

## Post-Apocalyptic Narrative Style in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: Present-Tense Rendering of Consciousness

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### Abstract

One of the odd but fashionable narrative styles in contemporary English novels is present-tense narration where the present tense, instead of the conventional past tense, is consistently used as a tense of narration to tell the story events. Literary critics (e.g. Casparis, 1975; Fleischman, 1990; Fludernik, 1996, 2003; Cohn, 1999; Harvey, 2006; Huber, 2016) have been concerned with what is called 'the narrative present tense' (Fludernik, 1996) and explored its multiple functions due to the broad temporal references of the present tense. In the wake of these studies, this paper examines the potentials of the narrative present tense in a specific context: the world after the apocalypse. Taking Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as a case study, it describes how the specific type of the narrative present tense called 'figural deictic present' (Huber, 2016: 30) is appropriately used to create the post-apocalyptic narrative style through present-tense rendering of consciousness.

### I Narrative Present Tense and Its Potentials in Post-Apocalyptic Context



Figure 1 'Snowman wakes before dawn'  
(illustrated by Jason Courtney)

The illustration<sup>1</sup> in Figure 1 is a visual imagery of an aspect of post-apocalyptic landscape described in Margaret Atwood's third-person dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The man on the tree is the protagonist called Snowman, who used to be called Jimmy. He believes he is the sole survivor of the global pandemic. This illustration is based on the opening passage of the novel, which reads:

- (1) Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep.

On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic.

Out of habit he looks at his watch—stainless-steel case, burnished aluminum band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is. (Atwood, 2013[2003]: 3)

The story begins *in media res*, involving the reader suddenly in a certain place and time of the post-apocalyptic world where Snowman currently exists. Instead of the traditional past tense, the passage is entirely narrated in the present tense and all the descriptions of the landscape in the second paragraph are filtered through the consciousness of Snowman as the reflector character. When starting to read this opening passage, the reader does not know that this strangely-named man is in serious trouble to face the reality after the global pandemic. However, one cannot but feel that something strange has happened or is happening to him, through the descriptions of, for example, the dawn's light ('deadly glow'), his surroundings ('the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble'), and his conception of time ('zero hour' and 'this absence of official time').

Regarding the usages of the present tense in this passage, the first point to note is that it cannot be explained in terms of the traditional historical present because, as Fludernik notes, it does not 'usually initiate texts' (1996: 250). Cohn argues that the historical present only functions in the context where the sudden tense shift occurs from past to present (1999: 99). The second notable point is that the present tense advances the plot of the story and functions as the tense of narration or what Fludernik (1996) calls 'the narrative present tense'. In the traditional past-tense narration, the story is told and developed in the past tense, while the present tense is sporadically used for the narrator's commentary and/or address to the reader and suspends the flow of the narrative events. The last significant point is that the narrative present tense in this passage temporally

refers to the reflector-character's (Snowman's) present. As indicated in the second point, the temporal reference of the present tense in the past-tense narration is the narrator's present. Huber calls this type of the narrative present tense, the 'figural deictic present' (2016: 30). One of the consequences of the use of the figural deictic present is that the narrative events are extensively filtered through the consciousness of the reflector character and rendered in free indirect thought and narrated perception. These unconventional usages of the present tense will be discussed in detail in section 4.

With these points in mind, this paper examines the post-apocalyptic present-tense narration in *Oryx and Crake* as one of the appropriate contexts where the narrative present tense demonstrates its potentials. In order to discuss how this odd but fashionable narrative tense creates the post-apocalyptic narrative style, section 2 looks at the basic meaning of the present tense by illustrating its flexible temporal references, and then makes a distinction between the narrative present tense and the present-tense usages in the traditional past-tense narration. Section 3 identifies the type of present-tense narration of *Oryx and Crake* and sketches out the general features of the figural deictic present. In section 4, I return to the analysis of the beginning passage shown above and examine other characteristic present-tense passages rendered through the consciousness of the protagonist so as to describe and explain multiple functions of the present tense as the tense of narration proper in the post-apocalyptic context.

## 2. Temporal References of The Present Tense and Its Usages in Literary Narrative

Semantically speaking, the range of temporal references of the present tense is more flexible than that of the past tense. As shown in Figure 2, it can refer not only to co-temporality with the (speaker's) present, but also to the future, to the past, and to 'habitual, generic, gnomic, and timeless situation' (Fleischman, 1990: 34).

Temporal references	Examples
PR cotemporal with now	The Market <i>is down</i> 50 points today.
future	I <i>leave/am leaving</i> for Paris next week.
past	I'm <i>sitting</i> in my office when suddenly this student <i>walks in</i> and <i>says</i> to me. . .
habitual	The Deans' Conference <i>meets</i> on Thursdays.
generic	Dogs <i>have</i> fleas.
gnomic	A good man <i>is</i> hard to find.
timeless	Two plus two <i>equals</i> four.

Figure 2 Temporal references of the present tense (Fleischman, 1990: 34)

Fleischman argues that the broad range of temporal references suggests that the basic meaning of the present tense is ‘timelessness’ in the sense of ‘temporal neutrality’ (1990:34). In fact, the meaning of the present tense can be variable depending on the narrative contexts where it is used.

In the traditional past-tense narration, the present tense has been typically used in two ways. Firstly, and most commonly, it is used in the narrator’s discourse to address the reader, express general truths, and convey authorial commentary and external evaluation. Fludernik categorises such typical usage as ‘the deictic use of the present tense to refer to the narrator’s and/or reader’s here-and-now’ (2003: 124). It may remind us of the common usage of the present tense in oral communication where it functions as ‘the tense of address’ for a speaker to say something to an addressee (Harvey, 2006: 78). The present tense is also suitably used for the traditional narrator’s generic or gnomic nature of commentary. In the past-tense narration, the deictic use of the present tense foregrounds the difference between the time of narrating and the time of the narrated events and reminds the reader that the story is being told by the narrator, as in the following example from W. M. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*:

(2) I warn my “kyind friends,” then, that I am going to tell a story of harrowing villany and complicated — but, as I trust, intensely interesting — crime. My rascals are no milk-and-water rascals, I promise you....

And as we bring our characters forwards, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the plat form, and talk about them... (Thackeray,1963 [1848]: 54)

In example (2), the third-person omniscient narrator addresses the reader in the present tense and makes metanarrative comments on the story and the characters. In other words, the narrator’s present-tense discourse suspends the flow of the narrative events for a moment and does not develop the plot of the story. Casparis therefore calls this usage, ‘non-narrative present tense’ (1975: 128-129)<sup>2</sup>.

The second typical usage of the present tense in the traditional past-tense narration is, in Fludernik’s words, ‘the intermittence use of the present tense in a past tense context’ (2003: 124). This is what is called the historical present tense, the use of the present tense to narrate the past events. In Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, for example, the famous escape scene is narrated in the present tense, which suddenly emerges from the past-tense narration:

(3) Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he had been, perhaps he would have been prepared for this. Not being prepared, however, it alarmed him the more; so away he went like the wind: with the old gentleman and the two boys, roaring and shouting behind him.

‘Stop thief! Stop thief!’ There is a magic in the sound. The tradesman leaves his counter; and the carman his waggon; the butcher throws down his tray...Away they run, pell-mell, helter-skelter, slap-dash...(Dickens,1999 [1838]: 74)

In example (3), the tense switch between past and present functions ‘to partition off events or points in the story from each other’ (Wolfson, 1979: 174) and to signal the scene break or change in the story. This switch also produces the vivid or dramatic effect on the scene. In fact, the ‘past-more vivid’ effect (Fleischman,1990: 75) is achieved not so much by an attribute of the present tense (co-temporality with narrator’s/reader’s present) as by the sudden shift in tense from past to present (Cohn 1999: 99).

Both the ‘deictic’ and ‘intermittent’ usages are based on the tense switching between past and present within the past-tense narration. These conventional usages, however, lose their functions when surrounding narration is almost entirely written in the present tense. Fludernik categorises this extended use of the present tense as ‘the consistent use of the present tense (either in the entire text, or in long passages of text)’ (2003: 124). This usage is variously called ‘epic present tense’ (Stanzel, 1984), ‘fictional present’ (Cohn, 1999), and ‘narrative present tense’ (Fludernik, 1999).

Type A	the deictic use of the present tense to refer to the narrator’s and/or reader’s here-and-now i.e. non-narrative present tense (Casparis 1975)
Type B	the intermittent use of the present tense in a past tense context i.e. historical present tense
Type C	the consistent use of the present tense (either in the entire text, or in long passages of text) i.e. epic present tense (Stanzel, 1984) / fictional present (Cohn 1999) / narrative present tense (Fludernik, 1996)

Figure 3 Three types of present tense usage in narrative texts (Fludernik, 2003: 124)

According to Jauss, since the 1960s onwards, the traditional past-tense story-telling convention is gradually defamiliarized by the spread of present-tense narration where the present tense, instead of the past tense, is consistently used as a narrative tense to tell the story (2011: 88). In spite of harsh criticism<sup>3</sup>, this trend has been getting more prevalent over the last two decades. Contemporary novelists, such as J. M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, and Hilary Mantel to name but a few, prefer to use ‘the narrative present tense’ applying its potentials to their own works. In fact, the present tense has now become an unmarked narrative tense and one of the options for a tense of narration proper.

### **3. Narrative Deictic Narration and Figural Deictic Present**

In Huber’s book (2016) dealing with more than forty present-tense novels published over the last two decades, *Oryx and Crake* is categorised as the type of present-tense narration called ‘the narrative deictic narration’<sup>4</sup>. In this type of narration, the present tense deictically refers to the narrator’s here and now and marks the temporal distance between the act of narration and the narrated events, which corresponds to the traditional deictic usage in Fludernik’s category. However, in contemporary novels, the narrator’s present-tense discourse is extended to a degree that it develops its own narrative plot. In Huber’s words, ‘the traditionally non-narrative deictic usage of the present tense thus becomes narrative itself’ (2016:23). Consequently, the narrative deictic usage makes it possible to create two narrative strands in which their own storyline is developed on a different temporal plane.

In the case of *Oryx and Crake*, there are two temporally different narrative strands which alternate by chapters in the course of the novel. On the one hand, Snowman’s present post-apocalyptic world is narrated in the present tense. On the other hand, Snowman’s past memories as Jimmy are retrospectively narrated in the past tense. The past-tense narration leads up to the apocalypse (the global pandemic) and merges with the present-tense narration in the last part of the novel. The examples of these different narrative strands are shown in the following passages:

- (4) Time passes. He wants to sing a song but can’t think of one. Old music rises up in him, fades; all he can hear is the percussion. Maybe he could whittle a flute, out of some branch or stem of something, if only he could find a knife.
- “Star light, star bright,” he says. What comes next? It’s gone right out of his head.
- No moon, tonight is the dark of the moon, although the moon is there nevertheless and must be rising now, a huge invisible ball of stone, a giant lump of gravity, dead but powerful, drawing the sea towards itself. Drawing all fluids. (Atwood, 2013

[2003]: 127)

- (5) Once upon a time, Snowman wasn't Snowman. Instead, he was Jimmy. He'd been a good boy then.

Jimmy's earliest complete memory was of a huge bon fire. He must have been five, maybe six. He was wearing red rubber boots with a smiling duck's face on each toe; he remembers that, because after seeing bonfire he had to walk through a pan of disinfectant in those boots...

So let's say five and a half, thinks Snowman. That's about right.

(Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 17)

Example (4) is extracted from the present-tense narration where the present tense functions as the tense of narration to advance the plot of post-apocalyptic narrative. Care needs to be taken, however, when considering to whom the deictic present refers in this passage. Huber argues that '[t]raditionally, a deictic present would necessitate the use of the first person, either by a first-person narrator, or by an overt authorial narrator commenting on their act of narration' (2016: 30), and that many contemporary novels remain deictic in relation to the present of the narrator's discourse. However, in *Oryx and Crake*, the deictic present refers to Snowman's here-and-now (not the third-person narrator's), as the temporal adverbs *tonight* and *now* clearly indicate his deictic centre in example (4). In the novel, in fact, the events are for the most part filtered through the consciousness of the reflector protagonist, Snowman. Huber therefore suggests that the narrative deictic present used in the figural narration should be called the 'figural deictic present' (2016: 30) in that it refers to character's (not narrator's) deictic centre.

Example (5) is the beginning passage of chapter 2 where Snowman's retrospective memories start to be narrated in the past tense. In the past-tense narration, he often appears in the third person (not in the first person like the traditional omniscient narrator) and makes commentaries on his memories in the present tense, which is cotemporal with the present of his discourse (e.g. 'So let's say five and a half, thinks Snowman. That's about right.'). Snowman is referred to in the third person both in the present-tense and past-tense narrations to remind the reader not only of the continuity but also of discontinuity between Snowman in the post-apocalyptic world and Jimmy in the pre-apocalyptic-world.

One of the linguistic features in figural deictic narration is the extensive use of free indirect thought<sup>5</sup> and narrated perception. Free indirect thought is a technique to represent

character's thoughts with 'the illusion of immediacy' (Stanzel, 1984: 126-127). Narrated perception is an immediate verbalization of character's sensory perceptions of external world and functions as 'the narration of events' (Pallarés-Garcia, 2012: 173, see also Brinton, 1980) to develop the story plot as well as to provide the background information of the story. The reason for the frequent use of narrated perception is closely related to the fact that the present tense is an appropriate verbal vehicle for conveying 'a sequential recording of sense impressions' (Casparis, 1975: 10).

In the next section, I focus on the post-apocalyptic present-tense narration and explore how the figural deictic present works in it.

#### **4. Post-Apocalyptic Narrative Style in *Oryx and Crake***

Firstly, I return to example (1) discussed above to delve into the functions of the figural deictic present in the opening present-tense narration.

In the first reading of this passage, as noted above, we do not know who Snowman is and in what situation he is at the moment. There are no dramatic descriptions, no tense shifts, and no narrator's external commentaries, which does not allow us to interpret the present-tense usage neither as the traditional historical present nor as the narrator's non-narrative present. In the first paragraph, the narrator only informs us of Snowman's awakening, listening to the tide, and yearning for sleep. However, the rhythmic and repetitive description of the tide ('wave after wave... wish-wash, wish-wash...') gives us the sense of circularity of sameness and repetition as it is metaphorically expressed as the habitual 'rhythm of heartbeat'. It is not until the last chapter that we find this repetitive tone is already retained in the first sentence ('Snowman wakes before dawn') where the narrator uses the present tense to describe his habitual action or 'routine' (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 430) in the post-apocalyptic world, which will be discussed again in example (6) below. The narrator's description of his mental state in the third sentence is also suggestive of his anxiety in that the intensifying adverb *so* and the temporal adverb *still* subtly hint his desire not to face the present reality and his vacillation between the past and the present. This is gradually revealed in the course of the narrative.

In the second paragraph, the narrator firstly enters into the perceptual level of Snowman's consciousness and uses narrated perception to render in the present tense his visual perception of the horizon in the dawn light as it is experienced by him. The deictic *now* in the first sentence temporally indicates Snowman's present (not the narrator's). The evaluative or emotive adjective *deadly* projects his subjectivity, implying his fear for the sun's 'evil rays' (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 41). It makes him easily redden and blister in the post-apocalyptic world (probably due to the climate change). Followed by narrated

perception in the first sentence, free (in)direct thought is used to portray his immediate psychological reaction to the colour of the dawn light ('Strange how that colour still seems tender'). The elliptic syntax, the empathetic deixis *that*, and the epistemic verb *seems* all evoke his inner psyche. Here, the temporal adverb *still* is used again to imply Snowman's ambivalent consciousness hovering between the past and the present. In the same vein, the epistemic verb *seems* indicates his uncanny feeling for the sunlight which cannot be seen 'tender' in the post-apocalyptic world. Free (in)direct thought is then switched back to narrated perception where his grotesque feeling is reflected in the epistemic adverb *improbably* used in the visual description of 'the offshore towers'. Narrated perception also renders the hideous sounds he currently hears ('the shrieks of the birds' and 'the distant ocean grinding against ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble'). They are strangely familiar for him like 'holiday traffic' he used to hear in the pre-apocalyptic world.

As the third paragraph begins with the phrase 'out of habit', the present tense refers to his habitual behavior of looking at his watch. The present tense, whose basic meaning is timelessness, is also suitably used to represent 'zero hour', 'this absence of official time'. Here again, the temporal adverb *still* is used to imply his vacillating consciousness between the past and the present. Although his watch, the relic of the past, does not work now, his habitual act of looking at his watch reminds him of the existence of the official time and thus relieves his anxiety for its absence.

Overall, the present tense functions as the narrative tense to develop the plot of the story. In terms of narrative distance, the figural deictic present makes the reader feel closer to Snowman than the narrative past tense. This closeness or immediacy obscures the causal relationship between the narrated events and gives rise to the reader's tension for narrative development. On the other hand, the past-tense narrative reminds us implicitly that the events in the story happened in the past and the narrator already knows the consequences of the story. This temporal and epistemological distance eases the reader's tension to some extent.

In this opening passage, the narrative tension created by the present-tense immediacy is gradually merged into Snowman's tension between the pre-apocalyptic past and the post-apocalyptic present as indicated in the frequent use of temporal adverb *still*. However, the habitual meaning of the present tense paradoxically implies his struggling to relieve the anxiety by sticking to the past habit of looking at his watch even though it is useless in the post-apocalyptic world.

Keeping this passage in mind, let us look at the beginning passage in the last chapter.

- (6) Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep.

On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. He gazes at it with rapture; there is no other word for it. *Rapture*. The heart seized, carried away, as if by some large bird of prey. After everything that's happened, how can the world still be so beautiful? Because it is. From the offshore towers come the avian shrieks and cries that sound like nothing human...

He pees on the grasshopper, watches with nostalgia as they whirl away. Already this routine of his is entering the past, like a lover seen from a train window, waving goodbye, pulled inexorably back, in space, in time, so quickly. (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 429-430)

Until the second sentence in the second paragraph, the passage is completely same as that of the opening chapter. When reading the beginning passage of the last chapter, the reader realizes for the first time that the opening passage in the first chapter in fact revealed his daily 'routine' since he started living on the tree in the post-apocalyptic world. However, in this passage, Snowman's mental state is drastically changed because he found there are some others still alive. In fact, his rapturous feeling for the dawn light is extensively rendered through free (in)direct thought ('there is no other word for it. *Rapture*.'; 'After everything that's happened, how can the world still be so beautiful? Because it is.') in combination with consonant psycho-narration<sup>6</sup> ('He gazes at it with rapture'; 'The heart seized, carried away, as if by some large bird of prey'). In free (in)direct thought, the temporal adverb *still* is used in collocation with the word *beautiful* and seems to reflect his positive attitude towards the prospect of his life in the post-apocalyptic world.

In the opening passage, Snowman attempts to perceive the unfamiliar sound (the shrieks of the birds and the strange sound of the distant ocean) coming from his surroundings as the familiar sound (holiday traffic) to alleviate his anxiety. However, this time, he can perceive the shrieks of the birds as they are, which is represented through narrated perception ('From the offshore towers come the avian shrieks and cries that sound like *nothing human*', italics mine). Thus, his routine 'is entering the past': he breaks the present routine of sameness and repetition and takes a step towards the future.

In the last scene of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman is finally determined to go to see other survivors:

- (7) “What do you want me to do?” he whispers to the empty air.  
 It’s hard to know.  
*Oh, Jimmy, you were so funny.*  
*Don’t let me down.*  
 From habit he lifts his watch; it shows him its blank face.  
 Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go. (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 433)

The story ends with ‘Time to go’. This open-ending story is the result of the narrative tension created by the present-tense narration, continuing to suggest to the reader Snowman’s uncertain and unpredictable future.

The following passage is a different type of present-tense narration. It is a similar form to what Casparis calls ‘current report’ or ‘the narration of present action’ (e.g. sportscasts) where ‘the situation demands that a normally unpredictable sequence of sense impressions is narrated simultaneously’ (1975: 10). The present tense cotemporal with the speaker’s present is the appropriate tense for current report or ‘eyewitness descriptions of events’ (Fleischman, 1990: 103). Example (8) is one of the dramatic scenes where Snowman discovers the traces of other survivors:

- (8) Here’s a human footprint, in the sand. Then another one. They aren’t sharp-edged, because the sand here is dry, but there’s no mistaking them. And now here’s a whole trail of them, leading down to the sea. Several different sizes. Where the sand turns damp he can see them better. What were these people doing? Swimming, fishing? Washing themselves?

They were wearing shoes, or sandals. Here’s where they took them off, here’s where they put them on again. He stamps his own good foot into the wet sand, beside the biggest footprint: a signature of a kind. As soon as he lifts his foot away the imprint fills with water.

He can smell the smoke, he can hear the voices now. Sneaking he goes, as if walking through an empty house in which there might yet be people. What if they should see him? A hairy naked maniac wearing nothing but a baseball cap and carrying a spraygun. What would they do? Scream and run? Attack? Open their arms to him with joy and brotherly love? (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 431)

In this passage, narrated perception and free (in)direct thought portray an ‘unpredictable sequence’ of Snowman’s sense impressions and their associated speculations. The present tense is suitably associated with colloquial features (the frequent use of ellipsis as well as

temporal and spatial deictics (*here, now*) connected to his deictic centre) to evoke the apparent simultaneity of narrating and experiencing. Cohn therefore calls this type of narration ‘simultaneous narration’ (1999). Although the narrator’s third-person reference to Snowman makes the reader feel to a certain extent the distance between narrating and experiencing, the thrilling narrative development is fully achieved by the simultaneity effect.

The last example is the present-tense passage of Snowman’s hallucination. The present tense is often used in imaginary contexts, such as dreams, vision, and hallucination because its basic meaning, timelessness, is closely associated with unreality. In the post-apocalyptic world, his loneliness often makes him hallucinate his dead lover Oryx as in example (9):

- (9) Now he can feel Oryx floating towards him through the air, as if on soft feathery wings. She’s landing now, settling; she’s very close to him, stretched out on her side just a skin’s distance away. Miraculously she can fit onto the platform beside him, although it isn’t a large platform. If he had a candle or flashlight he’d be able to see her, the slender outline of her, a pale glow against the darkness. If he put out his hand he could touch her; but that would make her vanish. (Atwood, 2013 [2003]: 131)

In his hallucination, the atemporal meaning of the present tense appropriately represents the illusory presence of Oryx as such an unreal phenomenon cannot be located in a real time space. Paradoxically, however, the present tense is also capable of portraying this illusion more realistically since it is the suitable tense for ‘a sequential recording of sense impressions’ (Casparis, 1975: 10) and is used here to render Snowman’s actual or immediate perceptions of her.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

To sum up, in *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood exploits some potentials of the present-tense as the narrative tense to create post-apocalyptic narrative style. The use of the figural deictic present successfully created two temporally different narrative strands with their own plotline in order to contrast Snowman’s post-apocalyptic present and his pre-apocalyptic past. In the post-apocalyptic narration, the present tense functioned as the narrative tense to develop its own plotline, retaining with its immediacy the close distance between the reader and the protagonist. This resulted in obscuring the causal connection between the narrative events and thus in increasing the reader’s tension for the uncertain narrative development. In the course of the narrative, this narrative tension was closely associated

with Snowman's ambivalence in consciousness between the post-apocalyptic present and the pre-apocalyptic past, which was skillfully represented in free (in)direct thought and narrated perception.

In the post-apocalyptic present-tense narration, in fact, the present tense functioned in flexible ways. The polysemy of the present tense was particularly activated with the fusion of opposing cognitions. In the opening passage, on the one hand, the immediate meaning of the present tense heightened the narrative tension and effectively represents Snowman's present anxiety arising from his vacillating consciousness. On the other hand, its habitual meaning paradoxically implied Snowman's attempt to stabilize his mental state by keeping the habit he used to have in the past. The immediacy or cotemporality of the present tense also created the illusion of simultaneity of narrating and experiencing and dramatized the thrilling scene. The atemporal meaning of the present tense created the unreal phenomenon of Snowman's hallucination, although paradoxically his hallucination was described realistically through the present-tense rendering of his immediate, actual perceptions. The open-ending was suitable for the ending of the present-tense narration where the reader cannot predict the narrative development.

The multiple functions of the narrative present tense I have discussed in this paper cannot be effectively achieved by the past tense. Particularly, its potentials seem to be demonstrated by paradoxical effects of the present tense due to its flexible meanings: e.g. immediacy (short range scope) vs. habitualness/timelessness (long range scope).

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### **Notes**

1. The illustration is created by an artist named Jason Courtney and can be downloaded from his website: <http://jasoncourtneyart.com/illustration.html>
2. For the narrator's deictic usage, Huber argues that 'strictly speaking, it is wrong to speak of such instances as present-tense narration, since nothing is narrated; rather the narrative is precisely halted here' (2016: 8).
3. For example, see Robert's article in *The Telegraph*: Philp Pullman and Philip Hensher criticise Booker Prize for Including Present Tense Novels (2010).
4. Huber's examples are for the most part from the long-lists of the Man-booker Prize since 2000. She identifies four main types of present-tense narration in contemporary novels

(namely, narrative deictic narration, retrospective narration, interior monologue, simultaneous narration) and argues that '[t]he effects and conditions of present-tense narration depend largely on the narrative situation in which it is used' (2016: 19). In her discussion, each type of present-tense narration is analysed based on Stanzel's three narrative situations (1984): first-person narration, authorial narration, and figural narration.

5. Note that in the present-tense narration, unlike the past-tense narration, the distinction between free indirect thought and free direct thought becomes ambiguous because the tense cannot be an indicator for distinguishing these thought representation categories. In the third-person present-tense novel, only the third-person pronouns can be a clear indicator of free indirect thought. When it is difficult to distinguish these two forms in analysing the passages in section 4, I use the label *free (in)direct thought*.
6. Consonant psycho-narration is a technique for representing character's consciousness, which is 'mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates' (Cohn, 1978: 26). It is often used in combination with free indirect thought in figural narration.

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