

The beginning of Denis Villeneuve's movie 'Arrival' opens with the sonorous strings of Max Richter's meditation on violence and futility, 'On the Nature of Daylight'.

Dr. Banks' voice floats out of the darkness,

'I used to think this was the beginning of your story.

Memory is a strange thing. It doesn't work like I thought it did.

We are so bound by time,

by its order.'

We then see a montage of Dr. Banks' daughter, Hannah - her birth, scenes of her life, and her death as a young woman. Because that montage takes place at the very beginning of the movie, the audience who is 'bound by time. . .by its order' is lead to believe those events occur in the past relative to the majority of 'Arrival's' story.

On the first page of Ted Chiang's 'Story of Your Life' which 'Arrival' was based on, the reader is dazzled with a careening shift of verb tenses from past, present, to future, aspected with the simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous. This is because the central theme to both narratives is time and our perception of it from a 3rd dimensional sequential viewpoint to the 4th dimension in which the whole of time is a simultaneity.

Chiang's impressive use of verb tenses conveys Dr. Banks' new perception of simultaneous time and Villeneuve uses cinematic language to do the same. The big themes explored are not only humanity's experience and relationship to time, but also free will; if you knew every moment of your future life, would you change the events of your life? Or are we fated to be bound by our perception of time like watching the movie of our life and knowing every plot point?