

Time Distortions in the Albanian Novel

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Abstract

The novel is the most successful literary work that creates the intimate relationship between literature and time, as well as the aesthetic and artistic value of time proceedings. It permits the enfolding of time, which flows away when the future is not yet present, when the past is absent and when the present is just a slipping moment. This is just what the most recognized novelists of Albanian literature make use of. They do not just make it coherent but they also provide reverse movement for it, turning it back, or predicting it, thus playing the role of a prophet. This is what makes them successful and what connects Albanian literature with its natural European context. Of course these types of proceedings are not isolated because they are in continuous evolution and they can be even more than what we have presented here in our study.

Keywords: time; novel; author/narrator; narrative; structural

1. Introduction

The relations of time with the literary work and the distortion suffered by the device of time inside the work itself are closely connected to a series of issues and theoretical concepts. First of all, it affects the relation between literature and the objective reality, the fictitious and the real within a literary text. After all, most of the schools and directions, independently from some non argueded speculations, accept the fact that literature mirrors reality by some very special and unique means: by figures based on WORDS.

The reality and its peculiarities and characteristics enter the literary work completely surrendering to the artistic rules of the text, but still maintaining their acting feature because the literary work is part of this reality and carries its peculiarities too. The work possesses a temporal and spatial existence and just like any other object it enters in relation with different items and objects (the reader) that belong to the reality.

Time as a feature and dimension of this reality, "enters" the literary work and subdues to the rules of "transformation" of the literary text, suffering its distortion inside it. The manner of the distortion is stated by the way¹ that the author chooses to transplant the objective reality into the artistic reality.

Referring to different criticisms, especially the formalist ones, efforts have been made to organize the narrative into schemes, thus avoiding temporal organization. For example, Barthes aimed to "dechronologize" and to "relegitimate" the narrative. (Barthes) This provides the description and the classification of these schemes just like it is operated with other "figures". Doing so there is created the possibility to clearly define the structure of the novel and to reflect, inside what Bremond calls "the logic of the narrative", on the possibilities and perspectives of the narrative in every stage of its creation. (Bremond, 1973) Of course, these efforts deserve admiration and gratitude. However, when it comes to the narrative inside the novel, we can never lose sight of the temporal dimension which appears to be the most important dimension. The moment, the non-time (the freezing of time) can be revealed as a "wonderful moment" inside the narrative- like Sartre states- what means that they are integrated in a temporal shell (because they are moments, so considered from a temporal point of view). (Sartre, 1951)

This kind of distortion is more noticeable and concrete in the so called narrative literature, especially novels, because its existence is closely linked with narration.

"The peculiarities of the organization of the narrative in a long epic work are determined by the temporal positions too. Through them the author builds the events and vice versa and the development of these relations is also affected by

¹ "Way" is used to refer to the genre used by the author to depict reality as well as the proceedings chosen by him to distort time throughout the actual work.

how the narrative forms are combined.” (Dado, 1999)

The artistic narrative is a configurating act. This fact points out the central role of time. The configuration of the narrative is figurative and temporal at the same time. The narrative is composed by a series of events organized in a meaningful and coherent way and is felt by the reader thus acquiring meaning because of the temporal configuration. The narrative organization of the text together with time implies space as a sign of its power. The relation of time and space is found in the base of every narrative because every event occurs in time and space. That is why inside the literary work the time-space duality is revealed in an inseparable tie where time is the main protagonist. Inside this temporal-spatial line the episodes are placed and numbered. Meanwhile the efficiency of an episode depends on the moment when it is positioned inside the narrative based on the author's perceptions and experience.

2. Time Distortion in some Albanian Novels

The various perceptions and experiences, casual or not and the reconstructed space, as well as the power of time to surpass the borders of the present and the past, the real and the unreal, have always been a subject of interest and attraction for writers.

Since ancient times they have been attracted by an uncommon confusion regarding the course of events. For example, in his work “An invitation in the studio”, Kadare also reveals Aristotle's opinion about time. He cites his famous quote according to which “time and people share the same relation that two wheels that go in two different speeds do”. (Kadare, 1990) So we may have overcome a situation but at the same time it may still be ahead of us.

Kadare presents in this work a classical example of a nonconformist approach of events that go against regular chronology. It is the case of the duel between Achilles and the Trojan hero Hector:

Kadare states: “Through the movement of moments you understand their displacement. This causes more mobility for the fragment” (Kadare, 1990)

These examples prove that time operations, their successful usage inside the work in order to make it as original and artistic as possible, are not late phenomena. Every literary genre has provided various examples of the combination of time relations. This has enabled the shift from a regular chronological order, as in the historical Albanian novel, to a transverse narration which brings us the inner thoughts of the characters where time flows together with their feelings and finds shelter in childhood times or other old memories, as in the contemporary novel.

On the whole the theoretical and practical concepts regarding the notion of time have improved and the relation artistic time and real time inside the novel has continuously changed. In Albanian literature there is a slip from the early novels where time and space, which are embodied in the correlation of events, move away from the casual meeting of protagonists where the temporal aspect was faded and serves as a mere background of events: (let's mention here the novels “The siege of Shkodra”, “The beautiful”, “Bardha of Temal”), to the connection of intrigues where the dialogue occupies an important position: (“The General of the Dead Army”, “The Surgeons”, “Hasta la vista”, “The Carrousel”). A balance has to be established between time and space because the description of dialogues decelerates the flow of time. From this shift the Albanian novel reflects noticeable tones of historical time and biographical time. The union of these two times creates an epochal unity inside the novel which is concretely and narratively visible.

Different authors have made use of the possibility to “consider” time in space through the description of the streets changed by time and history: “Chronicle on stone”, “The last city”, “The village of the seven rolling hills”. The footprints of time are indelible. They are present not just in the concrete background of events but in the psychology of characters too. They feel the temporary weight of time and understand they have changed.

In some works the notion of time will match only the biographical and chronological time and that will flow through all the lines of the novel: “If I were a boy”, “The legend of what is gone”, “Ustica's night”, “The Corpse”. For some other authors time equals the moment. It stops and freezes making room for the continuous meditations and reflections and being such it acquires a meaningful importance for the later developments in the protagonist's life: “The Emptiness”, “Ulku and Uilli”, “The vulture”. However, the works belonging to the first group also suffer moments of “crisis” or “falls” of chronology related to the moment. But being part of chronological time, these moments such as the interior monologues of characters or the interventions of the narrator, acquire the features of an extension in time.

If we would give a closer look to the distortion of time and how it is used we would conclude that it is a border line between the “traditional” novel and the “modern” novel. Of course, the usage of concepts like traditional or modern is not simple and leaves room for further doubts. However, this contradiction is considered only from the perspective of the usage of time and based on works of different scholars who have tried to determine the features of these two kinds of novels. Using an arbitrary division of time in the creation of these two kinds, we accept that the modern novel starts with

the work of Kadare during the 70s – 80s and reaches another development during the 90s with the work of authors like Trebeshina, Mustafaj, Koreshi, Kongoli etc.

In the so called "traditional" novel, time is perceived like an objective flow: starting from the past, the present, aiming at the future, while the work turns into a "deposit of consecutive events". The background of the novel and its compositional structures are just a kind of "la durée", a Bergsonian duration, a melting of fading voices which makes you feel you are in front of a work full of archeological remains which help the depiction of a historical past. (Bergson, 1946)

It is a fact that the narrative theoretically contains a correlation of the characters with the action. Moreover, it is the action that swings the characters inside the labyrinth of its realization which means that the time of narration is the time of action, while the action itself is the straightforward result of the perceptive potential of the author.

Going back to the issue of the action, we can say that in the traditional Albanian novel there has always been a cause and effect relation.

In the traditional novel it is easy to deduce that cause always precedes the effect, what suggests an objective, linear flow of time that slightly differs from the historical time. In this novel art is not for art's sake but for the history's sake. The combination of events in this kind of novel is characterized by an apologetic approach towards history in order to reveal what happened, why it happened and how it could have happened.

Regarding this feature of the historical novel, in the work "The Poetics of the Historical Albanian Novel", B. Krasniqi states that: "The research of the past through historiography and the historical novel remains inside this function. The historical novel competing historiography serves first of all the homogenization of the national identity". (Krasniqi)

From this historical perspective were created the novels of Ndoc Nikaj, Sterio Spasse, Skënder Drini, Vaso Pasha, Zef Harapi, etc. Some of these authors wrote with the same style even after the 70s.

Thus in the centre of the novel "The siege of Shkodra" is the siege and fall of Shkodra in 1912. The novel was published in 1913, a year after the main event. The main characteristic is the "chronical proceeding" (Krasniqi). So, the narration is entirely chronological and fixed with exact dates and places. The main aim is the description of the Albanian resistance during the siege. The love line between Ndoci and Leza entirely serves the function of presenting history. This also determines the fact that the retrospective is almost absent (it is just mentioned to show the patriotic background of the characters). Of course, the novel is also affected by the conditions it was born in, but we can state that time proceedings in service of a historical motivation are noticeable.

Almost all the novels of Nikaj belong to this category. Moreover, in the novel "Burbuqja" which he calls a "historical narration", there is lack of coherence in the times introduced by the author, due to the desire to provide a detailed historical account. It seems to contain two completely different times which preserve just an external link between each other: The description of the war between Skanderbeg and Ballaban Pasa preserves just a weak connection with the following event which flows during 1815-1817.

The novels belonging to the period after the 45s, especially S. Spasse's trilogy "The Renaissance Men", introduce in Albanian literature the social-historical novel as an encyclopedia of life, culture and national history in a determined historical period. The novels "The Awakening", "Death or Freedom" and "Torches" are characterized by a clean chronology, with a few throwbacks, with a cause and effect pattern and where the historical time is the result of the individual times of the historical characters. The artist time is in service of the historical fact. This fact is chosen among the numerous "archeological remains" and is conceived based on a consequent temporal rhythm thus fulfilling the so called lack of history. Time is what structures the whole novel/narrative. All the episodes are numbered following its patterns.

In brevis, the temporal device of the traditional novel, with a diachronical frozen scheme is an irreversible museum like time. As such, it is reflected as the total embodiment of the absolute and this will find its complete realization in the confrontation with the modern novel.

The complete opposite occurs within the modern contemporary novel, whose narrative network clearly shows how the literary aspect of the work is transformed in an "indirect language". The whole discursive system becomes indirect and because of its pressure the temporal dimension appears to acquire an ad agustinianum appearance which in reality is not like that. (Genette, 1969)

This happens for a very clear reason: this novel's concept regarding time does not relate to the ad agustinianum appearance. In the work of Saint Augustine time is revealed as "freed" from the past, the present and the future because it continuous to remain totally "objective" as far as flow is concerned.

We can even go that far and state that it is this objectivity that approaches the concept of Augustine to the Hebraic concept about the dimension of time. It is the case to recall here that Augustine shared another view on the concept of time. To him time flew in a total objective way following the historical manner.

The acquisition of time as a historical moment, following the concept of Saint Augustine, is revealed in the novel as the dictating and structural presence of a fragment belonging to the continuous present, to the moment enclosed in its inner flow which we can also refer to as a structural structure. So the ad agustinianum appearance is a characteristic of the so called traditional novel. (Lefebvre, 1971)

In the modern novel, on the other hand, time almost loses all of its objectivity. The main reason is that it transforms in a clean functional presence, thus fading its structural character. That is what happens in B. Mustafaj's "The Emptiness": the events occur between reality and dreams where the borders of time have no meaning or existence:

The author-narrator states: *"Dreams began exactly where life ended and arrived at a troublesome ending due to logical explanation. This made you believe that they were real. They were real"* (Mustafaj, 2010, p 84)

The events do not happen in time. They are the result of the blending of mental associations and dreamy evocations of reality. Just like in dreams, time does not have an objective flow. The same happens with the narrative. Time moves according to a completely individual and order and length based on evocations where dreams are reality and reality is a dream. No matter how much we try, we never seem to understand how long Ana stopped in the northern city, even though the author has provided a series of time indicators, such as:

That night. (Mustafaj, 2010, p 5)

Midnight had passed and the whole world had gone to sleep.. (Mustafaj, 2010, p 89)

Minutes crept like a confused spider. 10 o'clock passed. (Mustafaj, 2010, p 87)

It was already morning. (Mustafaj, 2010, p 148)

Ana arrived in Tirana at about 8 in the evening.. (Mustafaj, 2010, p 85)

These time indicators do not help the reader deduct the chronology of events. This is done on purpose to confuse the reader on whether these are dreams or it is reality.

At the beginning of the novel there is a dialogue where we understand that Ana was in town for two days and on the second day she had known the engineer:

"- Our journalist comrade looks angry tonight, continued the waiter.....

- Why? How did I look last night? Tell me!- she asked anxiously.

At least you looked more cheerful my comrade. I see, you don't like our town.." (Mustafaj, 2010, p 12)

There are also some other facts that help us guess the length of her stay.

Ana is a journalist on service. So, she is not going to stay too long because journalists are away on service for a determined period of one, two or three days.

She aims at writing an article regarding the work in the mine. This work does not acquire too much time. It can last for two or three days and not more than that.

However, these almost sure assumptions are denied by the author/narrator on page 87. After presenting the fact of Ana's arrival in Tirana: she arrived at about eight in the evening, the author/narrator presents facts that lead to the idea that Ana has resided in that small town longer than we had been assuming.

"The yellow light that covered them just when they appeared at the door, uncovered an unexpected view for Ana: her parents were completely old and confused. During her absence their wrinkles had become deeper and another life had set, far more tired than life.... Ana instinctively rubbed her eyes. It was not a dream. How long ago had she left?"

Ana's parents have become older. This cannot happen in days but in a longer time, maybe years.

Ana does not remember how much time has passed. So it is not just two or three days but more and her memory is quenched.

After these facts and after knowing Ana's struggles in the capital and her return in the small town, after witnessing the author/narrator's own trip to Tirana, which make us assume that some more days have passed, at least five or six, by the end of the novel, on page 179, we face this other fact:

"It was my turn to go mad. The waiter with his innocent look stopped my momentum. I put myself together, grabbed his elbow, violently sit him in the empty seat in front of me and remembered all that had happened two nights before. I had entered the restaurant which at the time was full, except of one chair, exactly where we were at that moment. There was eating a lonely girl...."

So from the introduction of the author/narrator engineer and Ana had passed only two nights. Two nights full of

endless and timeless anxiety.

The temporal confusion is noticeable and clear. It is not casual but functional. Time has completely lost her structuring role here. The author is trying to convey the message that society has deformed his aim. It has also deformed time. It does not possess a temporal identity anymore. In this time free society the individual is totally depersonalized and just like time, he has no identity: the author/narrator does not have a name, he is just the engineer; Artur is also Bardhul, etc. His temporal dimension of existence is violated. The same happens to Ana. That is why she calls:

"I swear I am Ana. It's me. Believe me! What should I do for you to believe me!?" (Mustafaj, 2010, p114)

Time does not flow. It is just functionalized.

The presence of the functionalized time in the contemporary novel is the expression of the existence of a series of "pieces of time" inside the universe of the work. They are able to shed a light on the future and also reflect it on the mirror of the present. These are the presence of virtual mirrors, like Henry Lefebvre calls them. (Lefebvre, 1971) Moreover, being very sensitive and dictating inside the work, this presence has led a lot of literary scholars to accept it as the most ideological part of a literary work.

The so called modern novel, as we saw, diachronically suffers a revolutionary distortion: it transforms into the result of an equation between the mythology of the writer and the conjunctures of his time. That is what Barthes called "the totality of personal intentions". (Barthes, 1986)

The time distortion follows the same itinerary here in this novel. For instance, in most of Kadare's novels the real time of historical events seems to suffer an "artistic" distortion. However, this artistic distortion, this mask of the "narrative time", (Ricoeur, 1994) has its roots in the situation of communist Albania and its dictatorship. Just like that the violation of the temporal logics in the work of Besnik Mustafaj is realized to satisfy the author's intention, in order to present the true colors of a society based on violence and lies.

The frequent usage of analogy by Kadare link, through symbolism, dy ages, the narrated one and the historical actuality, positively leading to the conclusion of using time "intentionally".

Being in this position and also being familiar with reality, its inner movements and the powers that make it possible, the modern writer, being he Kadare, Mustafaj, Kongoli or Trebeshina, look at it like with the eyes of a God. He knows almost everything regarding this reality. He knows the unlistened secret of his reveal because this is his reality. It is the embodiment of his experiences and his creative neurosis. That is why he owns it in a perfect manner, he knows it a priori. Everything resulting from his pen (Zigmund Freud has convinced is on this thesis) is first of all the product of a dream, of a desire. Every "sign", including time, is conceived because of this desire, and that is why it is oriented towards it. In the interpretative possibilities provided by this postulate also lies one of the secrets of the distortion of time in a literary work, the literarisation of the work.

The presence of a given desire in the creative conscience of the writer, the presence of a dream that extremely tends his nerves, is first of all expressed in the presence of a past, of a reality like experience, which is going to work as a material for the dream itself: Ana's past, her passion for the profession, the formation of the author narrator or the past of Festim Gurabardhi and his childish relationship with Valmir K. In Kadare and Trebeshina this past is even more distant. Secondly, this presence implies the present, under the reveal of the impossibility of realization of what is being elaborated within the dream. Ana cannot fulfill the desire to publish her report and to convince the people about her existence, while the author narrator cannot fulfill his love for Ana. Festim cannot escape from his duality, what in the end causes his non existence. Thirdly, the possible realization of this desire, the desire itself, implies a future, an ending, if we used Todorov's words, which is the embodiment of his desire and dream. (Todorov, 1978) In "The Emptiness", this future remains hypothetical, just like in the case of Kadare and Trebeshina. It is the reader the one who "sees" the future or not, based on the relations that are created between him and the work and with the author's desires. Of course, these three time fragments are never implied in their "objectivity", but they are vanquished to the consciousness and intentions of the writer.

So, in this case, the narrative time is always an intentionally manipulated time, lead by the interests and desires of the writer.

We can even state that the dreams themselves, those ancient desires arrives at the point where they determine everything; thoughts, beliefs and time. The presence of desire is itself introduced as the presence of the body and mind of the writer.

As we already mentioned, a characteristic of the Albanian novel is the conservation of the cause- effect pattern: first the cause, then the effect; the modern novel completely destroys this sequence.

The modern writer prefers to introduce the effect in a straightforward manner and then chase its cause, the finding

of which is of a second hand importance. Differently from the traditional writer, the modern writer is not interested in the cause as a "justification" of the effect, but in the cause as a revelation of the being's labyrinths- which in this case happens to be lying under the skin of the writer. In D. Çuli's "Requiem", it is being looked for the cause of Sana's death (the effect), even though this is not completely stated, in the complexity of the complicated relationship that Meri- the narrator, the author too, builds with it. It is thus being looked for inside the wholeness of the existential labyrinth of the author.

This step forward enables him to consider time and its world not as an impartial spectator, but as a semiotic being, according to an assumption that Charles Peirce² makes on the human being. On the other hand, the traditionalists consider time as a mirrored image, deprived from the living material. For the modern novelists it is revealed as a wholeness of multidimensional signs. The writer considers himself as an inseparable part of events. He is almost drastically detached, in most cases, from the third person whose power was thought to secure him a certain artistic objectivity, at least how Balzac had dreamt, and is entirely emersed in the power of possible "selves" of the semiotic being.

So, according to a final but not ultimate analysis, this artistic time as a distortion of real time and an eternal companion of the narrative, is presented as closely connected to it, to the "imperial" place where this narrative acquires life, the novel.

It becomes an integral part of the literary work, which is sometimes structures and other times works as a "figure" and is masterly elaborated by the creative power of every author.

Its relations with the work are complex and appear as internal and external relations, adjusting thus not only the course of events, but also the raports it creates with the writer and the reader.

So it can be found as the Time of writing and the Time of reading, when time is considered from his external relations with the work and as the Time of the narrated events and Time of the narrative of events when it is considered based on its internal relations with the work.

3. Conclusions

First of all, being a dimension of the existence of what is mirrored inside a work, the work and its author, even in the Albanian novel time acquires a certain value and is realized in a series of multiple relations and through certain artistic operations that are realized within this literary genre. We can thus witness that in the most significant novels of Albanian literature (as well as novels in general), time is not just a "cover" of the work. Due to its capacities and characteristics, always debatable, it is able to provide different colors and meanings to the novel, continuously enriching it or making it "fall down" on his way. It gives to most novels its characteristics of "eternity", making them last forever just like it, or at times, it forgets them, considering them just like a temporarily fragment that does not live anything behind.

The best Albanian novel, just like the novels in general, realizes the ancient desire of the human being to possess time, to stop it, to change its direction, to cut it down into smaller timeless fragments, "in a time that does not flow in time anymore". This is achieved by transforming time in an important artistic means which carries on all the features of an artistic figure. As such, through the phantasy of the writer it gains the power of a plastic item that moves in different directions, different places, with different intensities, building various and infinite subjects. Our most talented novelsits do not just "play" with time inside and intrigue, (in this case the writer is easily thrown in the past, or goes to the future, predicting the course of the following events, or they expand or shirr time based on the importance of moments or events waiting to happen, but, at the same time, they use it to build the intrigue (the case of the novels of Kadare, Trebeshina and Mustafaj).

All the above mentioned characteristics of the cohabitation of time with the literary work are also materialized in the Albanian novel through its historical course and in particular writings, what witnesses its intensive but late development. The proceeding richness of this novel is revealed to the reader in various and impressive forms. From this point of view we can say that this novel follows the tradition of European literature, proving that it is an integral part of its culture.

² Charles Sanders Peirce was an American philosopher, logician, mathematician, and scientist, sometimes known as "the father of pragmatism". He was educated as a chemist and employed as a scientist for 30 years. Today he is appreciated largely for his contributions to logic, mathematics, philosophy, scientific methodology, and semiotics, and for his founding of pragmatism.

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