

## Spoiling suspense? Anticipatory structures as creative narrative devices in Tabish Khair's diasporic fiction

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*'The beginning is simple to mark.'*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Narrative texts often aim to generate suspense, or similar type of involvement, in order to enhance plot developments through the delay or withdrawal of explicit information, or the use of unreliable characters. There are also cases, however, in which the flow of narrative progression is deliberately broken and punctuated by anticipatory elements that introduce, hint at or suggest future events, situations, and characters. My aim in this paper is to examine how a wide range of proleptic, cataphoric and other elements can function as creative anticipatory structures for the construction of fictional discourse, and I will focus on a recent diasporic novel, *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* by Tabish Khair (2012), which extensively, almost obsessively, employs such devices.

Functioning as clues that intersect narratorial levels and call for attention paradoxically *à rebours*, anticipatory structures are often realised via the use of different items such as mental process verbs, deictic shifts and split selves. The textual effects they generate significantly contribute to the presentation of the narrator's point of view, but also allow the author to address loaded questions, for example the ideological mixing of the 'threat' and the 'token' of otherness in our anxious postmodern age. From a methodological point of view, I will adopt and adapt a range of different tools from the fields of postcolonial studies, stylistics, narratology and pragmatics to investigate Khair's novel.

**Keywords:** anticipatory narrative structures, prolepsis, Tabish Khair, diasporic fiction

### 1. Introduction

One of the main preoccupations of narrative texts is not only to catch the reader's attention and generate involvement in the reading process in terms of plot development, characters constructions or other structural aspects, but also to maintain it constantly, as many scholars in literary discourse, stylistics and narratology have pointed out.<sup>2</sup> There may also be cases in which the flow of narrative progression is deliberately manipulated and punctuated by elements that somehow introduce, hint at or suggest future events and situations impinging on the plot, and to a certain extent spoil the 'surprise effect' that normally fuels the construction of the story. Why should an author deliberately do this, considering that literary interest typically emerges from a

<sup>1</sup> Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Elizabeth Black, *Pragmatic Stylistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1984); Michael Toolan, *Narrative Progression in the Short Story. A Corpus Stylistics Approach* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009).

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gradual accumulation of narrative ‘bits and pieces’ combined with informational blanks? My paper intends to examine how a wide range of proleptic, cataphoric and other resources can function as anticipatory narrative structures for building up creative fictional discourse both locally and globally in the text. As a case study, I will look at a recent diasporic novel, *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*, by Denmark-based South Asian author Tabish Khair, originally published in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

In broad terms, anticipation can be seen as a benchmark element that plays a salient role in the reading process, as demonstrated by recent narratological, cognitive and neuropsychological studies.<sup>4</sup> Operating as clues that intersect different textual levels and call for attention to narrative order, anticipatory structures are often realised via different strategies, encompassing the use of mental process verbs, deictic shifts and even ‘split selves’. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates stylistics, narratology and postcolonial discourse, I argue that these structures allow the author not only to modulate the narrator’s idiosyncratic perception, but also to provokingly handle controversial themes such as the threat from the ‘other’ and to challenge the reader in de/constructing specific stereotypes, for instance the notion of the ‘enemy’ as put forward by Umberto Eco, which I will use later in the article.<sup>5</sup> In reality, in the novel the sense of anticipation is cunningly employed in balance with retrospection, so that it surfaces discreetly (though constantly) and may remain largely unnoticed. The text under discussion covers a variety of sensitive and dramatic topics, including the discussion of fundamentalism, the danger of terrorism and the debate on transnational identity in the globalised world, but, while other studies offer critical readings of the entire work,<sup>6</sup> here I will mainly concentrate on the effects triggered by textual structures.

## 2. Constructing plot order: now and then

In his ground-breaking volume on narratology,<sup>7</sup> Genette shows how it is possible for authors to modify the chronological development of the plot by shifting backward and forward the representation of the action with the aid of anachronies, defined as ‘the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative’<sup>8</sup>. The categories of flashback (or ‘retrospection’) and flash-forward, also termed foreshadowing (or ‘anticipation’), are typically used to illustrate such contrastive movements. Sometimes these are labelled respectively as analepsis and prolepsis, with the former referring to a shift from a narratorial ‘now-moment’ to a

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<sup>3</sup> Tabish Khair, *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (London: Corsair, 2012). Subsequent in-text citations from this text are included parenthetically with abbreviation HTFIT and page number.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Timo Järvillehto, Nurkkala Veli-Matti, and Koskela Kyösti, ‘The Role of Anticipation in Reading,’ *Pragmatics and Cognition* 17.3 (2009) 509-526, and S. Miall, ‘Anticipation and Feeling in Literary Response: A Neuropsychological Perspective,’ *Poetics* 23 (1995) 275-298.

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, *Inventing the Enemy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Viveek Bharti and Randeep Rana ‘Negotiating the Issues of Survival and Identity in Cross-Cultural Context Through Assessment of Difference: A Post-Colonial Reading of Tabish Khair’s *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*,’ in Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández and Om Prakash Dwivedi, eds, *Tabish Khair. Critical Perspectives* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) 139-148; Chun Fu, ‘Satiricity, Secularity and (Dis)Order in *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*,’ in Gámez-Fernández and Dwivedi, cit. 149-166; Umme Al-wazedi ‘“Under Western Eyes”: The Face of Homegrown Terror in Three Texts,’ in Gámez-Fernández and Dwivedi, cit. 167-185.

<sup>7</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983) 33-85.

<sup>8</sup> Genette 36.

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<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

‘then-moment’, whereas the latter highlights the contrast between a ‘future-moment’ against the backdrop of a ‘now-moment’. Genette also recognises in particular the centrality, and potential to this respect, of the narrating character, since

the ‘first-person’ narrative lends itself better than any other to anticipation, by the very fact of its avowedly retrospective character, which authorizes the narrator to allude to the future and in particular to his present situation, for these to extent form part of his role.<sup>9</sup>

Anticipation can occasionally operate via the use of prophetic modal operator ‘will’<sup>10</sup> as in the classic example by W. Yeats’ lines ‘I know that I shall meet my fate / somewhere above the clouds above’, which spell out an act of foreseeing the future. Clearly, the order in which events are narrated is fundamental to the general atmosphere of a fictional work, and authors exploit it *in toto* to generate interest and implicitly anticipation in the readers, who as a result are led to continue reading whilst cognitively processing the text they are dealing with. It is also worth considering that the very idea of time in fiction is not monolithic or unidirectional, as Fludernik comments:

we are all tempted to see time as an objective, measurable and unambiguous category that can be pictured as a dotted line progressing from past to future. However, narrative temporality makes apparent the complex interrelationship of different types, or orders, of temporality.<sup>11</sup>

Anticipation, furthermore, often works in tandem with other narrative strategies such as delays and gaps,<sup>12</sup> which may contribute to the orchestration of the storyline since they respectively postpone the distribution of information and/or deliberately leave some absence in the narrative discourse. These techniques also operate in the Khair novel and support the general atmosphere of uncertainty and lack of clarity, which in a certain measure is typical in much diasporic literature that deals with the interconnected themes of intolerance, rejection and otherness juxtaposed with the irruption of terrorism, for example with the instance of Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007).<sup>13</sup>

In the Western tradition, there seems to be a preference for a linear temporal order in which the story unfolds progressively, with some analeptic passages for the construction of suspense and surprise. In particular, this narrative typology is attested by those genres that fully exploit the readers’ expectations: detective fiction, for example, tends to rely on a progressive accretion of clues and elements that cumulatively lead to the resolution of the mystery, sometimes by offering a twist in the tale, as notably occurs in Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) for example. When an author decides to break the traditional sequencing of a story, this operation affects the entire negotiation between text and reader, as it provokingly challenges natural expectations and consequential interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Genette 67.

<sup>10</sup> Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1995) 25-6.

<sup>11</sup> Monika Fludernik ‘Chronology, Time, Tense and Experientiality in Narrative,’ *Language and Literature* 12.2 (2003) 119.

<sup>12</sup> Rimmon-Kenan 125-129; Wales 201.

<sup>13</sup> See also Esterino Adami ‘Indefinite Identity: The Textual Construction of Ambiguity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*’, in J. Derrick McClure, Karoline Szatek-Tudor and Rosa E. Penna, eds, “*What Country’s This? And Whither Are We Gone?*” *Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) 293-302.

<sup>14</sup> Fludernik 2003 cit.; Rimmon-Kenan 1984 cit.

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Tabish Khair cunningly manipulates the chronological piecing together of his novel in a subtle way through the ‘laddish’ and subjective voice of a first-person homodiegetic narrator. However, rather than openly formulating anticipation of the storyline, for example via prophetic affirmations (‘I know this will happen’, ‘Because of the action of X, this result will emerge’ and so forth), he intersperses clues that sideways collaborate to predict, at least partially, the climax of the story. The writer’s use of anticipation, in reality, functions in delicate balance with other levels of time and narration, so that the readers follow the narrator in his ‘now-time’ and enter a story-world, narrated in the standard past tense (a ‘past-time’), in which however certain episodes conjure up future events, or a ‘more recent past’, within a past context. As Katie Wales holds, ‘in our reading there is a double movement of prolepsis and analepsis: the constant anticipation of the movement when, looking back, everything falls into place’<sup>15</sup> and the final outcome is a complex network that organises and articulates the author’s narrative discourse of diaspora, migrancy and globalisation in its various chronological segments.

### 3. Introducing the novel

I will now briefly introduce *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*, a diasporic novel written by author and academic scholar Tabish Khair, which from the very title intertwines a range of sensitive topics and pragmatically functions as a kind of face-threatening act,<sup>16</sup> because it provokingly alludes to religion, terrorism, sex and other complex issues and as such it explicitly aims to discuss a specific set of themes, motifs and atmospheres. Incorporating some biographical references, i.e. some traits of the narrator are actually shared by or at least similar to Khair’s personality,<sup>17</sup> the novel pivots around three main characters from the Indian subcontinent who for various reasons end up sharing a flat in the Danish town of Aarhus: the unnamed narrator, a young Pakistani academic working in the humanities, Ravi, a flamboyant Hindu intellectual, and Karim, an Indian Muslim who works as a taxi driver.

Whilst the first two characters tend to have a rather secular, almost bourgeois vision, the latter strictly follows the precepts of Islam, while he also keeps receiving mysterious phone calls, which from the very beginning of the story arouse doubts in his flatmates and in the readers as well. These sensations of uneasiness and dubiousness underpin the threat of terrorism, emerging and developing within diasporic communities in the West. Indeed, Al-wazedi coins the label ‘homegrown terrorism’ to designate this kind of violence, which ‘morphs from the complex international plots to small-scale attacks carried out by individuals located within US, UK and Denmark’<sup>18</sup> and which amplifies fears, diffidence and shock among people, as the recent bombings in Europe have shown.

The puzzling figure of Karim is fictionally and physiognomically built with specific clues to alert both the other characters and the readers, although some of these signs are depicted in a nearly parodic manner. Let us consider for example the indexing element of the beard: ‘His beard fooled Ravi into thinking that Karim was from Pakistan, like me, or Afghanistan, like the Italians in our favourite Italian pizzeria, Milano, on Borgmester Erik Skous Allé’ (HTFIT 5). In the quotation, the very notion of cultural belonging and roots are ironically (and bitterly) elaborated, with the inner message that somatic features can be shared by various national

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<sup>15</sup> Wales 378.

<sup>16</sup> Black 74-76.

<sup>17</sup> See Imtiaz Dharker, ‘Tabish Khair in Conversation,’ *Wasafiri* 29.1 (2014) 33-38.

<sup>18</sup> Al-wazedi 168.

groups rather than being unique stigmatising features, often marked by prejudice and stereotype. Other aspects, however, are designed to convey or suggest specific traditional connotations. With regard to Karim's eyes, the narrator comments that he 'could never determine if the darkened edges were natural or due to the application of kohl that, though uncommon now, was once widely used by men in north India' (HTFIT 7). A mixture of various characteristics, based on both difference and similarity in social, geographical and religious terms, is attached to Karim and permits the discussion of many intercultural questions. Placing the dynamics of the relationship among the three characters within a wider context in which fear, prejudice, and the echo of terrorist attacks are coterminous and often mixed, the unfolding of the narrative will progressively instil doubts about identity and increase suspiciousness. At the same time, according to Chun Fu,

the situation presented in the story through three differently placed immigrant characters can be universalized. It brings forth various combinations, permutations and possibilities out of human dilemma of keeping one's identity intact yet simultaneously being in an acceptable relationship with the new society.<sup>19</sup>

The novel therefore aims to discuss a broader framework of cultural, social and political confrontations, including the personal dimensions of sentiments.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Anticipatory structures in Khair's novel

Tabish Khair cleverly expands on the sense of anticipation by using a variety of devices that work in a double manner: on the one hand they target the reader to produce certain expectations and on the other they manipulate the levels of *fabula* and *sjuzet*, i.e. story and discourse. In other words, the force of prolepsis lies in the fact that it

serves as a foregrounding device, flagging it as an invitation to speculate. Not only does it positively invite predictive inferences by cueing a future state of the narrative, there is a strong pragmatic implicature that it is important to know this information now, not later.<sup>21</sup>

These anticipatory triggers may take a plurality of forms and functions, from chapter headings to phrases and sentences, from time adverbial expressions to modality and mental activity verbs. Probably the first indicator is the title of the opening chapter, 'Prolegomenon to a Plot', which speculates on the intertwined acts of narrating a story and arranging events chronologically, but which also seems to elicit predictions about future developments and to operate as a proleptic 'amplificatory framework.' In fact, the Greek-rooted lexeme indicates a type of prefatory observation, but in reality the etymology of the term covers a procedure of anticipation because it represents the neuter passive participle of *prolekein*, 'to say beforehand', from *pro* 'before' and *legein*, 'to say', and thus the linear and progressive order is disrupted and foregrounded to attract the readers' attention.

This sophisticated item, which however somehow hides its ideological power, endorses the meaning of anticipation and expectation that will run throughout the whole novel, following the contention that 're-ordered chronology teases the reader, involving us more closely in the text'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Chun 146.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Gillian Dooley, 'Review of Tabish Khair's *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*', *Transnational Literature*, 5.1 (2012), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Teresa Bridgeman, 'Thinking Ahead: A Cognitive Approach to Prolepsis,' *Narrative* 13.2 (2005) 131.

<sup>22</sup> Black 44.

In this chapter, the nameless narrating character recalls the advice about writing he had received from a former girlfriend, who suggested ‘always begin *in medias res*’ (HTFIT 1) and thus he continues:

Having set myself the task of providing a full account of the events that have exercised considerable media attention in Denmark in recent months and that involved me, though not mentioned by name, I now wish that I had paid more attention to her words. (HTFIT 1)

In spite of its apparent simplicity the final part of the quotation is rich in implied meanings and intentions. Through a volitive verb expressing deontic modality (wish), the subject in a specific narrating ‘now-time’ looks back to a narrated ‘past-time’ and from there he somehow foresees the future by suggesting that ‘something’ was bound to happen in a kind of ‘middle-time’, syntactically cued by the use of past perfect (‘had paid’). From a pragmatic perspective, this tense and aspect signal a sort of aftermath, namely ‘the time – however long it may be – during which the event or state seems to continue to have consequences’,<sup>23</sup> hence the doubts and uneasy feeling that haunt the narrating character. Furthermore, two other elements contribute to the creation of this type of sensation: the intensifying, evaluative and attention-getting adjective ‘considerable’ and the place deictical ‘Denmark’, which very easily the reader will mentally associate with the recent cases of religion-related abusive cartoons and shootings in the Scandinavian area, along with a generalised feeling of xenophobia spreading in Europe and in the world. The Nordic reference thus triggers echoes of tension and instability (i.e. the case of the controversial 2005 Danish cartoons), but also might suggest and memories of attacks and fear (the bombings that took place in Norway in 2011).

The occurrence of time expressions such as ‘later’, ‘later on’, ‘in my memory’, ‘recollection’ and ‘in retrospect’ is statistically salient, and generally these function through paradox because even if they technically point back to some past context, often emphasised by anaphoric repetition, in reality from the past they orientate the prediction for the future within a past context. What operates here is an almost contradictory mechanism that linguistically shapes the mystery of the story since ‘on the one hand, it seems to be pushing toward a solution, while on the other it endeavours to maintain the enigma as long as possible in order to secure its own existence’.<sup>24</sup> These structures anticipate at least a portion of the narrative, and in doing thus they ideologically try to persuade the reader to guide (or confound) their comprehension. This is a selection of examples of how such elements function in the text:

In later months, we would get used to such sudden disappearances by Karim Bhai. (HTFIT 22)

But the second kind of phone call was different and much rarer. So rare that we paid it sufficient attention only in retrospect, when suspicion left us with no choice. (HTFIT 32)

Later, when I mentioned these calls to the police, the interrogating officer looked visibly pleased. (HTFIT 33)

I mentioned this to the police officer later on. (HTFIT 35)

Karim, I realize in retrospect, was tense and nervous. (HTFIT 169)

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Griffiths, *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 104.

<sup>24</sup> Rimmon-Kenan 126.

These devices activate a series of deictic temporal shifts so that they manoeuvre the accessibility of information for the reader and the development of self-awareness, or they may even attribute a type of 'split self' to the narrator, a kind of double perspective to a certain degree.

It is worth repeating that the triggers here considered generate this perspective along with other stylistic constructions, in particular those that refer to memory processes, which depend on the mental capacity of the speaking subject (and implicitly the reader) to reconstruct and rearrange the succession of episodes into a logical chain of events, and which to a certain extent may produce ambiguity and uncertainty. Consequently, as the narrator frequently offers meta-textual reflections on his story, he also seems to disclaim responsibility for reliability and, in this fashion, his (sometimes partly) vague storytelling will anchor or orientate the reader's viewpoint and schemata.

Structurally, the sense of anticipation may also be suggested by the use of either verbs or nominal phrases expressing mental cognition processes and states, indicating not only the workings of memory but also its possible fallacies and conscious or unconscious reconfigurations. I will now take into consideration some examples and will begin with the use of verbs describing psychological activity:

Of course, I might have imagined this later on; at that moment, annotating my lecture on *Gulliver's Travels*, I did not really pay them too much attention. (HTFIT 61)

What else? What else do I recall from that period? The torrent of the past seeps the sieves of our memories and we clutch at the silt that sticks, trusting that it contains gold. Perhaps it does; perhaps not. (HTFIT 115)

What you might not recall is that in November a small postscript – almost unreported by the media – had been added to this tragedy. (HTFIT 133)

Semantically the verbs here employed indicate specific cognitive activities that by crossing past and future imply different degrees of self-awareness of the speaking subject (then/now) and therefore impinge on linear storytelling by offering a kind of anti-climax. In other words, to construct a narrative, which is typically rendered in a past tense, the narrator cumulatively uses verb forms and other textual means that from the beginning allude paradoxically to the final resolution of the events and therefore depart from chronological order. In the third extract, for example, the verb 'recall' working with a negative modal item ('might not') foregrounds a specific detail introduced by the cataphoric element 'what' which will resonate in the readers' mind as they continue navigating in the story-world.

The same type of effect may be generated by another grammatical category, i.e. nominal expressions (also in figurative terms) referring to time. Strategically these noun phrases are often embedded in rhetorical questions, which thanks to their ontological power further emphasise the obfuscation of borders between past and future, as shown by the following quotation:

We still had a lot to discover, and not least about Karim Bhai. Why does this memory come back to me, almost entirely, exactly in this part of my attempt to recollect and understand what really happened to all of us? (HTFIT 80).

Of course the exact meaning of 'this memory' can be inferred only by the support provided by context and co-text, but the recourse to such a lexically compact and semantically echoing expression displays a kind of 'iconising' function, since it draws the readers' attention to an apparently plain point. In this fashion it questions the distance between the two narratorial levels

(narrated time and narrating time) and signals the incursion of the future into the textual unfolding of the past, because it brings to light the semi-transparent micro-elements that proleptically have to be taken into account for the general comprehension of the story. As a matter of fact, it is through these stratagems that the entire novel builds up a sense of ambiguity, suspicion, and obsession concerning the idea of transnational identity, its perceptions and its possible forms of otherness against the backdrop of Western society, while provokingly it also projects the schema of the 'orientalised' migrant who 'has to be' an enemy and a terrorist, in Eco's definition, because of their physical/cultural/symbolic alterity.

The examples discussed above show how anticipation is textually constructed, but it might be argued that it also resides in the narrator's 'split self', namely the situation in which the speaking agent seems to experience a twofold perspective: self 1 presenting the story and self 2 as an earlier version of the subject immersed in the narrated story-world. In general, this binary positioning is frequent in first-person narrative texts because the narrator in some ways is inclined to manifest a certain change from his original position and thus advocates the presence of two, at least partially separate, selves. As Catherine Emmott notices, the instantiation of split self characteristically 'occurs at times of personal crisis',<sup>25</sup> and this modality 'reflects the sense of fragmentation of identity in postmodern society'.<sup>26</sup> The nameless protagonist, indeed, has to face a personal and professional crisis (which may mirror aspects of Khair's real experience) and approaches writing also as a therapeutic tool to elaborate on and come to terms with the many difficult facets of his life, including the mysterious matter with Karim, and his love affair with a woman nicknamed Ms Marx, but he also questions how the sense of identity filters through our perception of time, with the result of a dual point of view:

It was not the first time I wondered at the difference between what we seem to be and what we are to ourselves. Or is this too something that I think of now, penning down this account with all the advantages of hindsight? (HTFIT 79)

It strikes me that I am probably letting my current state of knowledge influence my narrative of those weeks to some extent. (HTFIT 100)

Both citations reveal how the complex and dialogic interplay of narratorial levels and selves constitutes the backbone of the entire novel inasmuch as the narrating voice induces readers to take up certain interpretive clues as anticipation-building elements. With the excuse of writing a biographical account of certain events, the nameless narrator brings to the fore the issue of how experience may affect or revise our understanding of reality. Of course the narrator's split self 2 (in the narrated story) does not know the entire story but, because his speech is juxtaposed with or influenced by the narrator's split self 1 (the narrating character), he naturally tends to insert some forms of narrative anticipation.

This articulated system of referencing is organised via deictic shifts that signal different degrees of consciousness for the narrator, so that in the first quotation the initial speaking 'I' using a past tense ('was not/wondered') is contrasted with a different version of the same individual who contemplates his current reality through the use of present tense with a time adverb ('I think of now'). Likewise, the second quotation illustrates the splitting of the self, with

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Emmott, "'Split Selves" in Fiction and in Medical "Life Stories",' in Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper, eds, *Cognitive Stylistics. Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002) 153.

<sup>26</sup> Emmott 153.

a confessional statement in which the narrator acknowledges his amplification of the story with the aid of opposing parallel structures ('my current' / 'those weeks') that engender anticipation. In both cases, the final outcome is a dialogic connection between the two selves and as Emmott points out 'both the perceiving self and the perceived self need to be included in a dynamic representation'.<sup>27</sup> In this framework, anticipation is a meaningful cognitive concept as long as something that is going to happen is assessed, therefore focusing on two time levels, a crystallised 'now' and the 'future' possible world, or two different selves with their corresponding views.

### **5. Concluding remarks: spoiling suspense and strengthening stereotypes?**

Bearing in mind all the textual examples of anticipation mentioned above, it is important to return to the question of why an author might want to spoil suspense, or, in other words, why readers would decide to read a book that, from the very opening, seems to tone down the components of narrative tension such as twists in the tale and dénouement by sketching at the beginning what will be revealed at the end. In pragmatic terms, the narrative anticipatory technique can represent a form of face-threatening act that might even annoy readers, as it disrupts a linear narrative style and thus requires a greater level of attention and elaboration. However, here I argue that Khair adopts this strategy as a provocative means of representation for the anxieties and contradictions of contemporary societies in the age of multicultural globalisation. In particular, in order to handle the thorny issues of cultural and transnational otherness (in terms of ethnicity, religion and difference), for the author the use of anticipation allows him to introduce, interrogate and deconstruct stereotypes<sup>28</sup> and their ideologies.

As I have argued in this article, the anticipatory structures at work in the novel depict the image of the orientalised 'other' and suggest that because of his 'difference' he has to embody a certain role, i.e. adhere to the cliché of the Eastern terrorist, which is culturally and socially 'invented' by the establishment as the 'enemy' because, as Umberto Eco affirms, it is fundamental for strong powers to create an adversary, an opponent onto which you can project fears, anxieties, obsessions and many other negative sentiments:

Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one.<sup>29</sup>

In this manner, the establishment not only legitimises its own decisions and actions, but also manipulates people and imposes ideologies of order, control and cultural superiority.

In processing the text, readers will normally invoke and rely on their schemas about binary otherness that is usually constructed and associated with fundamentalists through a set of linguistic, semiotic or other types of oppositions (e.g. white/Arab, western clothes/traditional Arab clothes, etc.), sometimes even in non-standard types of opposition, as demonstrated by Leslie Jeffries.<sup>30</sup> But here, because the narrative scenario is more articulated than what appears superficially, actually the task of the stereotype is not merely to confirm ideology and prejudice (eventually the pernicious role of secretive Karim in the 'Islamist Axe Plot' is reassessed), but

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<sup>27</sup> Emmott 177.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Amossy 'Stereotypes and Representation in Fiction,' *Poetics Today* 5.4 (1984) 689-70.

<sup>29</sup> Umberto Eco 2.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie Jeffries, *Opposition in Discourse* (London: Continuum, 2010).

rather to invite the readers to discuss and probably revise their schemata within a broader cultural context, e.g. by considering significant human concepts such as religion and culture not as monolithic entities but as individual constructs shaped by personal experiences. Ravi, Karim and the unnamed narrator for example interpret and construct their cultural baggage, including attitudes towards religion, society and politics, differently and as a consequence they cannot be distractedly pigeonholed together. In this light, Miall's view that 'the anticipatory function of literature provides degrees of freedom in our thinking and feeling that are perhaps only rarely available elsewhere'<sup>31</sup> can be fittingly extended to this novel, since it unfolds a discussion of current values, sentiments and movements that constitute the dominating paradigms of the globalised world. While the force of anticipation might result in defamiliarisation and confusion, this has to be interpreted within the author's intentions and attempts to grasp a complex, changing and challenging reality, since, for Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández and Om Prakash Dwivedi, 'in his novels, Khair ponders the uncertainty of life and how such quandaries compel individuals to fight for survival and to subvert the current given order which does not completely satisfy human needs, if at all.'<sup>32</sup>

According to Umberto Eco, 'a text is a lazy machine that expects a lot of collaboration from the reader'<sup>33</sup> and as a result it is open to interpretive pathways which perhaps undermine previous ideological positions, and thus lead to a process of schema refreshment. In this sense, anticipatory structures work as creative narrative devices as they require readers to cognitively elaborate the narrative material to extract meaning, and they are reminiscent of the sense of prophecy that blends together 'the real, the fiction, or something indistinguishable between them'.<sup>34</sup> Hence stems the warning against the deceiving force of intolerant ideology that Tabish Khair translates into his writing.

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<sup>31</sup> Miall 296.

<sup>32</sup> Gámez-Fernández and Dwivedi xviii.

<sup>33</sup> Umberto Eco, *Six Walks* 28.

<sup>34</sup> Alison Gibbons "'That's How Quickly Your Life Can Change'". Adam Thirlwell's Serpentine Bridge Commission and Everybody Prophecy', *Notes on Metamodernism*, (2015), <<http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/02/12/thats-how-quickly-your-life-can-change/>>

Spoiling suspense? Anticipatory structures as creative narrative devices in Tabish Khair's diasporic fiction. Esterino Adami.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 9 no. 1, November 2016.

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