

Emotional Resonance Through Language: Critiquing And Evaluating The Experimental Techniques In The Works Of George Saunders

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ABSTRACT

George Saunders is popularly known for his unique narrative approach and exploration of contemporary societal issues. He is probing the natural world in a fictional style. He is extensively favored for language-related trends in his works which include; a distinctive narrative voice characterized by dark humor, satire, and a blend of formal and colloquial language, and these methods Saunders are undeniable. The paper examines and critiques Saunders' experiments with language and form. He has employed unconventional syntax, created new words or phrases, and the way he used the repetition of rhetorical effect. The themes in his stories are particularly dystopian yet authentic, the fatal deaths and the fantasy world that creates a ditch for the people who live in the imaginary land. It studies the new trends in the techniques that contributed to the distinctive style of his prose. Examining his debut novel Lincoln in the Bardo to his latest work Liberation Day, he portrays characters from various backgrounds and socioeconomic strata which requires him to capture the nuances of different linguistic registers that can range from the polished language of corporate jargon to the congenial speech of a common-man, satirical language and social commentary are some of his exclusivity. Saunders often uses fracturing narratives depicting divergent perspectives or periods in a non-linear fashion which might involve shifts in tense, point of view, and distance narratives that help convey distinctive layers of the story. Moreover, the slang in almost every text sometimes flabbergasts the readers yet gains appraisal and recognition.

KEYWORDS: George Saunders, Language, Themes, Experiment, Characters.

Introduction

Words matter a lot in ¹the text, one can affect the readers, listeners, and audience. George Saunders is an American author known for his brilliant narration yet well-known for his satirical and fictional short stories and essays. His works often explore social cognition, social cognition indicates the way an individual perceives, interprets, and understands the social work around them. These themes in Saunders' works are often intertwined with his keen observations of contemporary society, consumer culture, and human behavior. Saunders also explores how technology influences social interactions and cognitive processes for example, in "The Semplica-Girl Diaries" from the book Pastoralia, he examines the implications of consumerism and desire for status using futuristic elements to comment on the present. The characters' interactions without technology highlight how it shapes their perceptions of themselves and others. One can admit how much rhetoric and bizarre choice of words he employs in his works. The slang or the words below the belt

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have made the readers uncomplicated and straightforward, which might amuse his readers but can agitate the critics. Firstly, ‘the anthology’, the name of his texts is one of the stories in the collection of his short stories. For instance, the Tenth of December is the name of a book and also one of the stories in it. A Swim in a Pond in the Rain is a story within a story. The book consists of teaching some lessons for young writers about writing and reading skills and the lessons are taught through the other short stories giving examples of the works of famous Russian authors like Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, and Nicolai Gogol. Saunders appreciates some parts and also criticizes the results whenever necessary. In some of their works, Saunders, linguistic authenticity, he portrays characters from various backgrounds and socio-economic strata. This requires him to capture the nuances of different linguistic registers, which can range from the polished language of corporate jargon to the informal speech of everyday people.

Saunders’ debut *Lincoln in the Bardo*, is popularly known for its narrative style. The specialty of the story narration is through conversations, the conversations not between human beings but between the souls, who are dead in some or the other misfortunes. Saunders has interestingly employed several ghosts’ talking styles in the novel. Using words, special gestures, and unique styles of expressing their emotions and stories helps the readers recognize the speaker. The novel is no doubt an amalgamation of fun and lamentation, more importantly, it is a combination of fiction and non-fiction. Saunders is one of the limited writers who has produced a work that has unquestionably won ‘The Man Booker Prize’ in 2017. The opening lines of the novel itself create engrossment and curiosity. “On our wedding day I was forty-six, she was eighteen. Now, I know what you are thinking: older man” (Saunders 3). The use of shorter and brief sentences while conversing between the ghosts, and the use of full stops frequently just after two or three words is another technique of Saunders to differentiate the speakers in the novel has been the rare narrative style in an anthology. For instance, “And that is how we lived. We became friends. Dear friends. That was all (3). The novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* is presented as a series of fragmented and often contradictory voices, blending historical accounts, fictional monologues, and ghostly dialogues. This style creates a vivid and haunting portrayal of the afterlife and the inner emotional landscapes of the characters. The book features a multitude of characters, each with their own voice and perspective. These characters often interject and interact with one another, offering a layered and complex portrayal of events and emotions surrounding the death of Abraham Lincoln’s Son, Willie. The ghostly characters like Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III, the Reverend Everly Thomas, Mrs. Elizabeth Crawford, Elise Traylor, etc. If anyone notices the characters’ names are spelled with small letters, Saunders wants to indicate that they are dead and not alive human beings, they are only souls conversing with each other in the graveyard. Much of the novel is composed of short quotations and citations from historical sources, contemporary accounts, and fictional characters. While reading the text, a reader can recognize the lines he/she has read somewhere. “Every nation, race, rank, age, height, breadth, voice-pitch, hairstyle, posture, and fragrance seemed represented: a rainbow come to life, calling out in manifold accents.” — Garrett, op. cit. (11). Some historical sources like “The war was less than a year old. We did not yet know what it was.” In “A Thrilling Youth: A Civil War Adolescence,” by E. G. Frame. (12). And the speech of a character “Many apologies, young sir. I only meant, in my way, to welcome you.” — Roger Bevins III (26). These snippets create a collage-like effect that contributes to the novel’s unique narrative structure.

Saunders shifts between different tones and writing styles. “That kind of touching —” — Roger Bevins III, “But this—this was different.” — Roger Bevins III (69). These long hyphens usually suggest a long pause while talking but here it’s interruptions. The character hasn’t finished the lines and the other one hinders and continues with one’s dialogue. Saunders has used this technique in many of his works. The dialogues or the speeches of the characters are not sophisticated and sober, they are very common like the speeches of an ordinary man having a conversation in their daily lives. “It was a terrible fite as I believe

I rote you. Tom Gilman is ded as I believe I rote you.” (137). Despite the unconventional narrative style, Saunders can convey deep emotional truths about grief, loss, and the human experience. Saunders often presents characters with moral dilemmas, forcing them to confront their values and beliefs. This exploration of ethical decision-making contributes to the social cognitive aspects of his works, as characters navigate complex situations that challenge their understanding of right and wrong. The fragmented structures allow for a more immediate and raw exploration of these emotions. The characters’ voices are often presented in dialogue in monologue form, revealing their thoughts, emotions, and backstories. This contributes to the intimate connection the reader forms with the characters, even as they exist, even as they exist in a ghostly state. The repetition and variation throughout the novel, and sometimes with slight variations create a rhythmic quality to the prose and reinforce important themes and emotions. Discussing the isolation and connection in Saunders’s works, the characters in his stories may grapple with feelings of alienation or may find unexpected connections amid their struggles. These narratives prompt readers to reflect on their social dynamics and consider the impact of isolation on individual and collective well-being.

Saunders often blends humor with moments of profound pathos. This combination of the absurd and the deeply emotional is a hallmark of his writing style. Lincoln in the Bardo is experimental formatting, the amalgamation of the facts and fiction, the facts of the death of Abraham Lincoln’s Son, and the fiction of the afterlife, the novel includes elements such as footnotes, lists, and typographical variations, adding to its unconditional nature. These formatting choices contribute to the overall texture of the narrative. Saunders’ writing style challenges traditional narrative norms, inviting readers to engage actively with the text and piece together the story from multiple perspectives. This approach creates a rich and immense reading experience that delves into themes of grief, empathy, and human connection.

The Tenth of December is another collection of short stories published in 2013. In this anthology, Saunders adopts a distinctive and multi-faceted writing style. The short story ‘Exhortation’ in the group Tenth of December starts in the form of a report writing or a kind of formal letter,

“DATE: Apr 6
TO: Staff
FROM: Todd Birnie, Divisional Director
RE: March Performances Stats.” (83)

and the Capitalization, “FRIEND TO ALL THE BEST..... AMONG US LIKE YOU, ONLY BETTER” (107). Saunders’ writing is known for its conversational and accessible language. He often uses everyday speech patterns, slang, and idiomatic expressions making his characters’ voices relatable and authentic. “Was it over? It appeared to be over. Could he sneak out? He could if he bent low.” (99). One can observe through these lines, that the lines are randomly mentioned without providing the speaker’s name, which could be in the form of a dialogue. It’s all up to the readers to read the text carefully and interpret or assume who the speakers of the lines written in the paragraph like an essay. Besides being simplified the format he uses is complicated. The names of some liquids like “Darkenflinx™ in your MobiPaks™” (55) indicate how significant it is for Saunders to do the detailing in his writing. The names were wisely chosen to name the liquids in the short story ‘Escape from the Spiderhead’ from the Tenth of December. The slang used boldly in the stories makes the readers more thoughtful and helps them understand the text, especially for the current generation who are familiar with such words. “It was weird. I had the memory of fucking Heather” (52), “Fuck. Get in there, Verlaine” (71). In some of the stories, he has used slang with special symbols like F...k.

Saunders uses humor to both lighten and highlight the darker aspects of his stories, creating a sense of contrast that emphasizes the human condition. He uses his stories as

vehicles for social commentary. He tackles issues such as consumerism, class disparity, the dehumanizing effects of technology, and the complexities of human relationships. “What? Alison? Raped? Killed? Oh God. Raped and killed” (21) from the short story ‘Victory Lap’ in the collection of *Tenth of December*, these lines hit alarm the readers because the lines are spoken by a little boy worried about his friend. The story ‘Sticks’ taken from the book *Tenth of December* again talks about difficulties in relationships and finally results in death. For instance, the old man from the above-mentioned story, is left alone by his family members, he has lost his wife and his son leaves him in the house after the marriage because his father was not willing to move to the new house with his son and the family, since there were memories of his wife in the old house. After years when they come to visit their dad, they mind him mentally ill which makes him act weirdly, all his actions are strange. “Dad began dressing the pole with more complexity and less discernible logic Mom died and he dressed the pole as Death and hung from the crossbar photos of Mom as a baby” (30).

Besides, addressing the theme of human relationships, Saunders has also addressed an important aspect of dehumanization in the short story *Fox 8*. The story is narrated by *Fox 8*, who is disappointed and astonished after hearing and witnessing what humans say and do. Since the fox is the speaker, therefore, it is understood that the words and diction would not be written grammatically correctly, and the obvious spelling errors. Saunders takes this opportunity to portray a rare technique of writing. “I saw the huje and small Yumen (human) doing such things to *Fox 7* as: further hits with their hats, and kiks and stomps, wile making adishunal noises I had never herd a Yuman make, as if this is fun! the small Yuman picked up *Fox 7*, now ded; and flung him threw the air!” (31, 32). The saddening and depressing lines ever found in his collection. These themes are woven into his narratives in ways that encourage readers to reflect on contemporary society. Saunders excels at developing multidimensional characters within the confines of short stories. He explores their motivations, fears, and aspirations, giving the reader a deep understanding of their inner lives.

The emotional resonance of Saunders’ stories is a hallmark of his writing style. He masterfully navigates between humor and heartache, often within the same story, evoking a wide range of emotions from readers. He occasionally experiments with narrative structure, employing non-linear timelines, shifts in perspective, and unconventional formatting. These structural choices can mirror the disorientation and fragmented nature of modern life. Blending the elements of realism and the fantastic is best witnessed in the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, creating a sense of unease and wonder within his stories. This blending allows him to explore profound truths through the lens of the extraordinary. Considering and examining the language that he employs is marked by his inventive use of language. He crafts unique metaphors and descriptions that bring his stories to life and contribute to the overall atmosphere. Most of his works incorporate symbolic elements and metaphors that add depth to stories. These symbols can represent broader themes and help readers engage with the text on multiple levels. Moreover, George Saunders’ writing techniques maintain his signature blend of humor, empathy, social commentary, and a willingness to explore the boundaries of storytelling. His ability to craft both relatable characters and fantastical situations makes his work thought-provoking and emotionally resonant.

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