

The techniques of storytelling used in "funny boy" by shyam selvadurai and "green..."

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The novels *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai and *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King (hereby referred to as *Green Grass*) depict a day-in-the-life of the characters. Though interesting and traumatizing events, the characters attempt to live in the world that they are in. Through specific storytelling techniques, narratives are understood differently by the reader. Point of view, shared experiences, nature imagery, and changes in time are all techniques that are used to advance the plot and keep the reader attracted to the story. There are not any better or worse techniques to tell a story, it just depends on how skilled the author is and the way in which the techniques are used to move the story forward. Both of the novels have good and poor uses of techniques and devices used, the novels try to protein to a certain audience. They try to shove too many eloquent devices into the narrative, the reader is left confused and momentary separated from the story.

Both of the novels have very different and changing narration styles. For Arjie, in *Funny Boy*, it goes from what appears to be a stream of consciousness and switches to journal style with third-person narration, as he is retelling the events that took place. The same is not true for *Green Grass* as the narration seems to change often. Besides the obvious jumps in narrative stories, there are also changes in the narration style. For example, Eli tells his first-person stories from the past, Lionel tells stories from the past also and switches from first-person narration in the present to first-person narration in the past acting as if it were present. There are also times when Lionel tells stories from the past and acts as a third-person narrator, just like Arjie in the last chapter. While reading the book for the first time, the

changes in time are difficult to tell, this will be discussed in greater detail later. The multiperspectivity is very well used in Green Grass, although at first it is quite confusing to the reader. It is also nice as the narrative goes on to see how all of these characters lives come together at the same point, and are all directly affected because of it. Not only this, but the quests and/or self-searching that all of the characters were doing was solved. Family relations have been fixed, the old Indians return meaning the doctor and Babo have finished their search along with the police, and the old Indians themselves succeeded at the task that they set out on in order to fix the world. Over nine stories are seemingly tied together and solved. Stream of consciousness is what most novels use, linear stories that consist of one protagonist, as with Arjie. Then there are other novels whose authors have tasked themselves with making multiple stories, skipping back and forth between them, and where there is seemingly no protagonist or antagonist.

Shared experiences are a great way to not only hold the attention of the audience but to also explore the possibilities and outcomes of the situation. They allow the reader to feel connected to a fictional character and as such closer to the narrator. In Funny Boy Arjie is constantly bullied and made fun of for not fitting into the strict gender role as a boy. At some point in every person's life they are made fun of for being too feminine or too masculine in a negative way. Generally speaking everyone knows what it means to be bullied or made fun of, and every reader is able to share that experience with Arjie. Similar to this, at some point every reader has felt the pressure to meet parents' expectations and the immense failure that they felt when they

could not meet these standards. While Arjie's issue was being funny or gay and more effeminate than his male peers, it is an issue that all readers should be able to relate to. Specifically readers who are gay males or more broadly in the LGBT+ community, will be able to greater relate to the subject matter and feelings that Arjie has to go through. Likewise, there are many shared experiences that could be recounted in Green Grass due to all of the different perspectives. There are tourists, Native peoples going through the daily motions of life, spiritual storytellers, Native people who have left their hometowns to pursue careers, and many more. Lionel can be the most easily related to by the general reader as he is perceived as a failure, again a strong feeling of not fitting into what is expected of him. Which example of shared experience is better created? Green Grass has constantly shifting perspectives that do not allow the reader to stay connected with characters for very long, but it did allow for the reader to want to know more about the characters and their situations. A cliffhanger almost, creating suspense and making the reader want more of a specific bit or character. On the other hand Funny Boy keeps the reader in a fairly linear storyline with Arjie in the center of everything. This allows for no confusion or frustration for the reader and also allows a deeper connection to form from the shared experiences. There are two other heavy topics that readers can relate to, marital abuse, and the fear of being anything but straight and the hatred that they would face. Latisha faces the marital abuse, and her children saw it first-hand. Later on in the story her husband George comes back, and her friends and family rally around her to protect her. There are high rates of marital abuse, just like there are high rates of the intolerance towards people who are not

straight. While the reader might not be gay or abused, there is a high chance that they will know someone who is. Making these stories teachable lessons, both of the novels use shared experiences as a storytelling technique in order to keep hold of the reader and their attention. Because of the different perspectives that the books use it is difficult to say which novel has a better use of shared experiences to the general reader.

The setting is very important to any story that is being told. Some authors chose to give little to no setting and leave it up to the reader to create the scene, other authors go into heavy detail describing everything from the specific color of the walls to the material in the curtains. In the two novels they use descriptive setting sparingly and tastefully. Both novels leave a lot of the scene around the character to the reader. Besides very important details such as where a car was in relation to a puddle in *Green Grass*, or the gates around new and intimidating places for Arjie in *Funny Boy*. Sometimes the more descriptive parts that the author wanted are not only seemingly out of place but throw the reader off guard. For example, when Arjie is at the lowest part of his life on page 311, he goes back to his house after it had been burned, and sees that whatever stood was stolen, and he began to cry, and it started to rain at the same time. Pathetic fallacy and specifically discussion about the weather has not been used anywhere else in the book. Besides speaking of how hot it is. The rain could have symbolized a new beginning, but due to it reflecting Arjies feelings, it is uncomfortably placed and feels as if a high schooler was told to use five literary devices in a short story. *Green Grass* has some very poetic examples of nature description and

uses them tastefully and sparingly such as page 96. The old Indians story is being recounted by Babo and she attempts to tell the story of Old Woman. There is also another example on page 201 where Eli and Karen are going to the Sun Dance Ceremony, and they are in the car watching the sunrise over the camp. In contrast to this, at the end of the book and the cars are floating in the lake to the dam, the author tries to explain who and the path that they are taking, while connecting the stories together. This did not work as the reader had already created a visual setting of the land. As such, a few earthquakes and cars floating in the river doesn't make much sense while it is being read. Both of these novels used descriptive settings sparingly and only to advance the plot.

Another storytelling technique that both of the novels use is jump in time, also known as changes in time. Green Grass seems to use not only flash-forwards - also known as prolepsis - but also flashbacks in time. Specifically in the case of Lionel's birthday and the ways that he has messed up in life. Also in the case of Eli and Karen. It tells the story of those two as if it were the present day, only after reading much farther into the book is the reader able to tell that the events were far in the past. Funny Boy has jumps forward in time, where years, months, or weeks are skipped over. Between chapters are the biggest jumps in time. The shortest time skips are in the last chapter when the raids are happening and Arjie is writing in his diary, where the events he recounts are only hours apart. Both Arjie and Lionel are tools by the author, and by using specific points said by them can the reader tell how much time has passed. Arjie often tells the reader how much time

has passed since a certain distance event, such as transferring to Victoria Academy which he says was “ Even though barely two months had passed since that day”, the event being meeting Shehan Soyza. Like this, King used Lionel’s repetition of how far away his fourteenth birthday was to keep the reader on track with the line of the narrative. There are countless points in the novels where time is either skipped or jumped back to. It is very important for the author to use narrative landmarks, such as a birthday or how long ago a major event happened, in order for the reader to understand the timeline of the story. However, it can feel like the author is using specific phrases through the characters to dictate time, and this can come off as uncomfortable or unnatural from the character. Like Eli reading the book on page 199 and onwards to dictate the passage of time.

There are many storytelling techniques that these authors use in order to keep stories interesting and keep the audience engaged, and there are many more that they did not use and that were not discussed. Narration style, shared and relatable experiences, descriptive setting, and skipping forward or backwards in time are all specific examples that *Funny Boy* and *Green Grass, Running Water* use. Narration style is important as it is the essence of what the reader sees, it is the frame of the story. *Funny Boy* has one character who switches from what seems to be first-person accounts in time to diary writing in the third-person of past events. *Green Grass, Running Water* has multiple perspectives that are presented as either the character thinking, directly talking to the reader, or living their lives in the moment. Relatable experiences that almost every reader can relate to are important

as they keep the reader interested because of the shared experience between themselves and the protagonist of the time. They also serve as toolkits for the reader to be able to react to different or difficult events to deal with like marital abuse, the public's despises of the gay, and/or the country wanting your dead because of your heritage. Descriptive settings must be used well so that the reader can see what the author wants them to see. They must be descriptive and to the point. Using pathetic fallacy or all of a sudden dramatically describing an important scene must be built up to in the book, in order to not feel out of place like these books both did. The final but important narrative technique that *Funny Boy* and *Green Grass, Running Water* both use is narrative jumps in time. While *Funny Boy* almost flawlessly uses jumps in time as it is a linear story, *Green Grass* has a bit of trouble in it. Due to the ever so constantly changing perspective, it is hard for the reader to initially realize that events are not linear. Both of the novels attempt to help the reader understand the timelines of the narrative, but again they fall a bit short as some the attempts made feel pushed, obvious, and out of place. Characters stressing about insignificant events or obsessing about a life event repeatedly in order for the author to create a clear timeline of events. Both *Funny Boy* and *Green Grass, Running Water* are amazingly well-written books. Writers should continue to play around and create stories with different techniques and devices. Narration, experiences, setting, and jumps in time are all very entertaining devices, and readers should continue to be challenged and surprised by authors and the fiction that they create.