than seventy-five years. So, narrative duration modulates between expansion and compression, deceleration and acceleration, depending on the nature and importance of the recounted events.

Frequency

The third and last category of possible relationship between discourse-time and story-time is *Frequency*. It refers to the repetition “between the narrative and the diegesis” (Genette, 1980: 113), that is, the number of times an event happened in the story and how many times it is reported in the discourse. Genette categorizes this relationship into three main modalities: *singulative*, *repeating*, and *iterative* (114).

According to Genette (1980), *Singulative narrative* is narrating once in the discourse what happened once in the story. This type has two forms: First, when an event happens just one time in the story and is described once in the discourse and second, when the number of times an event occurs in the story is equally mentioned in the discourse (114). Genette considers singulative narration as the most common narrative form and contends that nonetheless, “[it] has been very little studied by critics and theoreticians of the novel” (113).

Most of *The Hunger Games* narrative falls into the singulative category. Thus, District 12’s reaping ceremony which happens once is narrated only once. Katniss and Peeta’s boarding a train on their journey to the Capitol corresponds with its singulative occurrence in the discourse. Haymitch appears drunk several times in the story and the same incident is mentioned in the text every time it happens. The dandelions episode which occurs twice is mentioned twice (37, 58). Katniss-Peeta kissing occurs *n* times and the same incident is narrated *n* times (305, 329, 355, 366, etc.).

Genette (1980:115) calls the second modality of frequency *Repeating narration*, noting that it is narrating *n* times what happened once. He argues that though “this form might seem purely hypothetical ... certain modern texts are based on narrative’s capacity for repetition. ... [T]he same event can be told several times not only with stylistic variations but also with variations in ‘point of view’” (115).

Repeating narration materializes in *The Hunger Games* when the same episode that happened once is narrated more than one time. For example, Gale mentions early on that he and Katniss could run away from their district and live in the woods:

“We could do it, you know,” Gale says quietly.

“What?” I ask.

“Leave the district. Run off. Live in the woods. You and I, we could make it,” says Gale. (10)

The same dialogue is repeated in a later recollection while Katniss is recovering from the tracker jacker venom, with the same wording:

We could do it, you know,” Gale says quietly.

“What?” I ask.

“Leave the district. Run off. Live in the woods. You and I, we could make it.” (230)

Likewise, some events like the episode of the bread, Katniss’ mention of her mother as an apothecary and her remembrance of her father’s death in a mine explosion, which occurred once in the story, are repeated several times throughout the text and only in slightly different forms. Though the annual reaping ceremony takes place only once, the author repeatedly mentions the reaping system (5, 15, 17, 19, 22, 23, 25-26, 52, 101), giving an impression that it is something very important.

Given the circumstances under which they occur, these repetitions do not look exactly the same. As Rimmon-Kennan (2002:59) perceptively observes: “Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning”.

Conversely, *iterative narrative* is “narrating *one time* (or rather *at one time*) what happened *n times*” (Genette, 1980: 116), that is, several similar events are recounted once. Typical expressions which Genette considers characteristic of iterative narrative include “every day,” (116), “each time that...”, “every now and then (127). Genette discerns two types of iterative narration: *generalizing* or *external iteration* and *internal* or *synthesizing iteration* (118-119). Generalizing or external iteration indicates not what happened but what used to happen regularly, ritually, every day, etc. (117-118). Internal or synthesizing iteration refers to the iterative form within a single scene and does not extend over a wider period of time but over the period of time of the scene itself (118-119). Genette opines that when repetition of the same event occurs in the story, a narrative, except for deliberate stylistic purpose, can “synthesize” the repeated occurrences of the same act in one appropriate formulation (116).

The following passage from *The Hunger Games* comes under generalizing or external iteration as the act extends over a relatively long period of time: “I tell myself again that if I get killed, his winning will benefit my mother and Prim the most. This is what I tell myself to explain the conflicting emotions that arise when I think of Peeta” (183). Katniss’ conflicting emotions towards Peeta before and during the Games have been going on continually for some time, but they are now related once.

Internal or synthesizing iteration can be explained by this excerpt: “With each bottle I pour over him, the worse the wound looks” (*The Hunger Games*, 2008:300). The pouring of water over Peeta’s infected wound occurs several times in one sitting. Iterative narrating is here confirmed by the indication of the frequency expression “each” and by incorporating repeated actions within a single scene.

Overall, many parts of *The Hunger Games* narrative can be considered *iterative*. For example, in Chapter One, Katniss’ visits to the Hob (12), the neighboring black market, are recounted once though the reader can easily conclude that they happened several times. Caesar Flickerman’ hosting of the interviews is mentioned only once in the text although he “has hosted the interviews for more than forty years” (144). The repeated hostings are here combined in the “sylleptic” formulation “for more than forty years”.

Obviously, this novel has the three kinds of frequency relations occurring alternately and repeatedly. Below is a sample of switching between the singulative and iterative modes: “Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. ... Sometimes, when I clean a kill, I feed Buttercup the entrails” (*The Hunger Games*, 2008:3- 4). Katniss recalls the time when Prim first brought home the bad-looking cat Buttercup which she sometimes feeds the entrails. Though the excerpt starts with a singulative action, it switches to the iterative mode of narration, for the act of feeding is expected to be repeated several times as indicated

by the iterative expression “sometimes”.

To recapitulate, the preceding discussion has shown that the novel utilizes the three basic movements of narrative time outlined in Genette’s groundbreaking book and how they are often merged or combined to create different narratological effects. A segment of the text may contain alternating movements of anticipation and retrospection, a dialogue scene may contain a summary within it and a summary may include a pause and/or an ellipsis inside it.

4. Conclusion

Genette (1980) believes that the relationship between story-time and discourse-time must constitute the basis of any temporal analysis of narrative. Applying Genette’s narrative framework of time to Collins’ *The Hunger Games* has revealed that time modalities (*order, duration, and frequency*) pervade the whole text and constitute a major concern for the novelist. The narrative unfolds through a continuous shifting and mingling of different types of *order* (chronology, anachrony), a complex system of *duration* (scene, summary, pause, and ellipsis) as well as a multifarious system of “frequency” (singulative, repeating, and iterative,). As Collins is not always much concerned about the exact points of time due to the nature of the story, some constituent aspects of time have to be inferred by the reader from textual information. The research has also shown that the writer’s use of temporal narratological devices is conducive not only to understanding the narrative’s structural framework but also to disclosing some of its basic thematic and communicative aspects. Genette’s approach, as Piere (2010: 10, italics in the original) rightly asserts, “purports to be: *a study of the specificity of narrative within the scope of an open poetics*”.

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