

## Bhaktin's chronotope in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre

Isha Tyagi

University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

### Introduction

M. M. Bakhtin first introduced the term chronotope in his essay in 1937 in Russian and later in English as "Forms of time and chronotope in the novel" (Bakhtin, 258). This term is a method to delineate how time and space both are "described by language" (Bakhtin, 258). The use of chronotopes is an influential tool in the novels and in literal terms it means "time and space" and is described by Bakhtin as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature". James Clifford, an anthropologist describes chronotope as: - "Fictional setting where historically specific relations of power become visible and certain stories can take place." (Clifford, 123). Chronotopes are formally constituted category of novels. The choice of chronotopes is central in novels, it is the type of space and time that the novelist takes in order to organize his work. This term is borrowed from Einstein's "theory of relativity" and as in this theory and literature too time and space can't be described without considering the other and are not separate entities. Chronotopes even define genre of a piece of a work and different genres have distinctive chronotopes. Chronotopes are very significant as they are the "organizing center for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (Bakhtin, 243). The events of any narrative are structured around the chronotopes as they make the events abstract. The plot of a novel is manipulated within the chronotopes. They make the events realistic as time and space are brought out of the "dimension of text and into near realism as if they impart body to the entire novel" (Bakhtin, 243). The events that occur within the chronotope of the novel seem intense while others seem dry.

The chronotopes basically work at four levels in any text-

"They have narrative, plot generating significance, they have representational significance, they provide the basis for distinguishing generic types, and they have semantic significance..." (Nele Bemong, 6)

Nele Bemong asserts that "Each major chronotope can include within it a minor chronotope" (Bemong, 6) and in fact any motif may also delineate its specific chronotope. Bakhtin's major chronotopes that he pays attention to in the essay are the chronotope of the road, castle, salon and threshold. All these chronotopes are delineated in the novel Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre is the story of an orphan girl who grows up into a self-possessed individual. The novel is Bildungsroman in nature as it highlights the hardships, growth and struggle of the protagonist who finally in the end leads a peaceful life.

The chronotope of the road in a novel is characterized by rapid changes of a scene and situation in the novel. The road unlike the homogeneity of domestic chronotope is highlighted as a space where people of different classes intersect. Its classic manifestation, the road is that which runs to exotic terrains and places. The chronotope of the road has relation to the encounters as follows:-

"Encounters in a novel usually take place on the road. The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road, the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people-representatives of all social classes, estates... intersect at one spatial and temporal point." (Bakhtin, 243)

People from different classes who normally do not see each other can "accidentally meet" and their "fates may collide and interweave with each other" (Bakhtin, 243). This chronotope is a perfect setting for encounters that occur by chance. The road in particular is defined as a "meeting place", it also functions as a metaphor for the path a protagonist travels through the narrative. The story of a narrative takes on form when an encounter leaps on the protagonist through the pursuit of road and generates progress in the story. In the text Jane Eyre the chronotope of the road is significant as the protagonist encounters her master and would be half mate very first time on the road. The road becomes the evidence of the encounter of struggling Jane and Byronic hero Rochester. Jane goes out to post a letter of Mrs. Fairfax to Hay on a pleasant winter afternoon. As Jane sees a horse approaching, the stories of Bessie's start coming in her mind as she is told by her "a spirit called Gytrash... In the form of horse, mule or large dog haunted solitary ways." (Jane Eyre, 97)

Jane goes on to help the man on the horse as soon as he tumbles down and she realizes that he is not that spirit. The traveler refuses to take her help but she offers her services. She gets attracted to the traveler at first sight as she says:-

"I had hardly ever seen a handsome youth, never in my life spoken to one. I had a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, fascination..." (Jane Eyre, 99)

This meeting generates attraction in Jane's heart towards Rochester. Jane is not aware that by chance she has encountered the master of the house where she works as a governess. Rochester agrees to take her help when she tells him that she works as a governess in the Thornfield hall. This incident had no romance and interest but Jane feels:-

"...yet it marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life... The new face was like a new picture introduced... firstly because it was masculine, and secondly, because it was dark, strong and stern." (Jane Eyre, 101)

Later we see that their first meeting on the road arouses an interest in Rochester's heart to meet this governess and how later in the novel fate collides as they both decide to get married.

The chronotope of the threshold is also usually combined with the "motif of encounter" but "its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of crisis and break in a life." (Bhaktin, 248). The word threshold in literal terms means "the breaking point of life, the moment of crisis, and the decision that changes a life." (Bhaktin, 248). In this chronotope time is "instantaneous" and has no fixed duration and spaces are that which extend to the open air—"are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man." (Bhaktin, 248)

This chronotope functions in the life of Jane and Rochester as well. Metaphorically the threshold means the turning point in one's life. Rochester's life turns topsy-turvy when he marries Bertha Mason who is a mad woman. As his father leaves the whole estate to his brother Rowland, Rochester is sent by father to Jamaica to marry this girl who has massive fortune. He seldom sees her and never spends time with her alone. His infatuation towards her and her irresistible charm overpowers him and he marries her. After the marriage her true identity is revealed as Rochester says:-

"..I found that I could not pass a single evening, nor even a single hour of the day with her...when I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household...bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and intolerable temper..." (Jane Eyre, 270)

The protagonist Jane Eyre crosses the threshold of Lowood Institution and that is the turning point in her life as she decides to be independent and work as a governess in the Thornfield. Charlotte Bronte delineates this event as crucial turn in text as the protagonist has gained much confidence as she decides to live her life on her own terms. As Jane leaves the Lowood Institution she says:-

"..I mounted the vehicle which was to bear me to new duties and a new life..." (Jane Eyre, 80)

As the story progresses Jane faces a crisis in her life when she comes to know about Rochester's first wife. She refuses to marry Rochester and decides to leave the Thornfield Hall. Though she loves Rochester very much but after knowing about Bertha, she decides to conform to the moral conventions and leave the love of her life. She refuses to accept Rochester's proposal to leave to England and stay in the South of France where they would get married and lead a peaceful life. She knows that she can't be his official mistress as Bertha Mason is alive and even her true Christian values make her more firm in her decision. She finally affirms:-

"I must leave Adele and Thornfield. I must part with you for my whole life: I must begin a new existence among strange faces and strange scenes." (Jane Eyre, 268)

She also refuses St John's proposal of marriage and this decision would also change her life for good as she marries Rochester finally in the end. She knows that Rivers want servant in the form of wife. She refuses to be dominated by him and rejects his proposal out rightly. St John says to Jane:- "God and Nature intended you for a missionary's wife...you are formed for labor, not for love. A missionary's wife you must-shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you -not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign's service." (Jane Eyre, 356)

She for the sake of religion is ready to work but does not suppress her sexuality and remains firm in her decision. Terry Eagleton asserts that:- "She rejects Rivers not only because his demands violate her identity, but because of his imperious masculinity." (Eagleton, 12)

The chronotope of the salon is basically delineated in the European novels. The space here is dominated by the rich and powerful as they come from all walks of life. The basic thing about salons is that it is a site of gossip and intimacy and interactions between people is a feature of the salons. Bhaktin says:-

"In salons and parlors the webs of intrigue are spun...this is where dialogues happen, something that acquires extraordinary importance in the novel, revealing the character "ideas" and "passions" of the heroes." (Bhaktin, 246)

The conversations between Jane and Rochester when she is often called to Rochester's room reflect this chronotope of the salon. Rochester and Jane encounter each other on the road as discussed above which arouses an interest in him to see her again as he invites her for tea. Gradually they meet each other and Rochester tells Jane about Adele's past and his relationship to her. He even questions Jane whether she finds him handsome or not in their beginning meetings. She gradually starts loving her master through their meetings.

The chronotope of the castle is characterized by typical spaces-ruined churches, castles and room. These are basically the spaces that are saturated in the past. The past means the past of superstitions, ghosts, horror. The castle has often been linked with the historical time. The time in this chronotope is unreformed time. This chronotope is central to this text as gothic is perceived as one of the genres of this text. In Foucauldian views—"the version of the gothic operates utopically as the inverted analogy with the real space of society." (Foucault, 1986, 24) Bhaktin asserts:-

"The castle is the place where the lords of the feudal era lived and consequently also the place of historical figures of the past, the traces of...centuries are arranged in it in visible parts of its architecture, in furnishings. The ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in the particular human relationships." (Bhaktin, 246)

This chronotope basically focuses on the past events that generate fear, mystery and suspense. In this novel "The red room" appropriately reflects this chronotope as it has associations with the past. Jane Eyre often in her nightmares sees herself confined in this room which frighten her so much. As Jane educates herself by reading books, her cousin John simply could not tolerate her as well as other members of the family. He hits her with a book and when she rebels against him, she is locked up in the red room by Mrs. Reed order. The red room was square in space and not used by members of the house. It was also one of the biggest chambers in the house. It had a bed supported through massive pillars, curtains of deep red colour, with two large windows and also the carpet was red. The room always remained chilly and silent and sometimes visited by maids for cleaning and Mrs. Reed as "to review the contents of a secret drawer in the wardrobe, her jewel casket and a miniature of her deceased husband..." (Jane Eyre, 9). It was the room where Mr. Reed took his last breath and since that day, "a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion." (Jane Eyre, 9). Jane gets more frightened there as Bessie's evening stories that were also mysterious came into

her mind. Jane finally gets freed from the room but she recalls the room various time in the novel. Novy Kapadia asserts:-“ The author uses apt imagery and clever descriptive powers to evoke the fear and terror that arose in ten year old Jane as she was confined to the “red room”( Kapadia, 237). The images in the room evoke terror and fear and she collapses finally. She recalls this room when she is insulted at Lowood Institution and in the Thornfield hall on the night she decides to leave Rochester.

The secret chamber where Bertha Mason stays also has associations with the past as Rochester married her and as found her mad locked her up in the secret chamber which made her more deranged. Elaine Showalter asserts that-“Her secret chamber is simply another red room at the top of another house.”(Showalter, 426)Jane feels that there is something strange in this house, basically in a room on the third floor. When Rochester’s bed is set on fire and she saves him, he rushes to the third floor which make her feel that there is something mystery about this room. After this attack on Rochester, Bertha again attacks and stabs her own brother and for both the incidents Rochester blames Grace Poole who seem strange to Jane. The truth about Bertha is revealed on the wedding day of Jane and Rochester when Mr. Briggs produces a signed letter of Richard Mason which gives the proof of Rochester’s marriage with Bertha. It seems clear that Bertha was locked up by Rochester in that room where Grace Poole is appointed as servant to take care of her. As Jane sees her, she writes:-

“In the deep shade, at the farther end of room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being...it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal.. A quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.” (Jane Eyre, 368)

The mystery surrounding Bertha gets revealed and later in the story deranged Bertha sets the house on fire and kills herself by jumping off the roof. Therefore she makes a clear way for Jane to be Rochester’s dignified mistress.

Therefore I conclude that chronotopes are significant in order to construct the events of a novel as Bhaktin also remarks -“it is a force giving body to the entire novel.”(Bhaktin, 250)

## Reference

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