

MARRIAGE OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONCEPT OF TIME IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S 'TO THE LIGHTHOUSE'

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to study Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse with reference to the modern theories of time and temporality propounded by Henri Bergson, and Heidegger. The study traces the influence of Bergson's theory of time on Virginia Woolf's fiction by investigating the nature of narrative time and the technique(s) used by Woolf to dismantle the traditional notion of time. As such, the focus of investigation, in this project, is the affinity of Bergson's philosophical conceptualization of the category of time and Virginia Woolf's literary presentation of the new notion of time through the spatial and temporal experience of her characters.

In the process of investigating the narrative flow of time, this paper attempts to address the two crucial questions: First, does there exist systematic relationship, and hence interdependence, between French philosopher Bergson's theorization of time and English novelist Virginia Woolf's narrativization of structures of time? and Secondly, what narrative technique(s) has Virginia Woolf used in her fiction to bring out Bergsonian concept of time?

In order to address these two significant questions, the paper begins with articulating main postulations of Bergson's theory of time. Next, to forge a marriage of philosophy and literature, To the Lighthouse is analyzed comprehensively to study the application of the philosophical concept of time upon the literary art of Woolf. How Woolf has explored and integrated into her fiction the innovative conceptualization of time, the study argues, is one of the features of Woolf's departure from the traditional art of novel-writing. The dissertation concludes pointing out the striking similarities, as well as peculiarities, between the eminent philosopher's conceptualization of time and the intellectual novelist's treatment of time in the fictional world of To the Lighthouse.

Key-words: Philosophical, Literary, Dismantle, Notion, Affinity, Conceptualization, Spatial, Narrativization, Postulations

Introduction

When we, the readers, are engaged in the act of explaining or interpreting the literary work, especially the one philosophical in nature, we are likely to be trapped in conceptualization, for without conceptualization of the ideas discussed in a particular literary work, it can't be understood in its proper spirit. In case of Virginia Woolf's fiction, particularly in *To the Lighthouse* which is thickly strewn with philosophical discussions of time, though always in aesthetic and poetic way, I strongly believe that understanding of her literary phenomenon inevitably entails the politics of concepts. Concepts help one understand and define literary phenomenon. According to Bergson, however, certain concepts cannot be conceptualized as they exist within the flow of reality. This is particularly true in case of analyzing or defining the concept of time in a complete literary work such as *To the Lighthouse*.

Defining life and the fluid movement of reality, according to Bergson, is impossible, time and temporality in this regard offer a possible solution, an answer to representing the indefinite movement of reality. We will define in the following pages, focusing on time and temporality, the relation between the phenomenon of time and its explanation in the context of Woolf's artistic creation to the Lighthouse.

Describing a link between the last one hundred years' scientific/intellectual movements and the artistic field of novel writing, Kohler observes, "The novel has been assaulted also from without, for it has felt the impact of every intellectual development of the last hundred years. After, Bergson, Newton and Einstein, it could no longer evade the scientific necessity of new concept of time and space" (331).

David Daiches, in this context, observes that the new or modern novel evolved out of the unshakable influence of time theories. Instead of being conceived, as it were traditionally, as a series of separate points, time came to be viewed as a continuously flowing phenomenon.

It is argued that Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* plays with different kinds of temporalities, each temporality peculiar to one character which may be called his or her personal temporality. This idea of each person's possession of and movement with internalized temporality relates closely to Bakhtin's concept of chronotype also, which basically means time and space. "The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhtin 85).

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between Henri Bergson's Theory of time and Virginia Woolf's concept of time as portrayed in the "To the Lighthouse"?
2. How does the differing individual temporality of the characters lend organic unity to the novel?
3. How does Virginia Woolf's fiction represent her modern, philosophical conception of time and the form of novel?

Research Methodology

Within the qualitative paradigm, the methodology that we believe synchronizes well with the Hermeneutic interpretation of the novel is the reader-response theory, therefore, we intend to use it for the Hermeneutic interpretation of the concepts of time, temporality and the relevant issues of existence, death etc. portrayed in *To the Lighthouse*. What a reader does actually when he is engaged in the activity of reading a text is the effort to understand and then interpret the issues raised by the text. His/her understanding of the text under perusal, however, becomes profound and critical under the lines suggested about specific concepts by theorists, as in this case the actualization of the enhanced meanings of the concept of time takes place through the perspectives provided by critics and theorists.

We intend to analyze and explicate this concept of temporality in connection with Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur along with the rather introductory work of Henri Bergson to resolve the issue whether various temporalities inside on novel, as in *To the Lighthouse*, give the interpretation of another translation of the broken down text and how much this new understanding of the original influences the interpretation of past comprehension of the text. To respond to these inquiries, we have decided to deal with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* since this novel gives sufficient proof of the relationship among the different sorts of temporalities which depict assortment of time all through the book. These temporalities, usually, are impacting temporalities of various characters, like the two clashing temporalities of Mrs. Ramsay and James Ramsay. Hypothetical structure accessible to investigate the inconsistent temporalities is the one talked about by Martin Heidegger in his book "being and Time". Bakhtin's idea of chronotype will additionally assist us with relegating each character an individual fleetingness, to explore how the interrelation of these contrasting temporalities assist the interpretation with understanding the novel as a comprehensive product.

The philosophical theories of time given by the philosophers mentioned above will only make the backdrop of the study; however as my original intention is to unravel the

literary problem of time related to the characters. As it is obvious at this point that we intend to use Hermeneutists as theorists as my theoretical guides to gain a new insight into the novel through analyzing different temporalities experienced by the leading characters of the novel, especially drawing upon the novel's section 'Time Passes'. Since Hermeneutics is basically concerned with the interpretation of the text, it will help immensely to understand as well as explain the text under consideration.

Heidegger in his book "Being and Time" has described the existence of a person inserted upon the temporality of the subject and thus establishes a relationship between the existence and temporality lived by the individual. My second theorist we have decided to work with-Paul Ricoeur- belongs to the same tradition of Hermeneutics as Heidegger, but he approaches time from a different perspective. He is interested in the different formal and structural temporalities of the novel; therefore, differentiating between the temporality of the narration and the temporality of the narrated this work on differing temporalities of the novel will help us land on a different understanding and interpretation of the novel.

Literature Review

Seldon's remarks about the inextricable association of the reader and the text in the production of the meanings have special significance. He mentions that "Gadamer argued that a literary text does not pop into the world as a finished and neatly parceled bundle of meaning, rather meaning depends upon the historical situation of the interpreter" (62). Thus ruling out the possibility of the monolithic, universalistic and exclusive meanings of the text, he means that reader and the text interact to (re)create the meanings of the text, its social meanings, each time it is read. It is, therefore, only through the positive interaction of the reader with the text that the meanings of the text are realized. It follows, therefore, that we, the readers, give and should positively engage in imparting specific meanings to the text speaking from our unique historical and by implication intellectual position.

Considering the literature review which will help and improve the resulting examination, we will consolidate three creators whose work is similarly significant in the fields of writing and reasoning and hypothesis: Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur and Hans-George Gadamer. Fundamentally, these three creators address two axes; Heidegger's proposition will be considered in reasonable insight about his thoughts on the object of study, for example time. Then again, Ricoeur and Gadamer's thoughts, subordinate to the comprehension of rational abstract idea of time, will assist us with getting a more clear knowledge to comprehend the ideas of hermeneutics and scholarly hermeneutics, under the extent of artistic hypothesis

Having theoretical lines been drawn, it is significant to contextualize the study by placing ourselves, i.e., the readers into modern context, therefore, in spite of this arrangement, I consider necessary, in the first place, to situate ourselves as readers in the modernist context in which my analysis is based upon.

"Modernist writing is most particularly noted for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism, and for its attempt to create a 'tradition of the new'. Its historical and social background includes the emergence of the New Woman, the peak and downturn of the British Empire, unprecedented technological change, the rise of the Labour party, the appearance of factory-line mass production, war in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Modernism has therefore almost universally been considered a literature of not just change but crisis" (Childs 15). Shift from external reality to inner world is characteristic feature of the modernist literature of which *To the Lighthouse* is a prime example. "Modernist writers focused on psychological, introspection and individual consciousness" (Childs 26)

“In recent times, partly as a result of increased speculation into the nature of states of consciousness, writers have become dissatisfied with these traditional methods. They have realized that a psychologically accurate account of what a man is at any given moment can be given neither in terms of a static description of his characters nor in terms of a groups of chronologically arranged reactions to a series of circumstances” (Daiches 2:15).

As a matter of first importance, thinking about the original idea of Heidegger, we will think about a portion of the proposition made by Martin Heidegger in his work "Being and Time". On the off chance that we needed to characterize Heidegger's most significant work, we would say that it represents the unification of the three key ideas: presence, fleetingness, and finitude (passing) and every one of these three will be referenced in the investigation of the message. I accept that these three ideas are firmly interrelated, as the examination of *To the Lighthouse* would affirm; in this way, we imagine that when breaking down time inside a scholarly work focusing on points, for example, presence and demise ends up being extremely helpful as far as settling the subject of time and the interconnectedness of time, spot and character in deciding the fleetingness. As called attention to by Heidegger, the main attribute of a credible being on the planet is development. A true Dasein exists on schedule, stays aware of the progression of time and is continually encountering the impacts of time, since the person is in a steady development towards death. "Living is moving, despite the fact that all development is, concerning we all, towards death as end point and basic inspiration" (Miller 93). At long last, and concerning the abstract hypothesis that I will use to help my investigation; I will consider the recommendations made by Hans-George Gadamer, another driving hermeneutic. My advantage on Gadamer can be followed to my perusing of two books: "Artistic Theory" by Terry Eagleton and "A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory" by Raman Selden. When finding out with regards to peruser reaction hypotheses I comprehended that what I expected with my examination was to some way or another make a dialogic work in which all its consolidating parts would at last bring forth one more understanding on the issue of transience inside *To the Lighthouse*. "It is the peruser who applies the code wherein the message is composed and in this manner realizes what might some way or another stay just conceivably significant" (Selden (58).

Analysis of the Treatment of Time in ‘To The Lighthouse’

Virginia Woolf's reputation as a foremost modernist writer rests upon many distinctions: her innovative use of the technique of stream of consciousness; feminization of novel; revitalization of the concept of androgynous mind; Feminist assertion for woman to have a room of her own; and incorporation into her fiction the modern philosophic-scientific conceptualization of time. Uncomfortable with the traditional treatment of time by the Victorian novelists who structured their plots on the Linear, chronological movement of time, Woolf acutely felt the need for her contemporaries to abandon the fake realism in favor of psychological realism which she believed was the true vehicle for the representation of inner reality, fragmented structure of human consciousness. Her search for a new method, a new technique that could depict the incoherent mix of myriad impressions felt in human mind irrespective of the artificial division of time into past, present and future, the arbitrary classification of time into separate units, led her to review and radically transform the traditional understanding of time which centered upon conceiving time as a series of events that were measured by symbolic yardsticks of hours, days, months, years and so on. She considered this conceptualization of time not only severely wanting in substance, but also a grave distortion of the way in which time actually influences and is influenced by human lives, therefore, her characters like Mrs. Ramsay, James, Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*

experience time in non-chronological fashion and live out the most significant moments of time that stretch to immeasurable time.

Contrary to the externality of time, Woolf believed, under the influence of Bergsonian theory, that time exists within the individual which he/she experiences in a unique way stretching the moments to eternity and vice-versa, and this internalized vision of time makes the individual exist in the “time past” or present or future depending upon the train of thought moving from his/her mind. Time experienced by the leading characters of *To the Lighthouse* does not flow in one onward direction taking the characters along; rather its flow is to and fro, constant but back, and forward. Mrs. Ramsay, for example, in the beginning of the novel watching her son, James cutting pictures from the catalogue, disconnects herself from the present moment and with one swift flight of imagination dashes into the future, constructing for James the times when he will be successful professional, thus transcending from the moment in re-constitutive memory, though physically being the part of the room where she is with her son. The representation of such different vision of time was not possible through the traditional approach, so Woolf often chose non-chronological patterns for her novels experimenting with formal and structural elements of the narrative as well as the narrator. The purpose of this thesis, as described above, is the study of Woolf’s modern treatment of time in contrast with the conventional treatment of time, the formative influences upon her concept of time, and the role of modern hermeneutical studies in seeing her use of time from different perspective, thus opening new vistas in the study of time in Woolf’s fiction.

We have chosen to begin my analysis of time from “Time Passes”, one of three major divisions of *To the Lighthouse* for the primary reason that it at once engaged my attention as a problematic object of study. When read in continuation with “The Window” the first problem it poses for the reader concerning the idea of time is how much time has really passed since the section “The Window” ended, and while reflecting over the span of time passed one wonders whether the time has really passed or the reader is merely given an illusion of the pastness of time. Whatever the truth of the matter be, the section “Time Passes” needs a very cautious reading. During this section Prue hints at the ambiguity of the situation by saying “One can hardly tell which the sea is and which is the Land”(Woolf 121) suggesting stating the absolute reality of a phenomenon is almost impossible because reality is not only relative but also in flow, therefore what is true about reality is its relativity and fluidity. Prue’s statement, pregnant with semantic suggestions, refers not only to the blurring of the sea and the sky, the two broad divisions of the universe, but also points to the fuzziness of temporality.

A few opening pages of the section “Time-Passes” give hard time to the reader in deciding whether he/she has come years away from the time of in “The Window” or only a tow-week’s time has elapsed since the “The Window” closed. This certain ambiguity about the nature of time passed or past embroils the reader into deciding for himself/herself the amount of time, in other words, invites and engages the reader to positively enter into a dialogue with the narration and draw his/her conclusion about the temporality and impart a new sense of organic unity to the form a structure of the novel. This drawing of one’s own conclusion of time from the positively involved reading experience is quite in line with the assumptions of Reader Response theory that necessitates for the act of reading to be focused upon imparting a sense of organic unity upon the text. Woolf’s selection of diction plays a key role in depicting the certain ambiguity of the temporality by not giving my clear-cut markers of the temporality of time rather depicting just a space and that too in a chaotic form. Particularly relevant in this regard is Woolf’s symbolic depiction of the house, “Nothing it seemed could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and

crevices, stole round window blinds, swallowed here a jug and a basin, there the sharp edges and the firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say “this is her” or “this is she” (Woolf 121).

Woolf deliberately confounds the familiar yardsticks of measuring time by shrouding them in darkness, the darkness which, just like the sunlight, pervades into the objects of the house defining them through a different sense: visible darkness marks the presence of the things and objects. Pervasive darkness that finds emphatic mentioning assumes the gigantic proportions of flood, suggesting the passage/passing of time.

The house and all this objects within feel immersed in the flooding flow of time. Darkness not only confounds the material objects such as furniture but also existence in itself. These confounded concepts give rise to two crucial questions: How does flooding darkness or certain ambiguity affect the temporality inside “Time Passes”? and how the actual passing of time is portrayed from the beginning of the section by the deserted house flooded in darkness? Heidegger views existence as an entity composed of time and death, and if we conceive of existence in terms of Heidegger’s proposals, then it follows (from the depiction of existence, materiality and time in “Time Passes”) that not only existence and space are subjected to uncertainty but also time. “Time Passes” seems to represent uncertainty in itself. In the backdrop of these hermeneutical assumptions about the composition of existence, time and temporality discussed above now, we move ahead to the question of whether the time passes or pauses in the section “Time Passes”.

Uncertainty seems to be ruling supreme enveloping the space, furniture as well shrouding the existence. This darkness seems to be affecting the description of temporality inside, “The Time Passes”.

Virginia makes sure that reader realizes, though only through interactive role with the text, the brooding uncertainty right from the beginning of the section, has a major role to play. Traditionally light is associated with realization, but here Woolf turns the concept on its head, making darkness the tool of realization of uncertainty. The following quote from the section “Time Passes” illuminates the uncertainty, “Andrew, she called back, just put out the light in the hall. One by one the lamps were all extinguished” (Woolf 121).

This quotation taken from the beginning of the section, Juxtaposes light and darkness foregrounding the imagery concerning light and darkness to create the awareness that binary of light and darkness has a major role to play in evoking uncertainty.

Light and darkness don’t stay permanently; rather alternate to make a pattern of life as there was light before “Time Passes” represented by lamps that Andrew extinguished one by one. Once the light was put out, darkness prevailed over the scene, darkness that does not come uninvited to the house but as concomitant of light the filling its place temporality unless it was called back. The result of the “Lamps all putout, the moon sunk and a thin rain drumming on the roof a down pouring of immense darkness began (Woolf 122). By the imagery used in these quotes, and the impressions evoke through the symbols all direct reader’s attention to the confusion of existence and temporality.

Concentrating on the markers available in the section “Time Passes”, and reading and rereading the passages, I conclude the issue of how much time passes since “The Window” and how much time lapses during the “Time Passes” itself can be interpreted in two different ways. Woolf herself feels pretty much intrigued by the idea of time. Decidedly, she turns her back to the traditional treatment of time in favor of the more complicated, more philosophical and more subjective interpretation of time. She wonders, “What after all is one night? A short space, especially when this darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or

a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night" (Woolf 124).

In the time passes' there can very clearly be observed two conflicting modalities of time: one that is represented with the flowing characteristics of time; and the other that remains in the sentence "we remain" Cygan points out the inexhaustive possible meanings opened up by the use of paradox in Woolf's fiction, mysteries pullulate in Virginia Woolf's work on both the topical and formal levels and between them: genders meet in their disparities, one individual can be two, design and immediacy in Lily's painting, order and motivation in the actual books, solidarity and discontinuity. The rundown is a long way from comprehensive" (Cyan 2010). "Time Passes" surely adds another paradox to the list already provided by Cyan: the paradox of the existence of two conflicting temporalities lived by different characters.

After keen study of Virginia Woolf's fiction and faction as well her own views about the concept of time, and her advocacy for the contemporary writers to portray the modern vision of psychological realism by abandoning to follow the old method of plot construction and character portrayal based upon the chronological, orderly flow of time, we strongly believe the structuring of time in the "Time Passes" is in harmony with Virginia Woolf's own concept and realization of time portrayed with slight variations in her other novels. Now, at this juncture of analysis of the novel, to overcome the complexity of darkness and uncertainty, the most important question that surfaces is: how is the actual passing of time portrayed from the beginning of the section by the deserted house flooded in darkness? The answer of this question cannot be hoped to be found from outside the narration; it can be located in Virginia Woolf's own construction of time. The answer of this question, it is interesting to note, will not only resolve the conflict of time in *To the Lighthouse*, but will also furnish a convincing argument as to the general question: how time can be represented in novel?

Along with spatiality as a means to construct time, Woolf uses characters and characterization as a means to illustrate the concept of time, there are few characters in the section "Time Passes". There is Mrs. Macrab and other servants none of the familiar characters we met in "The Window". Now the depiction of time through the characters (major and minor) necessarily generates different interpretation of temporality based on the notion of chronotype as explicated by Bakhtin.

"The chronotype as formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic (Bakhtin 85). It follows from these ideas that characters are themselves Chronotopic, and hence they experience their own individual time.

Since Virginia Woolf's method of representation of the constructed time involves uniting spatiality and characters and as different characters don't, as a rule, possess same temporalities, there is then the clash of temporalities inside "Time Passes". Time in "Time Passes" therefore seems to have been constructed by Virginia Woolf in terms of two rather different and conflicting temporalities – one that be represented by the flowing characteristic of time and another represented by pause. These different temporalities in the novel are represented by two different sets of characters: the dead characters seem to represent flowing characteristic of time because the flux of time in one sense can be measured by the mark of their death at a point in the flow of time, while the living characters seem to represent the pause of time. Time, therefore, passes for Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew; while time stays for Mr. Ramsay James and Cam.

Conclusion

Till now it has been established that Virginia Woolf has used two devices or techniques to portray the flow of time, the two devices being the spatiality and characters. A very important literary question how a writer conveys the passing of time meets a satisfactory answer in the narration and narrated of *To the lighthouse* that is through using space and characters. Whereas the spatiality does not pose any significant problem of understanding, the temporality of characters is a problematic area and thus needs to be explained. Within Woolf's narrative/narrated framework, different characters have colliding temporalities. Taking into consideration these individual temporalities of the characters, it is easy to state within the Heidegger's proposal their only beings that can experience temporarily i.e. moving forward are authentic beings-as-a-whole.

Mrs. Ramsay's demise is the one that depicts the idea of the progressing stream of time through its own existential transience. Mrs. Ramsay's passing is described above so tranquilly, in a relaxed way as though occasions had no extraordinary significance in the book. Mrs. Ramsay's demise, we accept, is the allegorical marker flagging the progression of time inside "Time Passes". This acknowledgment is established in what Heidegger proposed with respect to bona fide creatures, and transience towards death. Under Heidegger's proposition in his book "Being and Time" we can characterize transience towards death as the separation of the passing in each character. At this point it has been plainly characterized that the idea of time is obviously identified with presence to death; sequence each hour that is spent in the fleeting scene is lost perpetually, unalterable, nonetheless, mentally, each character lives thought the book an alternate transience concerning passing. What Heidegger calls a legitimate being should encounter the existential fleetingness, which implies that the person accepts sequence in light of the fact that the outer time drives the characters to death. Passing is the climax of completeness.

Passing turns into the main marker of ordered time lived by the credible or an entire being, for this situation, Mrs. Ramsay as her demise estimates the measure of outer time lived by her. It follows that if character arrives at death, obviously in the wake of having lived for a quantifiable time frame set apart by various occasions, it shows that a lot of time has elapsed. Subsequently the meaning of the passing of Mrs. Ramsay turns out to be evident that the demise comprises a significant gadget to convey the transience of the described. It is presently sure that the demise of Mrs. Ramsay gives the perusers a thought that an adequate time has elapsed.

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