

A Chronotopic Analysis: Bakhtinian Review of *Women in Love* by D. H. Lawrence

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In this paper the aim is to interpret the Bakhtinian elements in terms of chronotopes and analyze *Women in Love* by D.H. Lawrence. Bakhtin in his work *Dialogic Imagination* opens a new path for analyzing the texts through which the comprehension of analysis is extended. He introduces the term “chronotope” that can enable the reader to understand a text, an event, a character or a philosophy. He has given no specific explanation to the term; rather it is left blank for the reader. However, he names the theory as follows: “We will give the name chronotope to intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed.”¹

In a general sense chronotopes describe the discoveries about the relationship of actions and characters to time and space. It is a way to comprehend the ways in which the relation of people may be understood. Thus it is needed to examine the literary works in detail that are concrete. These concrete details are the chronotopes as Bakhtin calls. Therefore, for him, novel becomes a rich place where the richest chronotopes can be expressed in order to analyze the characters’ inner world and nature of events. He defines it as: “The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.”²

It can be said that here Bakhtin highlights the importance of the wholeness of time and space. For him time and space constitutes a whole and they cannot be separated. The reason is that people can find a variety of senses belonging to time and space. Therefore chronotopes reveals the meaning of the works of literatures.

Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time and space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements- philosophical and social generations, ideas, analyses, of cause and effect- gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.³

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.85.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.250.

3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.250.

Chronotopes erase the abstract shadow from the text and reveal the real representation. Text does not hang in the air; namely it becomes concrete. Therefore reader can visualize “chronotopes as an optic” through which he can get into the depths of the text.⁴ In literature it is possible to find many chronotopes. It offers us profound image of people, events, history and public. In this context Bakhtin sees novel as a means to understand the time and space relationship.

In his theory, Bakhtin deals with the subject under there main title; the Greek romance, the adventure novel of everyday life, and the ancient biography. He finds that these novels lack historical change or biographical existence. However he claims that change is primary for the modern realistic novel. For him the ancient literature does not succeed in creating a living forms and unities that could be sufficient for individual’s private life. They are mechanic and static. On the other hand Bakhtin urges that the chronotopes should not be stable, rather they should be energetic in order to sustain the unity in time and space:

The most abstract of all chronotopes is also the most static. In such a chronotope the world and the individual are finished items, absolutely immobile. In it there is no potential for evolution, for growth, for change. As a result of the action described in the novel, nothing in its world is destroyed, remade, changed or created anew. What we get is mere affirmation of the identity between what had been the beginning and what is at the end.⁵

He is totally against the mechanic and unmoving relationship among individual, time and space. The reason is that chronotope loses its analytic mission. He adds that “space becomes meaningful as time becomes endowed with the power to bring change.”⁶ Readers find many references to this Bakhtinian idea which is the static and immobile life of the individuals in *Women in Love*. Gudrun and Gerald are the most static and closed ones. Throughout the novel reader is unable to see the slightest change in these two. Gerald has a mechanic and traditional mind and he is close to question the social and traditional ideas and values. He takes them for granted and never asks a question. It can be said that it is the result of his surrounding, his being the head of coal miners and the closed brain he has. Therefore he has a predetermined life standards and rules. On the other hand Birkin is open to new ideas, discussions and questions which make his life energetic and mobile.

4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.425.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.110.

6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.120.

‘Standard—no. I hate standards. But they’re necessary for the common ruck. Anybody who is anything can just be himself and do as he likes.’ ‘But what do you mean by being himself?’ said Gerald. ‘Is that an aphorism or a cliché?’ ‘I mean just doing what you want to do. I think it was perfect good form in Laura to bolt from Lupton to the church door. It was almost a masterpiece in good form. It’s the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one’s impulses—and it’s the only really gentlemanly thing to do—provided you’re fit to do it.’⁷

It can be said accordingly to the quotation Gerald accepts the ideas within standards. Therefore he is bound to live a limited life drawn by boundaries. However Birkin has no standards, rather he hates them and he lives freely in his lively sphere. Gerald thinks that it is very difficult to do what one wants to do. Therefore he represses his desires and wishes, he exerts himself in life in order to behave according to some determined standards thus he is far away from the real joy of life in which one can freely express his identity.

Bakhtin also urges the necessity to surprise in one’s life in order that one’s life will be away from the immobility. This enables one creativity and productivity in his life span. This can ensure the character to be open one, not closed off. The individual achieves changes and surprises in his life and thus saves his life from being a mechanical one. In this sense Birkin would like to discover new things so that life will be a discovery for him. In addition it is worth mentioning Bakhtin’s definition of “collective time.”⁸ His understanding of collective time can be interpreted as that the collective time is suffocating the individual freedom. The reason is that time is collectively passing for the individuals.

What then, are the distinctive features of this form of time? This time is collective, that is, it is differentiated and measured only by the events of collective life; everything that exists in this time exists solely for the collective. The progression of events in an individual life has not been isolated (the interior time of an individual life does not yet exist, the individuum lives completely on the surface, within a collective whole.) both labor and the consuming of things are collective.⁹

It can be said that the lives of Ursula, for the time being, and Gerald, almost always is within the collective time. Gerald’s position in life forces him to be the participant of collectiveness, of which the life standards are predetermined. He is the typical example of capitalist man whose only concern is to work and satisfy animalistic desires. Such collective behavior irritates Birkin in that he thinks that it reduces individuality and freedom and that it turns man into a machine that at the last is bound to be broken: “I think they

7. David Herbert Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996), p.33.

8. Paul Smethurst, *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction* (Amsterdam: Atlanra-Rodopi, 2000), p.67.

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.207.

always do. But I should like them to like the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing.”¹⁰

If a person is able to create his personal time besides the collective time, passing of time may not create a problem for him. The reason is that he lives the joy of each period as it is required. Thus he will not feel that his life slips from his hands and he does not feel the finalization effect. In order to achieve this Bakhtin says that it is required to include individuality to one’s life: “Insofar as individuality is not isolated, such things as old age, decay and death can be nothing more than aspects subordinated to growth and increase, the necessary ingredients of generative growth.”¹¹

Throughout the novel it is observed that the importance of individuality is expressed. The reason may be that with World Wars and industrialism man has been tried to be melted in the same pot. They would like create masses rather than individuals in order to create their so-called harmony. Different voices and colors irritated them so they left no space for the individuality. Thus it can be said that they were all against “Carnivalism.”¹² Since Bakhtin himself suffered much the lack of multiplicity and Carnivalism in the society he puts forward the idea that everybody has the right to express his own individual ideas. In this sense *Women in Love* has many scenes where author lets his characters speak freely. In this way the novel does not become an omniscient one and readers are not directed by single point of view. The free expressions of ideas of the characters represent the need to have individuality, at the same time free discussion within the society. It is not desirable to accept the things as they are but it is desirable to question the things and than decide. Rather dictating one idea the author sets his characters free in order to sing their individual song. In this point Bakhtin asserts that:

In the struggle against conventions, against the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being, these masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize the life; the right to parody others while talking; the right to not be taken literally ; not “ to be oneself”; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr’acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as comedy and to treat others as actor, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage- and the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets.¹³

10. David Herbert Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p.33.

11. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.207.

12. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

13. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.163.

Besides this it is possible to see the characters questioning the given standards and rules of the society. Birkin does not want to live in his public square as he cannot bear the people who are unable to grasp the inner meaning of the life. For example he is against the conventional way of understanding love concept. He does not want the given standards in a love relationship. As he wants to live a spontaneous life he would like to digest love step by step. He never cares for the surface meaning of love rather he searches for something deeper and mysterious which will drag him into the depths of this secret world. The desire to find new emotions and feelings and the hatred to live a mechanic life take him to the boundaries of such world. And of course the door of this secret world is only open to the ones who can find the right key. According to him this key is the having the spiritual sight into the one you feel yourself attached. He is looking for something eternal and long lasting, and it is this thing which maintains his existence. If the thing you love is mortal then your love is bound to end. This is one way of looking the concept of love, namely monologic; however with monologism it is impossible to maintain the relationship. It is asserted by Plato that rather than appearance one should gaze into the depths of things' nature in order that he can reach the "deep knowledge" and love.¹⁴ Such people accomplish to reach the true knowledge. This brings spirituality which enables man the state of immortality. As Birkin hates the "idea of finalization"¹⁵ he follows this idea: "What I want is a strange conjunction with you—" he said quietly; 'not meeting and mingling—you are quite right—but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings—as the stars balance each other."¹⁶

In order to attain this knowledge it can be said that individual knowledge should be acquired. When you establish your own set of ideas and digest them you are ready to enter the world as Birkin mentions. Therefore as it is mentioned before one should differentiate the collective and the personal time. As one is melted in the collective time, he will lose his identity and ceases to exist. He should construct his own individuality and he should let others construct theirs. Therefore a person should be open to different voices in the society, as it is in the carnival.

when the time of personal, everyday family occasions had already been individualized and separated out from the time of collective historical life of the social whole, at a time when there emerged one scale for measuring the events of a personal life and another for measuring the events of the history.¹⁷

14. Plato, *The Republic*, [translated by Desmond Lee] (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p.518.

15. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.76.

16. David Herbert Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p.157.

17. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.208.

The strong stress upon individualism urges the necessity to create single identities within plurality. The problem of measurement in the society can only be solved through this fact. If one degrades the things into some rules, it means that he is not dialogic and he views the life from one old window of which curtains are dark and invisible to the realities. In this sense Gudrun is unable to grasp the necessary existence of separate identities, thinking that her own criterion is the absolute judgment mechanism.

They are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces. It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is! Gudrun is really impudent, insolent, making herself the measures of everything, making everything come down to human standards.¹⁸

Gudrun cannot establish her identity, that's why she has difficulty in taking part in the society, so she scorns the people and measures them according to her own fixed standards. However, it can be said that the people whom she scorns are the ones who reveal her inadequacy in understanding humanity. In this sense the common people serves as fools and clowns in Bakhtinian concept. Actually there is a paradoxical situation at this point. It is known that Gudrun seems to be clown within the society. She wears colorful and ornamented cloths as if she tries to show off. Here she is the clown in the real sense; the people are also the clowns in Bakhtinian sense. They are like Shakespearian fools who reveal the true nature of the people. Bakhtin asserts that: "The rogue, the clown, and the fool create around themselves their own special little world, their own chronotope... Their very appearance, everything they do and say cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be grasped metaphorically."¹⁹

Gudrun cannot feel the rhythm of nature in her heart and she alienates herself from the rest of the society as she thinks that they are lower than her. She is unable to embrace all the people despite the differences. In this sense reader comes across with Bakhtinian idea of "provincial novel."²⁰ In provincial novel, he asserts that, with the celebration of nature the everyday life becomes important because it has the traces of folkloric images. The society turns in to carnival rather than turning into desolated unloving organisms. Therefore it is desirable to found an idyllic life with full of peace and joy.

It can be said that Bakhtinian description of idyll and provincial novel complies with our novel though we cannot certainly talk about a hero in our novel. In the following quotation Bakhtin urges that:

18. David Herbert Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p.284.

19. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.159.

20. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.232.

in the provincial novel one occasionally finds a hero who has set off for the city and either perishes there or returns, like a prodigal son, to the bosom of his family. In novels of Rousseauian type, the major protagonists are the author's contemporaries, people who already succeeded in isolating individual life-sequences, people with an interior perspective. They heal themselves through contact with nature and the life of simple people, learning from them the wisdom to deal with life and that; or they go outside the boundaries of culture altogether, in an attempt to utterly immerse themselves in the wholeness of the primitive collective.²¹

In the aforementioned paragraph, many implications in the novel can be founded. First of all, it is Gudrun who turns to her home town and perishes there since she cannot establish the harmony with the nature around herself. As it is expressed she desolates herself from the wholeness of the society by not celebrating the other simple people. Secondly it is Birkin who can establish an isolated individual life style with the bosom of nature by celebrating the existence of different colors and voices in the society. As he is irritated by the negative effects of the time he finds peace in primitivism rather than modernism. The wholeness of the primitive and collective desire shows itself when Birkin swims naked. He wants to throw off the unnecessary masks and rags in order to have a pure and primitive living.

Yet he wanted something. He was happy in the wet hillside that was overgrown and obscure with bushes and flowers. He wanted to touch them all, to saturate himself with the touch of them all. He took off his clothes, and sat down naked among the primroses, moving his feet softly among the primroses, his legs, his knees, his arms right up to the arm-pits, lying down and letting them touch his belly, his breasts. It was such a fine, cool, subtle touch all over him, he seemed to saturate himself with their contact.²²

To summarize, D.H. Lawrence's novel *Women in Love* coincides much with Bakhtinian chronotopes. It can be said that both Lawrence and Bakhtin tries to open a new path for the readers in order to extend their scope of understanding in terms of life and its components. That's why the individual free expression, the completeness of the primitivism, the exclusion of the surface meaning, the dialogic discovery of the self are emphasized in both works.

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21. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.232.
 22. David Herbert Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p.114.

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