

*Human Being as Defined by its Temporality:  
The Problem of Time in Salman Rushdie's Grimus  
and Umberto Eco's Mysterious Flame  
of Queen Loana*

Salman Rushdie and Umberto Eco, two of the most established authors of the contemporary novel, both design their novels as complex reflections of the contemporary environment, usually by combining elements from other fields of human cognition (e.g. science and philosophy) and from the social and political reality. In Rushdie's first novel – *Grimus* – and in Eco's latest novel – *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* – the main theme that connects these elements is the problem of time. Through the literary plot, both authors develop detailed and unique concepts of time by utilizing elements from contemporary philosophy and science (especially physics and cognitive science). In both novels, time, although in quite different contexts, is essentially connected with the human defined by his being-in-time. Only as a finite being can a human being design himself as a complete and authentic Da-sein, if we use a phrase from Heidegger's philosophy.

## 1. Salman Rushdie: *Grimus*<sup>1</sup>

*Grimus*, Rushdie's first novel, is a conglomerate of various literary styles; it develops multiple ideas connected by a uniform narrative plot. The publisher Vintage advertises the novel as "An enticing combination of science fantasy, storytelling and folklore ..." (the cover), which points to the two main literary styles used in the novel – magical realism and science fiction that are strongly intertwined throughout the novel without either of them becoming dominant. Magical realism and science fiction are both defined through their specific treatment of time. On the one hand, a restoration of old non-European cultures in magical realism includes literary excursions into myths, mythical time and alternative history. The European conception of linear time is thus dispersed and replaced by cyclical time. On the other hand, different manipulations of time (e.g. time machines) are one of the most common motifs in science fiction, and entanglement of different aspects of time (the present and the past entangled with some elements of the future) is one of the basic determinants of this artistic genre. The choice of both literary styles thus already suggests that the main theme of the novel deals with the problem of time.

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<sup>1</sup> A short summary of Rushdie's *Grimus*: Eagle and his sister receive a yellow drink of life and a blue drink of death as a gift from Grimus, a mysterious travelling salesman. After some time, the immortal Eagle finds out about a secret passage to a parallel world, where immortal people live. Grimus, the creator and supervisor of the island lives at the top of an inaccessible mountain with his sister, because he is scared that unsatisfied settlers of the island may destroy the Stone Rose, a mythical object that helps maintain the order and even the existence of the island. As they meet, Grimus reveals his plan: the creation of the island and the manipulation of its settlers serve only as means towards his ideal death at the end of his long life. Grimus wants to die as a victim of an assassination, while Eagle as his closest copy must carry on in the role of the creator/supervisor of the island. But after Grimus's death Eagle decides to put an end to the game with different dimensions and human destinies, he destroys the Stone Rose and the whole island slowly decomposes.

### 1.1. A fantasy world based on contemporary physics

It is Rushdie's science-fiction world that offers the basis for the development of his concepts of time. He creates a persuasive combination of fantastic and realistic elements by introducing some of the essential parts of contemporary unification theories<sup>2</sup>. These physical elements are built into a fantasy, and even though they are sometimes in contradiction with (mostly theoretical) scientific assumptions, they remain recognizable and the reader is able to connect them to their scientific source. The most frequently used and essential elements for the plot are the many-worlds interpretation, one of the leading interpretations of quantum mechanics, and the reality of additional dimensions, a common element in contemporary physical models of our world.

When Eagle, the immortal main character, comes to the Island Caf<sup>3</sup>, where immortal people live in isolation, Jones, one of the settlers, tries to explain the nature of such an island's existence:

Perhaps I might make a highly inexact analogy to demonstrate my thesis. Here we all are, [...]. Is it not a conceptual possibility that here, in our midst, [...], is a completely other world, composed of different kinds of solids, different kinds of empty spaces, with different perceptual tools which make us non-existent to its inhabitants as they are to ours? In a word, another dimension. [...] If you concede that conceptual possibility [...] you must also concede that there may well be more than one. In fact, that an infinity of dimensions might exist [...] And further: there is no reason why those dimensions should operate solely on our scale. The infinity could range from the tiniest micro-particle, the smallest sub-atom, to the universe. Is it not fascinating to speculate that we might all exist within the spaces of a few sub-atomic particles in some other, unknowably vast universe? (Rushdie 1996: 52–53)

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<sup>2</sup> Theories that try to unite quantum mechanics and relativity, the latest, although not completely compatible descriptions of physical reality.

<sup>3</sup> Different characters use different versions of the Island's name (Caf, Kaf, Calf). To avoid confusion we will use the name "Caf", except in citations.

In this rather poetic analogy, there are some very interesting parallels with contemporary ideas in physics. The extent to which Jones's interpretation is similar to elements of unification theories (which have been formed after the novel has been written) suggests that Rushdie and unification theorists shared their sources to some extent. Since *Grimus* was written shortly after Rushdie's Cambridge years, it is not improbable that he acquainted himself with the physical ideas forming at the time.

Jones's fascinating speculations are similar to physical explanations as to why additional dimensions, necessary in models of unification theories, have not been proven experimentally. In different physical models extra dimensions are, similar to Jones's reasoning, either very small (for example Calabi-Yau manifold in superstring theory<sup>4</sup>) or gigantic (for example RS2 model, one of the Randall-Sundrum's models<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> In superstring theory, one of the most well-known unification theories based on elementary one dimensional phenomena called strings, the extra dimensions of spacetime are usually conjectured to take the form of a 6-dimensional Calabi-Yau manifold. With their help, the fact that no physical experiments have confirmed the reality of additional dimensions is explained by their smallness and curvature. (Green 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Randall-Sundrum models, also called five-dimensional warped geometry theory, describe the real world as a higher-dimensional Universe described by warped geometry. There are two popular models. The first, called RS1, has a finite size for the extra dimension within two branes (more dimensional analogues of strings), one at each end. The second, RS2, is similar to the first, but one brane has been placed infinitely far away, so that there is only one brane left in the model. So the fifth infinite dimension is introduced. The standard model (A theory of the fundamental interactions and the elementary particles that take part in these interactions), except for the graviton, is described as being localized on a four-dimensional brane. Our four-dimensional world might in fact be just an "island" among other universes with different dimensions. The concept of branes, more dimensional analogues of strings, as represented in the RS2 model also offers an analogy with Jones's idea of our existence within a particle that determines the physical reality of our world. (Randall 2005)

While Jones carries on with his explanation, another analogy with contemporary physical ideas is introduced, namely the analogy with the many-worlds interpretation, one of the most well-known interpretations of the wave function collapse (one of the most striking quantum events). It originated in Hugh Everett's Ph.D. thesis (Everett 1956) and was quite popular and well-known at the time *Grimus* was written:

Perhaps you have come across the theory of potential existences [...]. So suppose there were, say, merely four potential pasts and futures for the Mediterranean Sea. In one of them, there never was nor will be an island such as this. In another the island existed but no longer does. In a third the island does not exist but will at some time in the future. And in the fourth ... he gestured around him ... it has existed; and continues to do so. [...] The dimensions come in several varieties, you see, he said. There are a million possible Earths with a million possible histories, all of which actually exist simultaneously. In the course of one's daily life, one weaves a course between them, if you like, but that does not destroy the existence of pasts or futures we choose not to enter. (Ib. 53)

Jones's explanation of the theory of potential existences is quite similar to the many-worlds interpretation, which denies the objective reality of the wave function collapse.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the many-worlds interpretation rejects proposes the realization of all possibilities. Every possible outcome to every event defines, or exists in, its own world. In the many-worlds interpretation as well as in Jones's explanation, all the different worlds are incomprehensible, therefore it is not possible to confirm them through a physical experiment. Furthermore, in both the actualization of a particular event in "our" reality doesn't affect other realities and other realizations. Both

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<sup>6</sup> In quantum mechanics, the wave function collapse is the process by which a wave function, a description of a physical system before the measurement that maps all possible states of the system (a particle is in superposition of different states), appears to reduce to a single state after interacting with an observer.

explanations offer an interesting and novel description of time, especially of “now” as part of it. “Nows” do not (only) follow each other linearly any more, but are also parallel. The otherwise absolute objective timeline (not only the subjective timeline constructed by our consciousness) is now questionable. This new description of time reminds us of a labyrinth with many possible directions, which is a very commonly used symbol in postmodern philosophy.

Rushdie creates an isolated world of immortal people on Caf Island on the basis of two contemporary physical concepts: additional dimensions and the many-worlds interpretation.

These ideas are, however, essentially connected with another, mainly philosophical one, also important for Rushdie’s concept of spacetime on Caf Island, namely with the idea of subjective time. This has been, in one form or another, a crucial part of all theories of time, however, Rushdie’s proceeding is significantly postmodern: “What I have been describing are the Outer Dimensions, said Mr. Jones. There are Inner Dimensions as well. One never knows what universes may lie locked within one’s mind.” (Ib. 55)

The idea of Inner Dimensions also has a scientific background, this time it’s neurological, instead of physical. The existence of shadowy parts of our mind and of additional Inner Dimensions is not based just on psychoanalysis but even more so on contemporary explanations of consciousness as a multiple drafts system. “There is no single, definitive ‘stream of consciousness,’ because there is no central Headquarters, no Cartesian theatre where ‘it all comes together’ for the perusal of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple channels, in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating multiple drafts as they go.” (Dennett 1993: 253–254)

Here as well, the abolition of the traditional image of time as an absolute objective flux plays a crucial role. A personal conception of time is based on a consciousness of internal time, while the problem of consciousness and its disassemblance brings us to the problem of free will. Its existence has already been problematized in traditional philosophy and science, however, quantum-mechanical principles

(the role of chance, quantum entanglement<sup>7</sup>, etc.) and the concept of “block time” (as an unchanging four-dimensional block) or time-scape make the problematization even more radical. Free will is similarly problematized in *Grimus* in view of the flux-lines concept, which can be interpreted in the context of the many-worlds interpretation and predestination.

It is the Crystal of Potentialities. In it I can examine many potential presents and futures and discover the key moments, the crossroads in time, which guide us down one or the other line of flux. (Rushdie 1996: 235)

So she will be very bitter, and will agree. The flux-lines say she will. I have examined them. Free will really is an illusion, you know. People behave according to the flux-lines of their potential futures. (Ib. 239)

From one point of view, an immortal life enables complete free will in all actions, as life without a full stop does not make us choose any more, and an individual is not determined by a finite number of actions. On the other hand, the structure of a world that makes such an eternity possible emphasizes the impossibility of free will. Total negative freedom is highly problematic either way: if time is treated traditionally as a line, even an immortal individual cannot choose everything – each event is characterized by its position in spacetime and is thus different from its repetition; if time is treated as a labyrinth of parallel events (as in *Grimus*), this requires a complete determination of events, which cannot be connected through causation any more, and also demands free will to be merely an illusion. In *Grimus* this reflects itself in a very interesting way in the character of “The Two-Time Kid” who tries to limit his negative

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<sup>7</sup> Entangled particles are particles that cannot be described with individual wave functions any more but only by a common wave function, describing them as one system. So when a measurement is performed on one particle, the properties of the other are immediately altered, even when separated at arbitrary distances.

freedom and substitute the lack of causality by creating and strictly following some artificial rules, namely trying everything twice:

The dainty man was called Hunter. [...], but his companion called him The Two-Time Kid. The name had stuck, not particularly because of the insult latent in it, but thanks to Hunter's frequent avowal that he would 'try anything twice' [...]: Once to see if one likes it; twice to see if one was right. (Ib. 110)

As seen in the case of The Two-Time-Kid, existence within the endless time dimension loses its meaning and needs to be compensated by meaningless goals. This existential problem, illustrated in the following motif, is thus deeply connected with the new role of time in *Grimus*:

The donkey was bellowing because The Two-Time Kid, Hunter [...], was in the process of sodomizing it, and even for a docile donkey, there are limits. [...] For pity's sake stop that, shouted Flapping Eagle, hauling Hunter off the tethered donkey. – All right, said Hunter mildly, it's disgustingly unpleasant anyway. – Then why ... – I'll try anything twice, said Hunter as if by rote, dusting himself down fastidiously. Last time the beast kicked me. Broke my leg, damn nearly. At least I shan't have to do it again. (Ib. 151)

In a world objectively determined by the specific conditions of Caf Island and subjectively by the obstinate Hunter's nature, even an act commonly regarded as inappropriate, irregular, illegal ... and even for him "disgustingly unpleasant," needs to be tried twice. This emphasizes a problem of non-linear, non-ending time. Without a unified arrow of time and the principle of causality, the order of events can be either completely determined or chaotic; the mere existence and the description of Rushdie's science-fictional world suggest the first possibility. If there is no principle of causality, no absolute line connecting different events (and thus making the confirmation and any logical reasoning possible), then there cannot be any absolutely valid beliefs, experiments, etc. Therefore, even truth is only an illusion based on subjectively arranged beliefs – in

the represented case, on double repetition. On the other hand, the concept of endless time lacks any basis upon which a personal meaning could be formed and thus needs a posterior determination, even though based on complete insanity. In completely relative spacetime even truth and (personal) meaning of life are completely relative: “One-Track, said Hunter. Why did you come to the Island? Peckenpaw considered the question, gravely. He said: I got used to being alive.” (Ib. 152)

The Two-Time Kid is not the only inhabitant of the island trying to save his existence from becoming completely meaningless by manic obsession. Rushdie offers two connected explanations. The first is “the fever of Inner Dimensions.” Because of the special environment on the island, all inhabitants are in danger of losing their individual consciousness and thereby their lives. Habits and fixed ideas are their main defence – the cornerstones of their personas.

But this was Calf Mountain; and in the field of the Grimus Effect, suicide had been unnecessary. Flapping Eagle could almost see the gutted brain within the coined head. Because Elfrida’s words had done more than upset Ignatius. They had broken through the unconscious, ingrained defense mechanism, the mental barrier he had built for almost every member of the community of K. Elfrida’s withdrawal had removed the cornerstone of the persona he had built; and in that instant, when everything which had seemed sure was suddenly flung into a state of flux, the fever of the Inner Dimensions had swarmed over him. (Ib. 177)

The second explanation, although not emphasized by the author, is obvious and actually already present in the first one. If personal time is limited neither by a full stop nor by the idea of linear (and thereby somehow determined) “outer” time, existence loses all meaning. Consciousness of internal time cannot be possible in an environment without cornerstones. Therefore meaning is artificially added by supplemental determination, but that kind of determination cannot be anything but meaningless. *Grimus* describes many different determinations that are added artificially: the island’s philosopher is obsessed with studying old phrases and myths, his wife is obsessed with him, etc.; however, one of them reflects our every-day experien-

ces more than the others. Dolores's obsession with fixation of time loses its tragicomical character present in the obsessions of others, and is well-known in our world, where people are often faced with the absence of meaning: "It is yesterday, she whispered. Every day is yesterday, so every day is fixed." (Ib. 51)

Her obsession is an attempt to achieve complete fixation or complete repetition, which should be repeated *ad infinitum* but nonetheless strictly limits one's personal negative freedom. The infinite field of possibilities is packed into a routine. Dolores's character could be interpreted as the outmost case of an unauthentic Da-sein.

## 1.2. Life without a full stop

In *Grimus*, personal time is not primarily problematized in connection with immortality, but in connection with death. Only as a deficiency, when it is not self-evident any more, is death finally perceived. Only now can death be perceived as a part of life – not just as its end, but as a crucial part of its formation, of its essence.

Then if life is on one side, death must be on the other, said Khalit. [...] But here's a paradox, said Khalit. Suppose a man deprived of death. Suppose him wandering through all eternity, a beginning without an end. Does the absence of death in him mean that life is also absent. – Debatable, said Mallit. He flipped the coin. Yes, he said. (Ib. 78)

The way life and death are dealt with in *Grimus* is very similar to Heidegger's philosophy. "Rather, just as Da-sein constantly already is its not-yet as long as it is, it also always is its end. [...] Death is a way to be that Da-sein takes over as soon as it is." (Heidegger 1996: 229) Only as final can Da-sein also be authentic, because this is the only way one can project oneself by authentic choices. "Something is always still outstanding in Da-sein which has not yet become 'real' as a potentiality-of-its-being. A constant unfinished quality thus lies in the essence of the constitution of Da-sein." (Ib. 219–220) Exactly this principle is the leading one in the life of Grimus – the creator of the island and the one who directs all actions within the island's

spacetime: “Engraved in the stone over the door of Grimushome: THAT WHICH IS COMPLETE IS ALSO DEAD.” (Rushdie 1996: 233)

The primary owner of the bottles containing eternity of life, who later distributes them to the chosen ones, is not, as the others are, captured in the paradox of simultaneous existence of the wish for eternal life and the loss of any personal meaning of life caused by un-ending time. His existence is constructed on the basis of anticipated death: “It was thus, I conceptualized the island, for in building a life one must be conscious of its end. Who would write a story without knowing how it finished? All beginnings contain an end. [...] I planned Kaf Mountain around my death.” (Ib. 233)

Grimus’s way of existence is presented as the superior one. He is the one who does not require a meaningless subsequent determination to bear the weight of immortality. He is not threatened by “The fever of Inner Dimensions.” A meaning is given to his immortality (which is not immortality at all) by the anticipated full stop: “– Grimus, what is this all about? Grimus looked mildly astonished. – All about, Mr. Eagle? But of course it is all about death. Death, Mr. Eagle – that is what life is about.” (Ib. 231)

Prior planning of death is also related to Heidegger’s philosophy. Through manipulation of the island’s inhabitants and manipulation of time (flux-lines), Grimus plans his death. But the crucial part of his plan is Eagle – his opposite (if Grimus is symbolically the carrier of eternal life, Eagle is symbolically connected with death). Eagle thus enters the indispensable inability of any comprehension of death and the eternal absence of final control and conclusion.

That is what I hope to do with you, Flapping Eagle. [...] You are to be the next stage of the cycle, the next bearer of the flag, Hercules succeeding Atlas. In the midst of death we are in life. – What if I refuse? The question came unprompted from Flapping Eagle’s scared lips. Megalomania is a frightening thing to be circled by. – You are the next life of the Phoenix, repeated Grimus. The Phoenician Death. (Ib. 233)

Even in the carefully planned world of *Grimus*, death cannot be experienced and Grimus's project remains unfinished. His plan contains everything but the final instance, which it is unable to overcome. Flapping Eagle as the one carrying death and thus being explicitly individual breaks the planned repetition. By deciding to destroy the Stone Rose and the (present) order and thereby the existence of the island, he goes beyond the plan by bringing in death: "Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving quietly, vanishing into primal, unmade energy. The raw material of being was claiming its own." (Ib. 253)

However, Eagle's attitude towards life and death is very similar to Grimus's one. According to him, immortality is an intermezzo, an intermediate state of not-being-human: "– It's a sad ambition you have, Mr. Eagle, said Virgil Jones. To grow old, to die; how is it that someone like you, so young in mind and body, can have such an ambition? Flapping Eagle replied, with a bitter tone in his voice which surprised him: – I want to return to the human race. [...] – Interesting, said Virgil, that you should think of death as such a humanizing force." (Ib. 55)

Main characters of the novel, Grimus and Eagle, are thus defined by their similarities as well as by their opposition, both relationships being defined by the crucial role of death - the creator and carrier of life can be whole only as long as the carrier of final destruction and death is present. He completes him, but also brings in a lack, chaos, incompleteness. There is to put chaos in order and bring it all to the end.

#### 1.4. On the way to postmodern time

With the motifs of the elixir of immortal life and the island of immortal people Rushdie emphasizes the concept of personal time as essentially determined by death. To paraphrase Heidegger: a sock with a hole represents the essence of the sock better than a whole sock, since the function of a torn sock is not self-evident anymore. Similarly, in *Grimus* the lack of the full stop at the end of life emphasizes that the essence of personal time is its completeness –

being limited by its beginning and end. Only as finite beings can humans constitute themselves as authentic and as being whole.

The literary plot in *Grimus* is on the one hand based on this very complex and structured philosophical concept of time and on the other hand on singular motifs taken from modern physics, which are thus often slightly transformed, but remain in touch with their scientific background. Literature as the point of contact between different approaches thus enables the entanglement of elements from different fields of time-comprehension, which in our everyday life usually remain disconnected because of the specialization of different approaches.

## 2. Umberto Eco: *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*<sup>8</sup>

A similar connection between philosophical and physical elements and a similar concept of personal time can be found in Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. Eco's novels are often labelled as conspiracy novels, a label typical and representative of post-modern literature. A quick overview of the plot of his last novel, describing an old rare books dealer's return home to recover his lost memories after a stroke, suggests a deviation from this pattern. Careful reading, however, reveals the opposite. While the main character tries to reconstitute his memories, a game of searching for personal meanings disguised by the entanglement of different personal interpretations unveils. Literary fiction from the novels of his childhood and personal memories of people around him are mixed with his current reality into an inseparable mixture. The main

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<sup>8</sup> A short summary of Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*: Yambo is a sixty-ish rare book dealer, a husband, father and grandfather, who has suffered a loss of episodic memory after a stroke and cannot recall any personal experiences. He withdraws to the family home in an effort to recover his past. After days of searching through old newspapers, vinyl records, books, magazines, and childhood comic books, he is unsuccessful in regaining memories, though he relives the story of his generation. But as he suffers another stroke, all memories mob him at once in a colorful flash and reveal so desired elements of his personal identity.

character is more than ever the victim of a conspiracy, only this time the conspiracy is set within him. Therefore memory and subjective time become part of a postmodern conspiracy game.

### 2.1. The foundation of memories

The conspiracy game and labyrinths of meanings in *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* are not based solely on historical and bibliographical facts, although these are not missing, but also on contemporary pop-scientific representations of neurology. The contemporary neurological view of the structure of memory is essentially related to contemporary theories of consciousness. Memory is thus not regarded as a unified, absolute construct, but as a cooperation of multiple processes that do not form a hierarchy. That kind of approach is only possible, to use Derrida's vocabulary, after the destruction of traditional "logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 1977: 49), which ordered all phenomena hierarchically and based on two classes.<sup>9</sup> This approach to memory stems from results of scientific experiments. (Bourtchouladze 2003) By observing brain-damaged patients, scientists have determined three different memory centres. The basal forebrain plays a role in identifying the chronology of past occurrences. Injury to this area preserves the ability to remember some events but impairs recalling the time and place they occurred. The hippocampus is in charge of the formation of new memories, while the temporal lobe is in charge of retrieving existing memories, particularly those related to unique events that occurred at a particular time and place. (Damasio 2002) This kind of differentiation is parallel to related differentiations of consciousness of internal time within philosophical theories of Husserl and Deleuze. On the other hand, that kind of neurological differentiation also represents the basis of Eco's plot:

We have different types of memory. One is called implicit, and it allows us to do with ease various things we've learned [...] And

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<sup>9</sup> Positive, present, masculine, urban, etc. belonged into the superior one, while negative, non-present, feminine, natural, etc. belonged into the inferior one.

then there's something called explicit memory, by which we remember things and know we're remembering them. But this explicit memory is twofold. One part tends nowadays to be called semantic memory [...], this is the first type to form even in children. The child quickly learns to recognize a car or a dog, and to form general categories [...]. It takes the child longer, however, to develop the second type of explicit memory, which we call episodic, or autobiographical. [...] It's episodic memory that establishes a link between who we are today and who we have been, and without it, when we say I, we're referring only to what we're feeling now, not to what we felt before, which gets lost, as you say, in the fog. You haven't lost your semantic memory, you've lost your episodic memory. (Eco 2005: 12–13)

This summary of memory-activity introduces the problem of lost past of subjective time. However, the consciousness of internal time, the retention and the protention, are not impaired, and memories not included in the personal arrow of time are unimpaired as well. In the novel this aspect is explained by the main character's wife, a psychologist:

“You are saying you no longer live in time. We are the time we live in. You used to love Augustine's passage about time. He was the most intelligent man who ever lived, you always said. We psychologists can learn a lot from him still. We live in the three moments of expectation, attention, and memory, and none of them can exist without the others. You can't stretch towards the future because you've lost your past. And knowing what Julius Caesar did doesn't help you figure out what you yourself should do.” (Ib. 29)

As is typical of Eco's way of writing, he uses the authority of Saint Augustine to explain the concept of completeness of time, while at the same time he connects it with contemporary philosophy using his own modern interpretation, which is very close to modern phenomenological theories of time. On the one hand, there is no protention or consciousness of internal time without retention in Husserl's phenomenological analysis of time – they both (retention

and protention), “spread out themselves over the time-field to build the unity of the continuity.” (Husserl 1985: 34) On the other hand, there is no personal future without personal past in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*.

Eco’s interpretations are also close to the philosophy of Deleuze, especially his first two syntheses of time. The first synthesis consists mainly of habits and is based on primary, spontaneous consciousness of time, while the second, active, synthesis can be grounded only in the basis of the first one. “Whereas the passive synthesis of habit constitutes the living present in time and makes the past and the future two asymmetrical elements of that present, the passive synthesis of memory constitutes the pure past in time, and makes the former and the present present (thus the present in reproduction and the future in reflection) two asymmetrical elements of this past as such.” (Deleuze 1994: 81) The past as past has thus never been present by itself. It is always contemporaneous with the present in relation to which it is the past.

This passage from Husserl’s model of consciousness of internal time to Deleuze’s interpretation of active synthesis can be more clearly seen in the reflection of a first-person narrator, where we can observe a kind of interpretation of Husserl’s well-known illustration of consciousness of internal time, namely the description of listening to music:

I was dozing, and the clock woke me. I didn’t hear the first few chimes distinctly, that is to say, I didn’t count them. But as soon as I decided to count I realized that there had already been three, so I was able to count four, five and so on. I understood that I could say four and then wait for the fifth, because one, two, and three had passed, and I somehow knew that. If the fourth chime had been the first I was conscious of, I would have thought it was six o’clock. I think our lives are like that – you can only anticipate the future if you can call the past to mind. I can’t count the chimes of my life because I don’t know how many came before. (Eco 2005: 26)

The lack of retention allows the construction of consciousness of internal time to be formed, while the lack of stored past memories

enables the complete construction of a self-conscious individuum in (his own) time. Any sensation of time is an entanglement of passing and synthesis. To be conscious of time, one needs to be conscious of all different moments. Therefore they have to be contemporaneously present in the consciousness and different at the same time. Thus there is no consciousness of time without the synthesis of time, and the loss of a part of the synthesis enables the forth-coming synthesis and accordingly the complete consciousness of time. The concept of the individuum as a totality, existing only within (his own) time, is not possible if a part of the totality does not exist. This mutilates the complete consciousness of the (personal) present and past – a part of the labyrinth is broken down and the essential threads of meaning are torn off. This time Eco's main character is more than ever the victim of a conspiracy.

Negative freedom is also put into question if life is viewed as essentially limited, as determined by birth and death. In the analysis of Rushdie's *Grimus*, we have emphasized the problem of freedom in the case of lack of death. Similarly we can emphasize the problem of freedom in the case of (a kind of) lack of birth, as is shown in *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*: "Is it worth to be born if you cannot remember it later? And, technically speaking, had I ever been born? Other people, of course, said that I was. As far as I know, I was born in late April, as sixty years of age, in a hospital room." (Ib. 98) The book dealer is not equipped with his former decisions of the past sixty years, despite being re-born in an already defined environment – defined as such by his past decisions. But that causes not only a kind of negative freedom, possibility of beginning from the start, but also a lack of foundation, essential for the formation of authentic Da-sein. As Heidegger's Da-sein is essentially temporal, this reveals the problems of synthesis of time. "At this point, why bother trying to remember? Memory is a stopgap for humans, for whom time flies and what has passed is past. I was enjoying the marvel of beginning *ab ovo*." (Ib. 225) The marvel of beginning *ab ovo* is thus not the choice of any optional beginning, but the attempt to go back, to someone's authentic beginning, which would not be burdened with repetitions and would be original. As memory is lost, it is not an absolute substance and unchangeable framework that is

lost, but something essentially changeable and flowing. Here Eco, following contemporary neurological theories, is again very post-modern:

“You can’t think of memory as a warehouse where you deposit past events and retrieve them later just as they were when you put them there, [...] when you remember something, you’re constructing a new profile of neuronal pleasant experience. When afterwards you remember that place, you reactivate that initial pattern of neuronal excitation with a profile of excitation that’s similar to, but not the same as that, which was originally stimulated. [...] The image of your parents in this photo is the one we’ve shown you and the one we see ourselves. You have to start from this image to rebuild something else, and only that will be yours.” (Ib. 25)

The presented views are to some extent connected with postmodern decay of absoluteness and of the logic of metaphysics of presence and especially with Deleuze’s philosophy of difference and repetition. As difference is beyond everything, everything is a simulacrum in the empirical world, “so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy.” (69) There are no copies but repetitions. Series of repetitions are reproductions of each other, not of a central original any more. Memory is actually the most representative player of this postmodern dynamic game. Although continually changed, permutated, etc., it represents the momentary structure as determined.

Some of the typical elements of *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (as being lost in the labyrinth of meanings, dynamics in the world of data, fluid ontology of information, etc.) are connected with the basic parts of contemporary neurology. It is not just written fiction that intervenes in the real world, but dreams and memories as well. The conspiracy is part of the world, where even the main authority of “I”, the centre of consciousness in command, is missing.

The problem of time is again revealed on the basis of some elements from contemporary science and their entanglement with basic and thus also essentially current philosophical themes. The essence of time and of human being-in-time is emphasized by the

lack of the crucial element – this time of the storage of past memories. The project of the authentic Da-sein is (again) represented as essentially conditioned by being defined by its temporality. The synthesis of a human person as a whole is thus connected with the synthesis of all three aspects of time – past, present and future.

## Conclusion

Time and its essential connection with us as being defined by our being-in-time is the main theme in both presented novels. In the literary-fictional worlds, based on elements from contemporary science, the true role of personal time is emphasized by the lack of one of its basic elements. In *Grimus* the lack of the end, and in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* the lack of the beginning of personal time emphasize their role in the synthesis of the authentic Da-sein and in the constitution of a human being as complete and unique. The use of two similar conceptions of time in two otherwise quite different contexts additionally emphasizes their true integration with contemporary environment and their role of complex reflection of the contemporary comprehension of time. Literature as a highly sensitive indicator of human environment, not limited by any explicit methodology or field of expertise, is able to combine different horizons of the comprehension of time and thus to reveal the truth about (our) time and ourselves as defined by being-in-time.

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