

Issues of Representing Time in English Literary Text

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Abstract: The present article is devoted to investigation of the category of time in literary texts. In Literature, the category of time presents a certain interest in both theoretical investigation and for practical use. The purpose of this work is to examine the theories of contemporary linguists who have been working on the topic and to exhibit their thoughts and conclusions via the theme by analysing the category of time in literary texts to achieve high standards of sustainability in the world of Literature.

Key words: narrative structure, complex temporal structures, chronological narrative, non-linear time structures, flashback technique, flash-forward, distinct temporal structures, multi-temporal narratives, Parallel timelines, time travel.

Introduction

Time is the continuous series of things that happen from the past, through the present, and into the future, seemingly in an irrevocable order. Time has great importance in human life, including in Literature. As it was stated by Miller, “All literature revolves around time. However, the discussion of time in literature today is premature.” [1, p. 86-87].

The category of time is a fundamental aspect of literature, and it is often represented in various ways. Time has a significant effect on the narrative structure, pacing, and overall mood of a literary work – poetry, fiction, nonfiction and drama as such. Its representation can range from straightforward chronological storytelling to complex temporal structures that allow for experimentation with time’s effects.

The fundamental question at hand is how, differently for each work, words might be used to represent the subjective experience of lived time. Literature, after all, is made of words. Therefore, language is the primary subject of literary study. The issue is that Western languages' primary vocabulary for time is spatial, as Heidegger long ago acknowledged in *Sein und Zeit* (1927). They convert space into time. Time loses direct representation as a result. It becomes an abstraction once more.

The present article thus discusses the different ways of representing time in literary texts. It consists of introductory entry, the review stage followed by examples and facts, along with concluding remarks.

Review Stage

As can be observed, the scope of the category of time in literary texts has not been much discussed in the works of scholars. The key works in this field had been published quite some time ago – among them Wyndham Lewis’s “Time and Western Man” (1927), A.A. Mendilow’s “Time and the Novel” (1952). Due to the paucity of research in this area, the current study will emphasise how the category of time is represented in literary works. The results of their researches strengthened the significance of time in literature. However, all these articles, including the Paul Ricoeur’s “Time and Narrative” (1983-1985), Michael Levison’s “Time after Time: Representing Time in Literary Texts” and Samuel Becket’s “That Time” (1976), do

not cover the ways, types and essential features of time in Literary texts.

Though much has been studied in this aspect, the clear representations of time were not discussed.

The aim of the present research is to define the ways of representing time through possible ways, chronological narrative and non-linear time structure, multi-temporal narratives and time travel.

Tasks of investigation are:

- to get acquainted with the importance of representing time in Literature; to look through the traditional grammarians analyzing their investigations.
- to determine ways of representing time in literary texts.
- to consider the place and role of those approaches in the literary texts.

The most straightforward representation of time in literature is the chronological narrative. The narrative is structured in a linear fashion, following events in the order in which they occur. A chronological narrative is familiar and easy to follow, making it the most common type of narrative in literature. In this form, the author establishes the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Characters and events unfold in a chronological sequence, along with an easily recognized timeline. Chronology is pretty straightforward because it relies completely on time. So, there aren't any real "types" of chronology, but it can be shared in different ways and narrative styles. Here are some types of chronological narrative:

1. Linear Narrative (Normal Chronology)

The linear (in a line) telling of a story as a sequence of events as they happened in time.

2. Reverse Chronology

The telling of a story from the end to the beginning, sharing events in the reverse order from which they occurred in time.

3. Nonlinear Narrative

The nonlinear (not in line) telling of a story as a series of separate events told out of chronological order.

A clear example could be the Jef Kinney's diary of a Wimpy Kid. Greg begins keeping the journal at the start of the academic year and updates it daily. Here are a few passages from many different diaries:

Monday

I guess Mom was pretty proud of herself for making me write in that journal last year, because now she went out and bought me another one. But remember how I said if some jerk caught me carrying a book with "diary" on the cover they were going to get the wrong idea? Well, that's exactly what happened today.

[2, p. 145-146].

Tuesday

When I got to school today, everybody was acting all strange around me, and at first, I didn't know WHAT was up. Then I remembered: I still had the Cheese Touch from last year. [2, p. 57-58].

It could be clear that Greg's notebook serves as a life timeline. It's a chronology of everything that occurs to him day by day, and he also informs us about earlier occasions.

However, many authors and poets experiment with non-linear time structures to create more complex representations of time. One of the most popular non-linear forms of narrative is the flashback technique: a particular event in the present causes the character to recall something

that happened in the past. Such a technique is often used to reveal important details about a character, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of their past or motives. Flashbacks can be an effective way of using time as a device for character development, as well as an alternative to exposition. As an illustration, in Matthew's "The Holy Bible": When Joseph, the Egyptian governor, finally runs across his brothers after a long absence, it is clear that a flashback has been employed. According to Joseph, he "remembered his dreams" about his brothers and how they had sold him into slavery. [3, p. 7923]. Another example is the Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman": Willy Loman's memories of the past are told in flashback in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. While playing cards with Charley, Willy had a brief conversation with his deceased brother. He recreates a discussion from the past in the present. This illustrates an individual who is physically present but is psychologically immersed in memories and previous experiences. [4, p. 30-35]. Also, in "The Cruel Mother" [5, p. 65-67], Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights" [6, p. 82-83] and in Robert Frost's "Birches" [7, p. 25-27] the flashback has been employed.

A similar technique to flashback is flash-forward, where the narrative jumps forward in time, to show a future event. The sequence of time in the story is disrupted in this case, and readers may be left guessing how the characters have reached the point where they are. This ambiguity can create tension and generate more significant interest in the story, making it an effective strategy for building suspense. For example, in "Isabella" by John Keats, the lines – "*So the two brothers and their murdered man Rode past fair Florence...*", These lines show a future event as if it has already happened. Lorenzo, who is called *their murdered man*, takes the character to a time in the future when the two brothers of his beloved Isabella will assassinate him. [8, p. 27-29]. Moreover, in "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens [9, p. 37-39], Stephen King's "The Dead Zone" [10, p. 88-90], and in Muriel Spark's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" [11, p. 23-24], the flash-forwards are used. Also, the use of flashbacks and flashforwards allow the reader to experience events out of chronological order. This technique is used in many works of literature, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," [12, p. 65-66], where the narrator, Nick, reflects on events that occurred in the past, and in Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse-Five," where the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, experiences time non-linearly due to his experiences during World War II.

Besides flashbacks and flash-forwards, writers can also play with distinct temporal structures, such as cyclical time, multi-temporal narratives, and parallel timelines. Cyclical time narratives typically occur when something repeats itself. They may use seasonal changes, the changing of the moon, or even the repetition of an event, in a manner that recurs every year. These narratives can create various meanings around the repetition of such events. For instance, the determination of cyclic nature can suggest timelessness or foreshadow an impending disaster.

Multi-temporal narratives are used in fiction to represent time in different ways, such as flashbacks or parallel timelines that explore the lives of characters, communities or even civilizations over a specified time frame. These narratives are often involved with time travel or are shown in alternative timelines. Parallel timelines can be used for characters to explore the consequences of different choices or decisions. They are an interesting means of creating multiple scenarios for the outcome of a story.

The most striking feature is that time travel is a common literary trope representing time in literature, whether the narrative displays a character traveling forward or backward across various timelines. These stories place an emphasis on the consequences of altering time, and it often explores the effects of time on an individual's moral development. The concept of time travel represents the inability to traverse time in a strictly linear manner. As an illustration, Mitchel's "The Clock That Went Backward" could be taken as an example of time travel. [13, p. 78-79].

Therefore, there are different ways of representing time in literary texts as have been analysed above. The results got in the article can be used in interpreting literary texts, compiling lecture materials on pragmatics, theoretical grammar and semantics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, time is a crucial and complex category in literature because authors use different temporal structures to tell peculiar stories. Some authors may use straightforward chronological narratives, while others use more intricate structures like flashbacks, flash-forwards, and parallel timelines. These innovative temporal forms help enhance the narrative's complexity, add suspense and tension, and build interest in the story. An effective representation of time can considerably enhance the emotional and intellectual impact of a literary text, making it a crucial element to be included in any literary work. In addition, the different ways of representing time will be created as a lot have been being done by the scholars nowadays. So, it will keep changing, and new standardised forms can appear in the future. As we progress, it will be crucial to have an open mind and be adaptable in how we approach time in relation to literary texts in order to continue to develop the scope of Literature clearly and accurately in a world that is becoming more linked.

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