Max Johnson

532 words

The idea of a non-linear method of story telling can, in certain circumstances, drastically increase the effect of a story. The most obvious way it improves the nature of storytelling is that it humanizes it. When meeting a new person, you rarely if ever learn about his or her life in chronological order. Instead, you learn relevant bits slowly and out of order. When someone introduces himself or herself, they do not start with the fact that they were molested. Instead, it is only after you get to know this person and have some base level of connection with him or her that you would ever learn about such a thing. The non-linear nature of Obasan does exactly this. You learn small tidbits about the character, pieces of background information, like her hesitant reaction to Aunt Emily’s feisty urge to solve the world’s problems, giving you an idea of her basic personality before you learn about the tragedies of her life and family. It is as though you are meeting a new friend for the first time, as opposed to simply being told about someone’s life. The effect of getting to know someone before learning about their tragedies is that the level of empathy you experience is drastically increased, simply because you already care about the character, on some level, before you hear about those horrors. In this way the book is more influential and memorable, and its lessons have a greater impact as a side effect.

Moreover, shifting the scene rapidly and moving from differently emotional scenarios causes the reader to feel a greater turmoil as they continue through. As opposed to having every happy and depressing moment in the book be its own discrete section or chapter, combining them all into a constantly shifting melting pot of emotion will evoke a greater interest in the reader as they will not know what to expect and will be greater influenced as they slowly piece together the tragedies and uplifting moments overtime, prolonging the emotional effect. By stopping in the middle of a story that appears as though it might be a scene of molestation with Old Man Gower, and briefly returning to the present timeline and leaving the reader on a cliffhanger, the fear for Naomi is suspended like an object floating in air before it falls as the reader becomes impatient and worried to find out what happens.

Furthermore, telling non-chronological stories forces the reader to pay attention as they are forced to keep multiple time lines organized and consistent in their heads. As the book presents more of a mental challenge to the reader, it encourages them to seek understanding the narrative as its own reward. The reader is forced to wrestle with the work, making sense of its inherent chaos and nonlinear methodology. This is a fantastic feature for a book intended for study to have, as it will naturally draw those inclined to challenging-but-rewarding reads. This does have its drawbacks, however. By making the book more difficult to read, the writer alienates the casual audience. Therefore, while the message of the book may be more potent to those who receive it, it will reach and influence fewer.