Abstract: The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years is a novel written by the great Kirghiz writer, Chingiz Aytmatov. In this novel, the writer adopted a stream-of-consciousness method of narrative, containing three temporal planes: the past, the present and the future in just one single day, as its name suggests. Through a parallel and fragmented narrative, Chingiz Aytmatov explored the theme of memory, humanity and the dictation of mainstream power over individual freedom.

Key Words: narrative methods, Chingiz Aytmatov, The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years, mainstream power.

1. Introduction

The first narrator of The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years is Yedigei, a worker in the Boranly-Burannyi junction on the vast Kazakh steppe. The story begins with the death of his closest friend, Kazangap, another worker at the junction. Then Yedigei set on a trip to Ana-Beiit, where his ancestors lied, to bury Kazangap. On his way to Ana-Beiit, he had remembered the old legends on this ancient land, and the life stories of himself, the died Kazangap and another family at the junction, i.e. the Abutalip family.

But what Yedigei didn’t realize was that, up in the space, two cosmonauts had found an extraterrestrial civilization known as Lesnaya Grud by chance. They
excitedly reported their findings to the ground control and they decided to accept the invitation of these aliens to visit their planet. However, when the governments had known this, they decided to abandon these two cosmonauts and launch a defensive system named the “Hoop” around the Earth to prevent any further approach of extraterrestrial civilization.

When Yedigei and his fellows finally arrived at Ana-Beiit, they were told that the place was now a military base, and no one was allowed to enter. So they had to bury Kazangap outside the military base and returned in disappointment when at the same time, the “Hoop” was launched into the space, and they were all frightened by the flames of the rocket.

2. Narrative Methods

There are roughly three parallel temporal planes in this novel: the past, represented by the ancient legends of mankurt and the love tragedy of Raimaly-agá and Begimai; the present, i.e. the life stories of the people at Boranly-Burannyi junction; the future, namely, the encounter of extraterrestrial civilization by the spaceship Convention. This arrangement of plots is by no means a spur of the moment. The author tried to convey the following messages through his unique way of narrative:

First, the inter-connectivity of the past, present and the future. In this novel, the three story lines are intertwined, as if happened simultaneously. By this seemingly confusing way of narrative, the author told the readers that the past could influence the present and the future, and forgetting the past could lead to catastrophic results. It is also worth mentioning that all of the stories are tragedies, which implies that humanity has remained the same, and people just don’t learn from their past.
Secondly, the isolation and alienation of human’s spiritual state. The whole novel was set in an isolated junction on the Kazakh steppe. The author had described more than once the loneliness and bleakness of the Boranly-Burannyi junction. The purpose of this choice of setting is to reveal the lost and lonely state of human mind. In Yedigei’s memory, he was once lived beside the Aral Sea as a fisherman. When his wife was pregnant with their first child, she had this strange yearning – to hold and touch a golden sturgeon. Yedigei prayed to the sea and fulfilled his wife’s wish. This memory was beautifully and poetically written by the author, posing a distinct contrast with Yedigei’s later life at the junction. The change of living environment suggests a loss of warmth, which could be further proved by the fact that all the main characters at the junction are outcasts from their previous home, for example, Yedigei lost his home because of the war and environmental problems, and Abutalip was a veteran who was persecuted merely because he was once a captive.

Thirdly, the unnaturalness and absurdity of modern life. Technically speaking, the science fiction part almost has nothing to do with the main story line, because the two legends at least come from Yedigei’s memory, while the story of the spaceship Convention is told by the omniscient author, who inserted this science fiction here and there throughout the novel. This story line adds to the absurdity of the modern human life: on an uneventful day, when most of the ordinary people continue with their daily life, who would have imagined that they were secretly deprived of the possibility of embracing a brand-new universe? This kind of absurdity was emphasized by the author’s description of Yedigei and his fellows frightened by the gigantic flames of the rocket. They didn’t know what had happened, and just ran madly out of fear, creating a dramatic art effect.

Last but not least, the seemingly unrelated stories actually point to the same theme – the dictation of mainstream power over individual freedom.  

The legend of
mankurt is recognized as a fable reveling the appalling result of forgetting one’s past and origin – becoming a working machine and a slave obeying whatever the master says. The story of the poet and singer Raimaly-aga and the young woman Begimai reveals the worldly oppression towards pure love. While the science fiction of Convention alarms us that the absurdity and humanity will hinder the progress of human civilization. All these seemingly distinct stories actually repeat the same theme from different aspects, just like “a leaf contains all the rich experience of a plant.”

3. Conclusion
The author adopted a fragmented and intertwined narrative method, creating an almost dazzling reading experience for us. In this novel, time is not linear, but circular, with tragedies happened again and again at different time and space, revealing a sad fact – human denies itself a better future because of distrust, prejudices and selfishness. The author had showed his deep concern and humanistic care for the unnatural and absurd situation of human beings.

References