

ENDING- CLOSURE TENSION IN HELON HABILA'S *MEASURING TIME***Anwasha Gogoi****Student, Tezpur University (Assam)****Integrated M.A in English****Abstract**

The depth and essence of any literary text is determined by its endings and closure. Endings and closure unravels the essence of a novel. So, the paper intends to study the ending closure tension in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007). For the study Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* will be taken into consideration for a better understanding of the concept of narrative endings. For Closure of the novel Marianna Togovnick's book *Closure in the Novel* (1981) will be referred to. This study will try to look at the ending as well as the closure in the novel the basis of the thematic content and portrayal of the characters.

Keywords: closure, ending, tension, novel, narrative

In the Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode has tried to discuss narrative endings. He states that endings in a novel create a sense of tension which needs to be resolved as well as negotiated at the closure. In most modernist works, unresolved moral consciousness or resolution is often regarded as some form of better ending as they are left open ended for readers to interpret. While, on the contrary, close endings are unadventurous and often narrow in nature.

Endings always look for what will finally turn out in the novel. In all kinds of narratives, be it a novel or a drama, endings are what every reader eagerly and curiously wait for. Endings bring in a sense of whole to the entire narrative. It is worth noting that endings both ravel as well as unravel a text. And if consider the form of a novel, endings are crucial in a novel. James has highlighted on the idea that a proper ending is established only by the process of 'selection and comparison' and by artistic arrangement. Furthermore, skilful endings give readers a sense of whole. Forster talked about 'pattern and rhythm' in narratives. While, Aristotle stresses on the three unities of beginning, middle and end.

Closure is the term used by John Hunt. Marianna Togovnick in the book *Closure in the Novel* has discussed the closure of a novel with great detail. Togovnick in his book defined

closure as 'a sense that nothing necessary has been omitted from a work'. It implies that something has not simply ended, but has been resolved and is now complete. A sentence reaches its end with a full stop. However, a sentence also needs to have a closed internal structure and should make sense. Closure implies that all narratives are tied together. Closures can begin at the novel's first line in some cases. While in others, closures can be assessed by looking at epilogues or at the several scenes. In scenic endings the final dialogue between two or more characters are presented without any authorial commentary. Epilogues are mostly over-view endings while scenic endings are often close-up endings.

So in this paper an attempt is made to examine the tension between endings and closure in the postcolonial novel *Measuring Time* by Helon Habila. The novel was published in the year 1967 and is a representation of the third wave of Nigerian literature.

The novel *Measuring Time* narrates the story of twins, Mamo and La Mamo born to an oppressive and uncaring father, Lamang in a Northern Nigerian village named Ketu. The novel portrays the story of rewriting the history of Ketu village, the failed political career of Lamang as a leader and his eventual death. The story centres on Mamo, Lamang's son and his attempt to rewrite the history of Ketu, his failed relationship with Zara and LaMamo's exploits in the Chad and Liberia wars. The novel also explores the role play of missionary in Nigeria.

Kermode and Julian Barne's in *The Sense of an Ending* try to discuss the essentials when it comes to ending in a novel. Kermode's book published in 1967 is a critique of fiction. While Barnes's book, is a fiction as critique which describes Kermode's theories on the relationship between reality and fiction, time and memory, genesis and apocalypse. For Kermode, the attribution of meaning to a life or event is always a way of fictionalizing it. He states that all kinds of fictions be it literary, political or religious are essentially dependent on the concept of apocalypse. Kermode thinks that form and plot are the best ways to make sense of time and reality. Once time is fictionalized or transformed into narrative it becomes human time. Fiction therefore requires a sense of order and meaning. Meaning depends on having a proper sense of genesis and apocalypse. While creating fiction we face the challenge of memory in telling a story and constructing it meaningfully, because all stories are about the past.

Mamo is the narrator of the novel *Measuring Time*. So in this case he is on his verge of death being affected by the deadly disease of anaemia. As he is recalling his past he has used memory of his past experiences here. He narrates the story right from his birth along with his twin brother Lamamo and the death of their mother right after their birth. Their father Lamang was so cruel that he did not attend the funeral of his dead wife. Instead he chose to take

shelter in his old lover's company. It was only through the narration of their Aunt Marina through which they know the atrocities of their father. After that they developed a strong sense of hatred for their father.

Also, it is worth noting that memory does not operate according to the rules of chronology. As far as memory is concerned with the past, it is always about the present of the rememberer. Forgetting as much as remembering is also a function of memory. Memory can be *mneme* or *anamnesis*. *Mneme* is memory which is spontaneous and *anamnesis* requires an effort to recall or requires laborious recollection.

In *Measuring Time* the narrator, Mamo has employed *mneme* while recalling the memories of his past. At some point he gets stuck as what to write next. He is writing in the present recalling the times of his past days since his childhood. So, here comes in the question of fiction and reality as suggested by Kermode.

Next comes in, crisis or apocalypse when we are to discuss a novel. Time and memory has a very significant role to play as a thing or memory that was important at one point of time may be useless at the present moment. A moment of crisis creates an enlightened consciousness and new meaning without which the story would be incomplete. Apocalypse depends on imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future (Kermode, 8). The Apocalypse as pointed by Kermode introduces two concepts: *kairos* and *chronos*. *Kairos* is a moment of crisis which is concerned with personal crisis like death, suffering or guilt, a point in time which is filled with significance and charged with a meaning. While, *Chronos* is the passing time or waiting time. *Kairos* is critical time whereas *chronos* is quantitative time (Kermode, 46-47).

In case of the novel *Measuring Time* the central protagonist Mamo faces *kairos* as well as *chronos*.

Mamo was in a point of crisis when he had to return back home due to his sickly disease of anaemia. He even had to leave his university half way. It was at this point when his Uncle Illiya offered him the job as a teacher in the Keti School. He felt very dejected at this point of time. Therefore, he resorted to writing in order to pass his time. When he established himself as a writer, he was entrusted to write a biography for the Mai. His tensions almost reached a climatic position when he was entrusted to write the biography. It is because the Waziri tried to mould Mamo's writing to gain favour of the people and thereby become the next Mai of Keti. It seems clear that he is not a good person. As the novel progresses, it Mamo realizes that the Waziri is a manipulative person who can do anything in pursuit of power. Moreover, the

clash between the Muslims and the Christians offers an opportunity to Mamo to know the true colour that the Waziri is evil. In the conflict, many people are arrested including Auntie Marina. And to release Auntie Marina, the Waziri insists that Mamo must do his work of writing the biography of the Mai in which the Waziri will enjoy an important presence, and secondly, urged Mamo to keep quiet on the millions of money realised during the fund-raising ceremony.

Narratives play a very vital role in Mamo's life that too since his childhood. He was first introduced to the world of narratives by his Aunt Marina. Moreover, it is letters through which that both the twins, Mamo and LaMamo communicated and kept in touch with each other. In one of his letters, LaMamo regrets about the conflict in Liberia and war in general. He has even lost one of his eyes in the war. As LaMamo is moving from Liberia to Guinea, fighting, his father Lamang is neck deep in the politics changing from one party to another. Moreover, Mamo keeps himself engaged in research activities leading to the publication of a review of Drinkwater's *A Brief History of the People of Keti* by the *History Society Quarterly*. Also, Asabar becomes the leader of the Youth wing of Lamang's political party and wishes that LaMamo comes back to join in the politics because according to him, "the party needs people like him at this time". (*Habila* 154). Furthermore, Lamang's political ambition was washed away and his life is finally doomed with his death.

When the Waziri blackmailed Mamo to include him in the Mai's biography Mamo was in a great confusion and crisis. It is at this point that his brother La Mamo came to his rescue. He advised him never to include the Waziri as he very well knew his intentions. He said: "People like that must be opposed no matter what". (*Habila* 288).

Mamo too was a failure when it comes to love. While working at the Keti School, Mamo fell in love with Zara, the wife of a soldier. But his love was never successful as Zara fled away to South Africa with her university friend. Towards the end of the novel, we could see Mamo waiting for Zara but there is no sign as to whether to will meet or not.

Chronos in the novel basically happens at the latter part of the novel when Mamo is waiting for Zara and also his own death.

Zara is a significant character in the novel. She also encounters a sense of kairós. In the novel, she is grieving the relationship shared between her and her mother. She gets into a loveless marriage in order to please her mother who seems to blindly support custom and tradition even injustice and abuse meted out to her daughter by her irresponsible husband. What is worse, as Zara battles the ensuing emotional and legal crises caused by her failed marriage is that her mother does not appear to be terribly bothered about her own daughter. It is this

absence of maternal support and understanding which plays a major role in the onset of Zara's mental breakdown.

Closure is the process by which a novel reaches an appropriate conclusion or what the author thinks to be a proper conclusion. It is believed that anti-closure or open endings are called effective closure. Regarding the technique of identifying closure he stresses on the importance of looking at the epilogues or the different scenes in a novel. Furthermore, he discusses about the relationship shared by an author with the reader and also the relation of an author with his self. Closure is the provision of a feeling of nothing more is to be said, a feeling of being comfortable putting a book down. The word closure in literature implies the resolution of a trauma. Most novels try to create a state of emotional uncertainty, an engagement with that uncertainty, and finally the resolution of that uncertainty.

In the novel, Mamo's status as a writer is left ambiguous or open ended. Though the narrative continually indicates of him becoming the biographer of Keti, by repeatedly using the phrase 'When Mamo wrote his biography of...' to introduce new chapters and characters, in the narrative this never occurs. Moreover, the biography he is tried writing for the Mai is never written and the story of Keti is never told. From these two important standpoints the novel *Measuring Time* lacks a sense of closure.

In his book Torgovnick basically discussed the various terms useful for us to understand the concept of closure well. Regarding the pattern of endings he classified them into- circular endings, parallel endings, tangential endings, and linkage endings. The ending in the novel *Measuring Time* is open ended and scenic. It is because the narrative ends with no proper resolution when we consider Mamo's life. Also, throughout the narrative we see the demise of most the characters in the novel which is in itself tragic. The narrator Mamo too is awaiting his death but at the same time he is waiting for Zara whom he loves so dearly. The question of whether he will meet Zara or not is not resolved here and is left for interpretation. Also, it is said that the novels having open endings can be considered as having good closure.

In case of the novel *Measuring Time* the protagonists Mamo's future is forever uncertain as he spends most of his days waiting: for his lost love Zara, for something to write about, for his sickle-cell disease to kill him. As the characters are in a state of stasis, the lack of closure of the narrative is the only possible endings for the text.

However, it is worth noting that at some points of the novel the tensions evolved were resolved. The novel *Measuring Time* can be considered to be traditional in its structure of narration. The majority of its major storylines find some sense of closure. Mamo and

LaMamo's oppressive father, Lamang dies following his failures in politics and in life (Habla 220). Again, the corrupt Mai Mamo selfish motives are exposed and justice is finally delivered (Habla 350). The younger twin, LaMamo eventually returns home after his years of war and dies in the struggle against the Mai after reuniting with his brother (Habla. 354).

This closure is basically on the narrative's surface level. If we consider the depth of the narrative of *Measuring Time* it is not a plot of the two brothers or their village. But, the narrative focuses more on the central character Mamo. Even the narrative tries to look as to how Mamo's tries to build his own identity alone after his brother left for the army. Mamo also shared a relationship with Zara, a childhood acquaintance, who might be his companion as his twin left. Moreover, his aspiration to be a writer marks Mamo's existence which helps in the further movement of the narrative.

Thus, we can conclude saying that the Helon Habla through the narrative of *Measuring Time* tries to employ the tension between ending and closure. The ending to a great extent tries to resolve the tension though it is uncertain as the ending is open and is left open for further interpretation. In case of closure, it is not fully achieved in the novel though in most cases a probable sense of closure is indicated. It is worth noting that by refusing narrative closure and endings, these narratives and their representation of individuals and conflicts stresses on the importance of continued negotiation and interrogation necessary in the postcolonial fictions. By denying a proper closure, Habla has tried to resist the traditional closure of the novel. Furthermore, the novel can also be regarded as a re-storying of Nigerian history. The open ending of the novel has hinted that the text can be revisited and reinterpreted. Thus the novelist has to some point tried to touch the four R's of postcolonial fiction.

WORKS CITED

- Akung, Jonas Egbudu. "New Historicist Dimensions in Helon Habla's *Measuring Time*". Vol. 1 No. 4, International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, ISSN 2200-3452, September 2012.
- Akpome, Aghogho. "Child and youth protagonists in Habla's *Measuring Time* and Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*", DOI 10.17159/2309-9070/tv1.v.55i2.1783.
- Ganapathy, Maya. "A Liberal State of Mind: Formal Reconstructions of Statehood in the Anglophone African Novel", Washington University, St. Louis.

- Habila, Helon. *Measuring Time*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Country, 2007.
Internet Archive.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Lipenga, Ken Junior. “Narrative Enablement: Constructions of Disability in Contemporary African Imaginaries”.
- Torgovnick, Marianna. *Closure in the Novel*, Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Tenshak, Juliet. “History, Culture and Tradition in Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time*”. International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies, School of Arts and Humanities, University of Stirling.