



## The Study of the Notion of Time in the novels of Guillaume Musso\*

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**G**UILLAUME Musso, a contemporary French novelist, respects the rules of the popular novels trying to be liked and accepted by the public. One of these rules is to increase the suspense. To achieve this, in his works Musso approaches time in a different and sometimes unprecedented way.

We, therefore, try to analyze the concept of time through the work of Guillaume Musso from different points of view. Beginning with a presentation of the ideas of great French and foreign thinkers on the concept of time, we will then study time as a major theme in all of Musso's novels; an attractive aspect of Musso's work that assures the reader's sympathy for what he reads is the change of time presented as an amalgamation of the present, the past and the future. Finally, the study of time from a narratological point of view and based on the ideas of modern critics like Genette constitutes the subject of the last part of this article.

The notion of time has for long preoccupied the minds of thinkers of different periods of history. This shows the importance of this concept which can be considered as one of the essential concerns of man.

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For Plato, the course of time is punctuated by the celestial revolutions. To Aristotle, the study of time comes just after that of space. Time is nothing at all or it is very precarious and undecided. The past is gone and the future has not come yet. The present, limited between the past and the future, is reduced to a moment. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* suggests that time has an objective existence. According to what we can understand from Kant's thesis, time cannot be directly observed because it is properly invisible. Henri Bergson makes a distinction between time and duration. According to him, time is that of the observatory; it is measured instantly and it is objective. Duration is the individual's personal perception. The conceptions of time is, thus, quite numerous and quite diverse, and each writer uses his own method to represent it.

To study the preponderant place of time in the work of Musso, one must first consider the date of the publication of his novels. The author respects a temporal rule to write his novels: a novel a year, released between January and June. It must be remembered here that Guillaume Musso is a best-seller writer, therefore, he is obliged to respect such rules. Among these rules, we focus more on those that affect the concept of time. Readers of popular literature normally look for an entertaining and easy to understand book. One way to meet this need is to use short descriptions in the context of short chapters. Mastering these rules, Musso writes funny novels often in a direct style, which can create a kind of sympathy between the reader and the character and thus facilitates the act of reading. The number of pages is important here and most of his novels contain less than 400 pages. Because the reader begins to feel tired beyond this number of pages. It seems that during his narration, the author always considers the time of the reading of his audience.

In most of Musso's novels, time is labyrinthine. We see a hero disappointed and weak in front of his destiny. This hero is, thus, faced with an unequal conflict with time. The day is repeated three times and at the end of the first two, the hero wakes up from his nightmare (*One day perhaps*); a thirty-year-old man has encounters with himself at the age of sixty (*Will you be there?*); there are connections between a man and a woman, when they are in two different years. The woman lives in 2010 and the man in 2011 (*Tomorrow*); a young man is condemned to disappear and to see only one day of each year (*This very instant*); a woman wakes up handcuffed to a man in Central Park while she was in Paris the day before until midnight and cannot understand how she could have traveled such a long distance in just a few hours.

The hero of *This very instant* and that of *Will you be there?* time travel, while for Grace Costello of *A mix-up in Heaven*, time stands still: dead for ten years, she has now returned to save her daughter's life. However, she hasn't aged in these ten years; she is as young as she was when she died. In fact, the journey through time is most often made using an object: Matthew

of *Tomorrow* contacts a woman through a used computer. In *This very instant*, Arthur's journey begins with the cursed room of an old mill.

In all these novels, it is interesting to see the great effort of the protagonists to understand the puzzle of time and to solve it. The hero tries to repair his faults or to thwart the games of fate in order to save his own life or that of his loved ones. That is why time is getting more and more important. As an example, we can cite the case of Matthew, the hero of *Tomorrow*, who wants to save the life of his wife, Kate, with the help of Emma.

One narration method frequently used by Musso is retrospection. Once the initial situation is exposed, the story progresses alternately between the present and the past of the characters.

The characters in Musso's novels return which helps the novel to be seen as a homogeneous whole is the return of the characters. It seems that he wants to show the flow of time that changed the heroes or the secondary characters.

Considering narration speed, *Central Park* is considered as the slowest. According to Gerard Genette, we are dealing with a pause in the narrative. The story includes 24 hours of frenetic research in New York to find the truth in more than 400 pages. Whereas in other novels there are narrative ellipses: two initial pages of *This very instant* are allocated to the year 1971. But afterwards, the story persists twenty years later in the spring of 1991.

From the narratological point of view, *One Day Perhaps* is even more interesting. The hero, Ethan, lives three times through the exhausting events of the same day. The second prologue of this novel begins ten years after the first. Besides, the first chapter is dated October 31, 2007. The course of time between the second prologue and the first chapter is not clear but we can deduce that years have passed, because Ethan has now become rich and popular. In this chapter, the author's precision about time should be mentioned; it even quotes the seconds: 7:59:57, 7:59:58, 7:59:59, 8:00.

According to Genette, order is the relationship between the sequence of events in history and their arrangement in the story. Studying the temporal order of a story means comparing the order of arrangement of events or time segments in narrative discourse with the order of succession of these same events or time segments in history, as it is explicitly indicated by the story itself, or as it can be inferred indirect clues. One of the main features of detective novels is their non-compliance with the linearity of time. Thus, the author presents an incident, most of the time a murder, then he resorts to analepsis to give explanations and reach the outcome which is most often the recognition of the murderer.

With regard to the frequency of events suggested by Genette, we can say that in majority of Musso's novels, we see a singular mode in which the narrator tells once what happened once. For other modes, the case of *One day perhaps* is worth mentioning in which the novelist uses the repetitive

mode. That is the reader reads the day-to-day events of Ethan Withaker three times, who is given the opportunity to fix his mistakes.

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