

## Narrative Authority and Temporal Structures in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*: A Narratological Approach

Doris Lessing'in *The Cleft*'inde Anlatı Otoritesi ve Zamansal Yapılar: Anlatıbilimsel bir Yaklaşım

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### ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* is not only a speculative narrative exploring time and trauma, but also a case narrative that problematizes narrative authority and overwriting. In fact, Lessing's novel is a narrative of ideological struggle, shifting perspectives, and narrative disruptions. The study aims to show how narrative discourses represent the ideological tension between linear male historiography and cyclical female memory. Drawing on narrative strategies with references to ecofeminist and narratological lenses, this paper examines how narrative authority is gained, how temporal structures affect history and myth, and how characters become narrative devices. The analysis of functional agents, such as narrators, mediators, or manipulators, explains the emergence of gaps between myth and history. The study contends that narrative authority is also a selective authority that governs linear or cyclical temporality and regulates the character voices to keep gendered power embedded in male authorship. The work thus resonates beyond its mythic frame, offering readers a critical allegory for the intersections of narrative, gender, and ecology.

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## Introduction: Narrative Authority and Overwriting the Myth of Origins

The present paper employs a narratological ecofeminist lens to examine the interconnection of gender, ecology, narration, temporality, and authority. This paper, therefore, discusses how binaries of woman/nature versus man/culture structure the myth, and how the narrative technique, which employs unofficial orators to undermine the pivotal narrator, undermines them. The novel dramatizes the mediation of origins, showing how oral tradition, patriarchal emplotment, trauma, and ecological agency shape storytelling.

Lanser maintains in *Fictions of Authority* that narrative voice is never gender-neutral; its authority is always situated within systems of power and ideology and that "the authority of a given voice or text is produced from a conjunction of social and rhetorical properties" (Lanser 1992, p. 6). It implies that for the women, memory is oral repetition; for written history, narration is invention. It brings to mind Paul Ricoeur's claim that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricoeur 1984, p. 52). Lessing's narratives foreground the essentiality of oral

tradition against invented history, consolidating a continuous archive of temporality. The struggle between oral and written forms thus becomes a struggle between ecofeminist continuity and patriarchal historiography. A number of oral accounts of the female orators in the novel embody this mode: the narrators resist change by repeating the exact words throughout the narrative. When the narrator reframes their stories in Roman historiographic form, monumental time is absorbed into linear time, and oral tradition is transformed into a written record. The oral narrators safeguard their past through ritual repetition or repetitive rituals: "They told their histories into the ears of the Memories and perhaps never thought that when they said..." (Lessing 2007, p. 250). In fact, their so far unheard alternative oral accounts of history enrich, yet 'manipulate' the existing archive of narratives that make history.

Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* (2007) unsettles the notion of history by exploring the representation of human origins. The frame narrator, Transit, a Roman senator, admits from the start that his story is not a neutral record or official account of history but a compilation of fragments. Transit, as a narrator, acknowledges the differences in tone among divergent narrative accounts and attempts to assimilate oral narratives emerging from memory into a single, unified "story." This rhetorical move and suppressive narrative struggle reveal how patriarchal historiography erases plurality, collapsing multiple voices into one authorized account. The narrator's opening frame foregrounds the instability of knowledge: "Compiled from ancient verbal records, written down many ages after their collection" (Lessing 2007, p. 29). By presenting the text as a compilation, Lessing denies us the fantasy of unmediated myth and insists instead on narrative mediation. From the outset, the reader is told that what follows is already layered with distance, translation, and ideological framing.

Genette's distinction between *histoire* (the story), *récit* (the discourse), and narration (the act of telling) implies (Genette 1980, p. 27) that the narrator's 'voice' is doubly ideological, regarding 'what is told' and 'how it is told', as it persists in narrative authority and narrative invention. Hence, the narrative voice is marked by self-awareness of explicit cultural codes that shape Roman historiography: "Males are always put first, in our practice. They are first in our society... Yet I suspect this priority was a later invention" (Lessing 2007, pp. 28-9). This remark highlights both the arbitrariness and the authority of patriarchal ordering. On the one hand, he recognizes that "priority" may be an imposition rather than an inherent truth; on the other hand, his act of narrating reinscribes male-first order. Lessing repeatedly reminds us of the fragility of the narrator's sources. He confesses: "To make a history from this kind of material is not easy... [yet] seldom did the Memories of the Clefts and Monsters differ very much... Often the tone was different... But on the whole, Clefts and Monsters... lived the same story" (Lessing 2007, p. 30).

The novel explores narrative authority as the core of its mythic prehistory. Hutcheon suggests, such texts problematize the very possibility of historical knowledge while claiming the authority of historical representation (1988, p. 89). Hutcheon's discussion fits perfectly here since myth functions as a narrative in *The Cleft* rewrites history, reorienting the myth around female origins, incorporating narratives with ecological and cosmic elements such as sea, moon, and rock, which serve as both a belief system and a narrative frame. This corresponds to Joseph Campbell's understanding of myth as a framework that aligns human life with cosmic forces, a "reassurance... that the peace of Paradise... supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past," and that protective power remains "immanent within... the unfamiliar features of the world" (Campbell 1968, p. 66). Lessing, however, explains their own existence through a more cosmic imagery: "They believed... that a Fish brought them from the Moon... They were hatched from the moon's eggs" (Lessing 2007, p. 31). She complicates the myth with a polyphonic narrative frame and with many embedded oral accounts as Maire recalls: "There was a time we didn't have fire. That is in our records. Our story is known" (Lessing 2007, p. 8). Transit, on the other hand, seeks

to overcome women's collective memory, which exceeds and subverts textual constructions. He asserts:

Their prominence in the tales, both male and female, the fact that it was Maire who gave birth to the First One, meant that their words were heard and then recorded. But soon they were not young females, but founders of families, clans, tribes - and at some point, ages later, evolved into goddesses. (Lessing 2007, p. 102)

The authoritative voice presents the myth only to undermine it, foreshadowing its eventual replacement by male-centered origin stories. However, the question is whose account of origin prevails: the oral, ritualized narratives of the women known as Memories, or the codified, patriarchal writing of Transit, the Roman senator who serves as the novel's narrator, generating categories such as "Males, females, New words, new people" (Lessing 2007, p. 13), which transform undifferentiated existence into relational identity. Similarly, Old Shes' boundaries, the boys' transformation, or Transit's seemingly empathetic yet controlling narration reveal how the novel dramatizes the contest between female-authored memory and male historiography, exposing how patriarchy operates not only through material domination but also through control of storytelling itself. The critical distinction, gap, or, figuratively put, "cleft," occurs across the strategies of the construction of temporality or temporal revision of the Roman senator.

### **Linear Temporality vs Cyclical Spatiality**

*The Cleft* reveals the imposed temporality as an ideological tool. Transit's linear temporality is shaped by causality and chronology, which resists cyclical continuity. As Ricoeur argues, "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (1984, p. 52). So, Lessing handles trauma as a mode of linear temporality because the traumatic events persist in narratives as distorted memories. Lessing's story of origins is not only about the origin of women or men, but about how time is narrated, remembered, and structured. The novel does not unfold in a straightforward linear sequence but alternates between modes of temporality: cyclical repetition, abrupt catastrophe, mnemonic rupture, and imposed chronology.

Patriarchal resistance to women's narratives through cyclical memory threatens males' linear history: "We Romans have measured, charted, taken possession of time" while "all we know of those events is what was said of them by the appointed Memories, the repeaters, who spoke to those who spoke again, again, what had been agreed long ago should be remembered" (Lessing 2007, p. 101). The dichotomy between Roman history, governed by measures and schedules, and female memory, associated with repetitions and retelling corresponds to Ricoeur's idea that "emplotment brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results" (1984, p. 65). Transit's narrative discourse weaves fragments into a linear sequence for the sake of so-called "emplotment." However, the cyclical, circular, and recurring elements in Memories' storytelling indicate distinct temporalities.

Elements of emplotment, through selecting, arranging, and interpreting events, foreground narrative authority, since Ricoeur takes emplotment as "the operation that dynamizes every level of narrative articulation" and as "what brings about the transition between narrating and explaining" (Ricoeur 1984, p. 168). Patriarchal myths, supplanted by female-centered origin stories in *The Cleft*, exemplify the narrator's emplotment at critical narrative instances. For instance, male-authored chronicles expose that "the earliest ancestors were male... the eagles hatched them out of their eggs... There are many possibilities, all more credible than that females came first" (Lessing 2007, p. 143). Here, Transit's voice indicates the ideological perspective as an external authority, referencing so-called scientific discourse: "In a recent scientific article, it was remarked that the basic and primal human stock was probably female, and that males came along

later, as a kind of cosmic afterthought. I cannot believe that this was a trouble-free advent" (Lessing 2007, p. iii). His invocation of "a recent scientific article" characterises his narrative as mere invention utilising myth, history, science, and imagination. The ideological underpinnings linked with temporal indicator, "cosmic afterthought," suggests a linear progression in history, from chaos to cosmos. However, situating male existence as a belated phenomenon signifies a reversal of the patriarchal Genesis myth. Such a rhetorical twist in Transit's narrative indicates narrative gaps between male history and female myths, and is considered a potential 'trouble': "I cannot believe that this was a trouble-free advent."

In this way, Lessing foregrounds how patriarchal narrative voices often claim legitimacy by citing external sources while simultaneously asserting interpretive control. However, the storyworld in *The Cleft* is one of cyclical repetition, signaled by phrases such as "They used to . . . They were in the habit of..." (Lessing 2007, p. 137), which mark a temporality of habit rather than progress. This continuity is ruptured by catastrophe, the Noise remembered only as "the wind moaned and shrieked, it sobbed and it screamed, it was the Noise, something none of the people had ever imagined" (Lessing 2007, p. 138). Therefore, Lessing situates temporality at the center of her narrative compilation. The collapse of communal memory, "Generations of chroniclers, of Memories, died out" (Lessing 2007, p. 138), further exposes the fragility of temporal continuity. Against these ruptures, Transit introduces Roman linearity, "measured, charted, taken possession of time" (Lessing 2007, p. 101), overlaying cyclical myth with historical sequence. Lessing thereby dramatizes what Ricoeur describes as narrative's configurational power—the way emplotment organizes otherwise fragmented or mythical temporalities into a form of time that can be understood, interpreted, and lived. The novel reveals, however, that no single temporal mode suffices: cyclical memory is vulnerable to rupture, linear history is imposed and selective, and catastrophe resists integration.

Lessing's temporal patterns not only imply Transit's narrative unreliability but also emphasize the role of his temporal impositions. He persists in distorting the cyclic narrative and memory by the Noise, amalgamating memory drawbacks with narrative impositions. Noise's repetitive, and somewhat lagging memory, demonstrates that "what happened" (story) can never be represented with a coherent discourse. Accordingly, the experience of time is ruptured by these blended narratives. Narrative control over temporality shapes communal memory, which is structured into narrative episodes marked by discontinuities. Transit's narrative about origin brings forth not only the opacity of beginnings, but also the dominance of a new narrative from above: "The Clefts did not know when their kind had first crawled from the waves to breathe air on the rocks, and they were incurious (Lessing 2007, p. 31). Transit's discourse highlights the significance of narrative rather than knowledge. As White observes, historical consciousness itself "may be little more than a theoretical basis for the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship to cultures and civilizations" (White 1973, p. 2). Hence, distinct narratives of origin do not indicate knowledge but rather point to ideological discourses and memories. In Noise's memories, there is no trace of curiosity, therefore, no emplotment, which highlights their cyclical existence.

The Cleft represents that the contest over origins is fundamentally a contest over narration: who speaks, how memory is preserved, and which temporalities are authorized. Transit's compilation of Cleft narratives provides fragments that include the Clefts' semiotic: "There is nothing here like the raw angry fragment... which is the very first we hear from the Clefts" (Lessing 2007, p. 30). This "raw angry fragment" represents an early moment of female speech about the Monsters, a voice that does not conform to Roman expectations of rationality or coherence. Its very "rawness" evokes what Cixous describes as *écriture féminine*, a bodily and affective mode of writing that disrupts phallogentric regulation of discourse. As she insists, "Write your self. Your body must be

heard" (Cixous 1976, p. 880). Yet in Transit's hands, the fragment becomes framed as an anomaly, angry, raw, excessive, rather than as authoritative. Transit explains how speculation itself leads to narrative authority and production: "Brooding about this whole question sparked off speculation and then that spinning of the imagination that can lead to the birth of stories. Here is one of the tales about what might have happened when Clefts first gave birth to a baby boy" (Lessing 2007, p. iii). Lessing is deliberate here: the 'birth of stories' parallels the birth of boys. Both are disruptive, altering cycles, and inaugurating new forms of temporality. The senator's description of "spinning of the imagination" foregrounds narrative not only as labor but also as appropriation.

Against Transit's historiography stands the women's oral tradition of memory. Later in the narrative, Transit exposes the gap between Roman and Cleft conceptions of time: "We Romans have measured, charted, taken possession of time ... for we would have the year, the month, the day off pat, we are a defining people, but then all we know of events is what was said of them by the appointed Memories, the repeaters, who spoke to those who spoke again, again" (Lessing 2007, p. 101). Here Lessing juxtaposes two models of narrative authority. The Roman model is linear, quantitative, and "measured." The female model is cyclical, qualitative, and ritualistic, stories spoken "again." Showalter has noted that women's writing has historically been associated with "double-voiced discourse," in which female expression negotiates patriarchal structures while maintaining its own traditions (Showalter 1981, p. 201). In *The Cleft*, the Memories embody such a double voice: they preserve continuity, but their authority is ultimately reframed by Transit's patriarchal chronicle. The contest between these voices becomes stark in the insertion of a later chronicle that directly overturns female primacy:

It is now believed that the earliest ancestors were male, and if it is asked how they reproduced themselves, then the reply is that the eagles hatched them out of their eggs. After all, it cannot be for nothing that respect for the great birds is expressed in a hundred myths about our origins ... There are many possibilities, all more credible than that females came first. And there is something inherently implausible about males as subsidiary arrivals: it is evident that males are by nature and designed by Nature to be first. (Lessing 2007, p. 142)

Patriarchal appropriation arises from history-writing in Transit's case and represents an ideological narrative revision, illustrating narrative authority. The female voice is obliterated by the male perspective as the story is retold and restructured from a different perspective. Transit's masculinist allegory of eagle-born men displaces women's narratives that depict lunar myths or tell about marine origins, degrading and undermining female agency and women's storytelling. As Irigaray argues, woman's words become "inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids" (Irigaray 1985, p. 28), effectively erased within dominant masculine logic. Thus, Lessing demonstrates how storytelling was first replaced (and displaced) by authorship, and then authorship emerges as narrative authority, or simply put, authority as such. The absorption of women's stories, the silencing or distorting of female voices, ends in the manipulation of women's memories or memory-preserving myths. Rewriting turns out to be the burial of women's origins altogether.

The fragments show how the fragility of memory becomes a structural concern. The abandonment of male infants, for example, is remembered not directly but through displacement: "It was hard to do because the eagles watched us all the time and we had to keep the baby Monster out of their sight" (p. 17). Here, the Old Shes deny responsibility, attributing the infants' disappearance to animals. Cathy Caruth's insight is illuminating: trauma "seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out..." (1996, p. 4). The women's denial is a form of repeated possession. The novel recounts that "Generations of chroniclers, of Memories, died out and for some reason the attempt was not made to restart the process of activating Communal Memory" (Lessing 2007, p. 138). Here, the narrative foregrounds

how time is shaped by institutionalized practices of remembering. Without the characters 'the Memories', cyclical time loses continuity, and rupture becomes oblivion. This passage dramatizes what Reinhart Koselleck has described as the distinction between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" (2004, p. 259). The Clefts' communal memory is the space of experience, but once the chain is broken, the horizon of expectation collapses; there is no continuity into the future. Time ceases to be iterable and becomes fragile, when disrupted. The Clefts and environmental elements, and their narratives are absorbed by the framing narrative. However, the clefts live on communal spheres and cycles, intrinsically connected with nature and space, not exhibiting individual characters.

### Characters as Operating Functions

Characters in *The Cleft* are embodied functions and collective beings rather than individual psyches. These functional operators generate difference, thereby steering the narrative's expression rather than its psychological development. From a narratological perspective, Bal emphasizes that character identity is produced through their positions and relations within the fabula, rather than through interiority. As she observes, "Finally, characters change. The changes or transformations that a character undergoes sometimes alter the entire configuration of character as it looked during the analysis of mutual relations" (Bal 2009, p. 114). Maire and Astre exemplify this principle: they are defined by their role in generating new categories, not by introspective psychology. Similarly, Lessing centers the boys' functions through scenes of imitation and social learning. The boys, at first marked only by restlessness and noise, gradually assume functional roles of innovation and sociability, though their hunger also recasts them as potential wilderness. The scene, where "the carcasses dripped their fat into the fires and the flames licked up into the branches and in the morning the leaves hung brittle and pale" (Lessing 2007, p. 235), for example, demonstrates the characters that operate as embodied functions. Similarly, helpers, opponents, mediators, or storytellers depict recurrent cyclical time in the complicated narrative, which aligns with the time of nature, reproduction, and repetition: "Some think that the tale went on – and on – with nothing much changing, for so long that the chroniclers fell into that mode that often signals time passing, when you hear the phrases 'They used to...' 'They were in the habit of . . .'" (Lessing 2007, p. 137). Within this cyclical frame, even social arrangements become defined by function rather than individuality, as seen in the presence of infertile or voluntarily childless women living among the men:

There is no way of calculating, particularly when it is known that among the men were always girls, who were not merely the visiting females, but who had decided that they preferred the men for company. These females were for some reason not fertile or had made sure they were not, or were sterile, and this meant they did not discommode the men with their babes. (Lessing 2007, p. 169)

These moments demonstrate how Lessing replaces psychological depth with structural, cyclical, and functional modes of characterization.

The clefts experience time-space (chronotope) in a prevalent mode of spatiality. That correlates the clefts to external space, environment, and ecology rather than psychological depth. Therefore, Bakhtin's "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84) represents a static "space-time" rather than a dynamic 'time-space'. The characters' association with cyclical temporality manifests itself through prolonged and distanced duration. The living spatial elements, such as seas, cliffs, skies, and caves, punctuate a cyclical temporal structure that exhibits a mythic and distant temporality. It brings about ecological implications of women's reproductive cycles since sensory experience, bodily performance and biological changes are part of spatiality on various levels:

Yes, there were high water-line marks on their cave walls, big waves must at some time have come rushing up, more than once, but these were creatures of the sea. There is no way of finding out what they felt about monster waves - their songs are not histories or stories but a kind of keening, sounding like the wind when it sighs and murmurs. (Lessing 2007, p. 32)

Moreover, the narrative's catastrophic interruptions undermine cyclical temporality; the Clefts' refusal of linear sequence mirrors trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1996, pp. 11). The Noise, a raging storm, shatters the communal experience of duration, which governs the continuity and passage of time. The chroniclers' report maintains: "In both the histories the first mention of the catastrophe was the word 'Noise': 'When the Noise began...', 'The Noise went on...', 'We did not know what caused the Noise and some of us even went mad...'" (Lessing 2007, p. 138). Here, the catastrophic event is delivered not through causal explanation but through linguistic echo of "Noise." The passage asserts that verbal iteration falls short of depicting experiential time, so descriptive narrative mode collapses into repetition: "the wind moaned and shrieked, it sobbed and it screamed, it was the Noise, something none of the people had ever imagined" (Lessing 2007, p. 138). Hence, catastrophic events cause traumatic ruptures, thereby interrupting cyclical time.

The characters with narrative function structure the novel around competing narrative modes such as female communal memory, male historiography, ecological cycles, or catastrophic ruptures. The work thus functions simultaneously as a feminist allegory, an ecofeminist critique, and a deliberate "narratological mediation." The narrative invites readers to consider the representation of gender relations and ecological responsibility, but also to rethink the narratives through which communities constitute their pasts. Narrative form itself becomes an ethical domain, and in Lessing's account, the stakes of telling are inseparable from the stakes of living. One of the most distinctive features of Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* is its unusual treatment of character. Unlike the psychological realism that has dominated much of the modern novel, *The Cleft* constructs figures who rarely attain interior complexity in the conventional sense. Instead, they are positioned within a narrative economy as agents of function, embodying specific roles that organize the novel's myth of origins and its contest between female and male communities.

Female myths of origin are gendered through idiosyncratic characterization, exposing them as storytellers or as carriers of fragments. Maire, Astre, the Old Shes and the Squirts. These marginal characters use knowledge to alter collective understanding. Using a polyphonic strategy of narration, their thoughts and perceptions, as in the case of the Old She, are represented as opposed to those of Transit. The Old She appears as an outstanding character, whose altered narration illustrates how these suppressed characters' fragments are buried or obliterated by male narrative authority. Moreover, Maire and Astre disrupt Roman perception of the Clefts as anonymous types in a narrative. They expose themselves as individual characters and reclaim a voice of their own. This act of "naming" and presentation of "categories" make them heard: "Males, females. New words, new people" (Lessing 2007, p. 13), marks a turning point in the narrative. The utterance does not merely describe a social reality but inaugurates it. By giving linguistic shape to difference, Maire and Astre transform undifferentiated existence into relational identity. Yet Lessing destabilizes this cyclical mode by introducing the boys' as the instruments of catastrophic interruption. They fulfill their functional role as the elements of narrative ecology and economy:

The boys in their flimsy shelters by the forest's edge found themselves helpless as the wind tossed them over and over, or threw them into the river. They could not find any place in their lovely valley where they could be safe. Up on the mountain no eagles could fly - most were killed or hurt in those long days and nights of the Noise. (Lessing 2007, p. 139)

The Clefts' Memories, however, embody female storytelling, oral, cyclical, and resistant to alteration yet vulnerable to erasure. Transit's reorganization of these fragments exemplifies what Lanser describes: that even texts which challenge dominant authority are nevertheless "constrained to adopt the authorizing conventions of narrative voice" (Lanser 1992, p. 7). The authoritative framework through which Transit retells the Clefts' histories thus recasts their "raw" anger as mere "anomalies," not as legitimate testimony. Their myths are not simply rewritten but overwritten, displaced from the realm of authority and excluded from the domain of historical narration. So, narrative and history together operate as ideological instruments used to prevail over the female fragments.

These fragments also represent women's bond with nature and environment, where humans and nonhumans resonate altogether with an entangled vision as well as harmonious beginnings. This gives a glimpse at an ecofeminist perspective and correlates with the governance of narrative discourse. Hence, Transit cannot determine the origins as such (who existed first?), but can manipulate, change, or reconfigure authorship, narration and narrative discourse (who tells the story?). In other words, once one controls the narrative, they can control life. Transit's male narrative authority, therefore, is not simply a matter of representing truth but of structuring how it is told and received. It accounts for why the memories' oral stories, cyclic temporality, and fragmented recollections resist written historiography, linear temporality, and structured emplotment. Transit's written history reconfigures narrative discourse to gain social control. As Lanser emphasizes, "discursive authority... is produced interactively; it must therefore be characterized with respect to specific receiving communities" (Lanser 1992, p. 7). In *The Cleft*, the women's collective voices circulate beneath the official chronicle that authorizes Transit's version as "history." Lessing therefore frames origins not as stable truths but as contested archives. The myth of the Clefts, the angry fragments, the Memories' repetitions, the Roman historiography, and the later inversions all participate in a polyphonic narrative in which authority is always at stake.

On the other hand, Transit, the Roman senator and male patriarchal character, retains his authority over narration, regulation, and arrangement, and occupies a functional position within the narrative frame. The narrator is significant in that he is both a character and a narrator and interferes with history by overwriting. His interventions remind us that characterization itself is subject to the authority of framing: "This historian is allowing Astre tears, though none were ever recorded in any document we have" (Lessing 2007, p. 71). He exerts his narrative power to suppress female characters with emotional perceptions, responses, and acts. His deliberate and frequent use of "my history" aims to relocate and recontextualise the female characters, their experiences, and their stories within the broader narrative discourse of Roman historiography. In doing so, the male narrator-character interweaves "his" narrative with what Barthes termed "tissue of quotations" (1977, p. 146) to reinforce patriarchal narrative authority.

The Clefts share private languages and perspectives. As Genette notes, even in seemingly neutral narration, characters are always positioned within a specific field of vision; where "the object of the narrative, is seen from the outside" (Genette 1988, p. 76). This principle clarifies that perspective regulates what can be perceived, known, or felt within the narrative frame. Maire and Astre, for instance, vary in what they see, know, and articulate. Their accounts construct differentiated focalizations that others cannot share. Their speech therefore functions as a focal filter through which the possibility of future community becomes legible.

Their distinctiveness is further amplified through their creation of a shared idiom unavailable to the rest of the Clefts: "All they knew was that when they talked together about the new babe, about the Monsters over the mountain, they were using language and ideas they could not share with anyone else on that shore" (Lessing 2007, p. 68). In contrast, the Old Shes serve as guardians of prohibition and interdiction. Their suspicious perspective of the male infants is voiced through



categorical judgment: "This first babe born to the Clefts, with a Monster for a father, was, these two girls knew, different in its deepest nature" (Lessing 2007, p. 67). Such pronouncements are functional in Propp's sense, where early interdictions set the terms for subsequent narrative violations (Propp 1968, p. 27). The Old Shes embody the function of gatekeeping, insisting on maintaining purity and stability. Yet Lessing also shows how their function is unstable. One Old She climbs to the eagles' roost. She perceives the existence of an alternative male settlement: "An Old Female climbed to the top of the mountain 'to see for herself' ... hearing all kinds of descriptions from the young ones, of the events going on in the valley where the Monsters grew and flourished. She had not believed what she was told, that is clear" (Lessing 2007, p. 107).

Some characters, such as The Boys [referred to disparagingly as Squirts or Monsters], initially appear as behavioral types rather than individuals, who "were tied, but they made such noise, yelling and screaming, that when they escaped, running away, guided by the great birds, the old Clefts were relieved. No more little boys were kept as 'pets,' and the Clefts reverted to their earlier practice" (Lessing 2007, p. 39). Yet Lessing gradually allows them to accrue a more complex role. A striking description shows their inventiveness: "It had tied around its waist one of the fish-skin cloths we wear at the time of the red flower. We could see that under the skin was the lumpy swelling thing we thought was so ugly. This was a Monster we had given birth to, grown up" (Lessing 2007, p. 14). What begins as noise becomes innovation, and what was once disturbance becomes sociability. Forster famously distinguished between flat and round characters, noting that a round character is one "capable of surprising in a convincing way" (Forster 1954, p. 78). The boys undergo the narrative transformation, developing into characters from mere types or objects in the story. Even nonhuman agents are involved in the storyworld as remarkable participants. Eagles appear to be important characters that transport babies or storms, and function as storyworld participants. As Margolin has argued, character "In the widest sense, 'character' designates any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction" (Margolin 2007, p. 66). Lessing accords these nonhuman figures functional roles: the eagle becomes a helper, the storm an opponent, the doe a nurturer. Such distribution broadens the novel's ecofeminist argument: nonhuman forces act with as much significance as human ones in determining the trajectory of origins.

Female characters' ecological agency does not have metaphorical significance but rather performative, material, lived, and experiential characteristics, which overcome myth because it is collective, organic, and open-ended, and disrupt history because it is not ideological or social. From an ecofeminist perspective, authority and patriarchy are social institutions developed through the rise of human civilization. The female characters' stories of ecological catastrophe introduce yet another temporal mode. Nature becomes a character and voices: "The wind moaned and shrieked, it sobbed and it screamed, it was the Noise, something none of the people had ever imagined" (Lessing 2007, p. 138). Such aftermath transformations glimpse both environmental response and temporality: "The Noise, that great storm, had felled trees as easily as one of our breaths may blow seeds off a stalk. Old rotting trunks in unhealthy water – and so it was that there was not enough of the desirable forest for everyone" (pp. 171-2).

The Noise, as a character with narrative function, interrupts human temporality altogether, imposing scarcity and displacement. As Benjamin notes, so-called "progress" is not a continuous phenomenon but is driven forward by catastrophic ruptures that accumulate and destabilize any linear narrative (1969, p. 257). Hence, The Noise embodies this catastrophic temporality, breaking the cyclical rhythm of the Clefts and placing memory itself at risk. The Old Shes cling to continuity, resisting difference; the Squirts represent rupture and conquest; Maire and Astre negotiate between these opposing forces. Transit then reframes these temporal fractures through a patriarchal narrative that asserts control and coherence. As Plumwood observes, dominant

cultural systems operate by “systematically inferioris[ing], backgrounding and deny[ing] dependency” (Plumwood 2003, p. 21), a dynamic mirrored in Transit’s appropriation and overwriting of the Clefts’ temporal logic. The flat characters and environmental forces thus function as disruptive breaks in the Clefts’ cyclical world, creating gaps that can only later be overwritten by historiographic imposition, ultimately undermining binaries such as history/myth, culture/nature, man/woman, linear/cyclical, individual/communal, and temporal/spatial.

## Conclusion

Transit’s narrative is not aimed at erasing epistemological opacity but simply distorting female narratives by producing a new narrative discourse. Lessing’s critique of historicism and the imposition of linear temporality, therefore, becomes noteworthy and of critical significance. Roman historiography is marked with ongoing retrospective temporal arrangements because Lessing employs temporal strategies to show that history is gendered and constructed via narratives, as is gender. She explores the issue around the narratives of origins, and shows how origins are structured as “history,” and argues that the issue of origins is not an epistemological problem but an ideological tool. Considering Genette and Bal’s essential categories of fabula (story), this paper examined how a set of gaps emerges between distinct narratives: between what happens and what is told; between what happens and what is remembered; and between what happens and how it is told. Hence, the paper examined *The Cleft* regarding the representation of temporality from an ecofeminist narratology, emphasizing “who narrates,” “how memory is preserved,” and “temporality” is constructed in narratives.

*The Cleft* shows how ideological tension emerges between linear male historiography and cyclical female memory. Drawing on narrative strategies informed by ecofeminist and narratological lenses, this paper examines how narrative authority is gained, how temporal structures mediate the relation between history and myth, and how characters function as narrative devices. The analysis of functional agents—narrators, mediators, manipulators—reveals the emergence of gaps (or clefts) between mythic and historical modes of knowing. The present study demonstrates how women’s voices are absorbed into patriarchal narrative formations while simultaneously foregrounding the instability of authenticity, for gender is “both the product and the process of its representation” (de Lauretis 1987, p. 5). In *The Cleft*, the senator-narrator’s insistence on “my history” is inseparable from his institutional authority as a Roman male, transforming female-origin myths into a linear account that reinscribes male priority. This dynamic exposes the close link between ideological imposition and narrative authority, visible in the narrator’s persistent drive to revise, reorganize, and overwrite the temporal frameworks through which the Clefts understood themselves.

Roman Historiography’s linear temporality devours cyclical temporality/spatiality. Lessing’s narrative not only reveals, through the Roman narrator’s authoritative voice, how male representation of the female myth of human origin undermines male and female narratives simultaneously, but also scientific and mythic narratives. Narrative authority exerted by the central narrator is selective, shaping linear temporality against cyclical spatiality. The narrator’s account not only produces (or controls) “history” but also resists spatial disruption. It regulates the character voices to stress gendered power, embedded in male authorship. The new narrative thus resonates beyond its mythic sources, framing the myth within an allegory of the “clefts and Clefts,” in every sense of the word, touching on narrative determination of gender, history, and ecology. Thus, Lessing’s narrative, from a narratological perspective, demonstrates that it is not a question of “events” but of how these events are told. In this context, the construction of temporality through narratives emerges as an ideological tool. From the very beginning of the narrative, the patriarchal narrator holds narrative authority to reshape female notions of time.

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