

The Impressionist Chronotope: Space and Time in Katherine Mansfield and Édouard Manet's Art

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Abstract

This paper investigates how Mansfield and Manet used space and time for the creation of similar complexes in Impressionist literature and painting. Using Gabriel Zoran's theory the paper tries to understand the different layers of construction employed in the short stories and the painting and how merge and overlap in order to make sense to the reader. Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope is used to understand the impact these different spatio-temporal planes create, which in turn is used to provide an explanation for the rejection of chronology by modern artists.

Keywords: Chronotope; Duration; Lived time; Spatial plane; Temporal plane.

No work of art can exist in a vacuum; space and time are important considerations for its existence. While in works of the previous centuries, adherence to the chronology of space and time was imperative, the Modernists of the 20th century adopted methods and forms that allowed them to loosen the shackle hold of chronology, if not do away with it altogether. This chapter shall explore how space and time were used by Katherine Mansfield and Édouard Manet with the help of Bakhtin's theory of 'chronotope'.

Bakhtin describes 'chronotope' as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). It acts almost as a metaphor, where time thickens "takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (85). This paper will try to use Bakhtin's theory of 'chronotope' to trace similarities in Mansfield

and Manet's techniques using the short stories- "The Wind Blows" and "The Fly" and the painting- "The Bar at Follies Berger". However, to make sense of the events caused by the interconnectedness of space and time in these two forms of art, it is essential to bring in Bergson's idea of 'pure duration', which implies that the flux of change experienced due to the locus of space and time in art also causes a change in the observer. Thus, the observer perceives spatio-temporal changes while undergoing changes himself (Bergson 1). Bart Keunen, in his essay, modifies 'observation' to 'imagination', stating that "all aspects of chronotopicality seem to circle around the human faculty of imagination", stressing that it has nothing to do with "pure reason" (5). Since every observation occurs from "a changing observational consciousness; every state of things is coloured by the observer's lived time" or personal experience (7). In other words, the formation of a 'chronotope' in a work of art depends on the person's imaginative sensitivity and results in the formulation of 'pure duration' where the person undergoes a considerable change.

But, before delving any further into the Mansfield's use of literary chronotope, it is essential to understand why she resorted to it and how she chanced upon it. Anthony Alpers, in Mansfield's biography, lays it all down to the difficulties of inventing a new form of literature in which she would be able to express herself. "She was not by nature a novelist- she had nothing to offer to publishers of books", and though Edwardian England had a proliferation of magazines, they did not enjoy the same prestige as a novel (Alpers 81). Arnold Bennett, writing in the *New Age* in 1908, described England's periodicals as "the most stupid and infantile of any 'World Power,' the United States not excepted" (qtd in Alpers 81). He considered a "purely literary paper. . . a novelty in England" (qtd. in Alpers 81). According to Alpers, the editors wanted the stories to have a "plot" but Mansfield only wanted to record the mundane everyday life, which often provided no happy ending. "It was expected to have what playwrights called a 'curtain'-and she liked windows," says Alpers (81). England had no patience for what Mansfield wanted to do; the time and place were not conducive. In her lonely and persistent quest to carve a niche for herself, she created a fiction that depended on the confluence of space and time to create the moment that the readers would interpret with their 'lived experience'.

Katherine Mansfield had always been fascinated by the implications of space and time upon one's life and had once written in her journal, "I wish to live faster, still faster, faster. . . It is true, I fear, that this desire to live by steam is a forewarning of a short existence" (qtd. in Alpers 51). Kronegger,

in her book on literary Impressionism, while mentioning Wolf, also talks of how Mansfield's stories can be described as "moments of time" (48). Another trait that she had in common with Virginia Woolf was "the total abandonment of chronology in her texts; events were not precipitated one after the other in their particular order, nor are they ever recorded in that manner" (Reimer 24). Instead, events occur as a 'moment of shock' and have the same implications as they do in Woolf's works. This 'moment of shock' is essentially Woolf's version of chronotope, "a sequence of multiple sensory impressions and emotions that dissolve (or is included in time flow) when they become integrated with the darkness or a random wind." (qtd. in Corriea 2). In Mansfield's case, 'the moment' is significant not only for the characters of the story but also for the reader, who are active participants in the experience created by the reading of the story. The story then gains further significance as it is judged based on their own experience or "lived time", as propounded by Bergson and Keunen, and the readers automatically become part of the chronotope.

The 'moment' in "The Wind Blows" becomes more significant for the readers than the story's female protagonist. From hindsight, it would be just a fleeting recollection for her; however, for the readers, the moment brings about an understanding of all the previous events, narrated at break-neck speed through the language of senses. Until the final revelation, "Look, Bogey, there's the town. . . Do you remember? I cried at my music lesson that day- how many years ago!...", it is impossible to deduce the chronology of the events or even the timeline ("The Wind Blows" 194). The story itself has various temporal and spatial planes that operate simultaneously to render the scene as a whole, but the spatiotemporal units do not come together until the last revelation where these units merge to form the 'chronotope' and, in keeping with Keunen's idea, "forms an image in the mind's eye" (6). The 'wind' acts as the link between the various, separate spatiotemporal units in the text. The epithet "the wind, the wind . . ." brings with it a change of setting and time. The changes in space and time make it possible for the readers to decode the protagonist's sensations. The sensations or emotions are not explicitly spelt out; instead, the clues hide in vague murmurings like, "Life is so dreadful" and others ("The Wind Blows" 193).

Nevertheless, the first flush of teenage anxiety, sexual awakening are perfectly perceivable to the readers as it corresponds with their experience of 'lived time'. The often mentioned 'wind' in the story is employed as a symbol that transforms a spatial arrangement into a temporal one. The wind is initially used to bring about changes in setting, from Matilda's

house to that of the piano teacher's to that of the promenade, but eventually results in a temporal change as its last mention precedes the brother and sister gazing back at the town years later aboard the ship.

In "The Fly", the chronotopic moment is that of the Boss chucking the fly into the bin; it rips off the mask he had been hiding under; unlike Mr Woodifield, his degeneration is not that of the body but of the mind. The story's spatio-temporal units are mostly in chronological order, but a large cleft separates the first and the last part of the story. Like Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", the two parts do not seem to fit into the same piece; however, the chronotope helps stitch the two ends together. By being unable to remember what he had been thinking about before throwing the dead fly into the bin, the Boss displays to the readers that he is no different from frail Mr Woodifield, before whom he had been luxuriating in his physical strength. The transformation from the spatial to the temporal is almost literal here and happens halfway into the story when Mr Woodifield mentions the 'boy's grave'. In this case, the mention of a physical place takes the Boss back in time while bringing about anticipation for the future. The chronotope transports the Boss to the past- to that exact moment of loss, "Deeply regret to inform you . . .' And he had left the office a broken man", while also making him realise the bleakness of his future without the prospect of being able to hand over his business to his son ("The Fly" 532).

Gabriel Zoran, of the Haifa University of Israel, in his essay "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative," proposed a theory that would help us understand the asymmetry of space and time in Mansfield's narratives. Zoran divides the space of a given text into three different levels and explains their function in the chronotopic framework separately. This chapter shall borrow from his idea and similarly stratify the spatial and temporal elements of the two short stories and Manet's painting to bring out the similarities in the use of space and time in Impressionist literature and painting.

The first level, according to Zoran, is that of 'topographical structure', which is space "at its highest level perceived as self-existent and independent of the of the world and sequential arrangement of the text" (9). In "The Wind Blows", this level would comprise the entire town of Wellington, including Matilda's house, her piano teacher's, the promenade, and other places, where she goes about her daily life. Intricate as the construction of this level is, there will remain blank areas as the readers read and reconstruct the space in their heads. This level, though it borrows from the real world, exists independently of it. In "The Fly", this level consists

of the Boss' office with its redwood furniture, pearly white sausages like electric heating, the scotch and poor old Macy. Zoran also points out how, unlike maps, this space can be ontologically divided where characters are situated in different groups with varying sets of problems. The mention of his son's grave brings into view different sets of problems that the Boss has to contend with. As he has never visited the grave, the Boss, imagines his son lying unchanged (buried), on a different ontological plane. He can not envision the challenges of maintaining a large grave or even envision the ravages of time on a human corpse.

As far as the grouping of the characters is concerned, the protagonists in both the short stories belong to the elite class, not in terms of race or position, but by their sheer ability to perceive and feel emotions. In "The Wind Blows", the peripheral characters like the mother and the grandmother, coloured as they are with Matilda's prejudices, appear insensitive, whereas the piano teacher occupies a position almost akin to veneration as Matilda regards him as her confidant. Nevertheless, the veil is flimsy, and his genuine nature shows through when the other girl comes in, breaking through the exclusivity of the different ontological levels. The intrusion of the other girl, which forces the piano teacher to move away, hints at the different levels that the two characters operate on. The reason for his sudden withdrawal alerts Matilda to this difference, the moment is broken; she can no longer confide in him. Woodfield and Macy, the only other characters in the fly, are not as significant, but their intrusion upon the Boss's ontological space helps bring about his realisation and eventually the chronotope. Upon Woodfield's intrusion, the Boss transcends back to the past to grieve for his son and realises his vulnerability in the process.

The next level, as Zoran puts it, is that of 'chronotopic structure' dealing specifically with the structure and organisation of space and time in a particular narrative. Describing this level, Zoran says, "the chronotope determines defined directions in space: in the space of a given narrative, one may move from point a to point b but not vice versa; in another narrative, the movement may be reversible" (12). In both of Mansfield's stories discussed in this chapter, there is no way for any of the characters to move back to the space they had started from. The ship can not go back, nor can the characters go back into space or time, for they have outgrown their previous selves and have gained greater experience living through similar windy days. In "The Fly", there is no way to reverse the son's death or the Boss' mental trauma. His son's death has changed him, and instead of trying to accommodate that change into his life, he tried to suppress it, cover it up under his veneer of vigorous health and material achieve-

ment. There is a poignant use of time at play here; the Boss has not made accommodation for the changes he has gone through, but unbeknownst to himself, he has moved on, and as a result, he can no longer summon the grief as he had earlier been able to. "He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep. . . He was not feeling as he wanted to feel" ("The Fly" 531-532). Space and time would not allow him to go back and change the fate of his son, but they do bring about changes in him.

Zoran's last level is of 'textual structure', where "objects structured belong to the reconstructed world, but the structure itself is imposed on them by the linguistic nature of the text" (12). The best possible way to engage with this level is to detect the authorial voice in the short stories. Both stories are from a third-person, omniscient narrator's perspective who narrates the fate of the characters, their emotional states and, by hints and literary devices, directs the perceptive powers of the readers. The helplessness that overpowers the Boss at the end of the story or the sheepish laughter that accompanies Matilda's memory of having cried at music lesson is part of the textual structure that allows the readers to tap into their personal experience and gauge what the author is trying to convey through the ellipsis, dashes and the half-finished sentences. The reader is immediately reminded of similar circumstances faced in life, and drawing from the experiences of such events, they add a satisfactory conclusion of their own to the story. Mansfield provides the framework of the story. However, the readers' life experience and the changes they have undergone during the process really concludes the story.

Paintings, unlike literature, are considered a predominantly spatial medium; however, the Impressionists have tried to incorporate a temporal dimension into their paintings. Fascinated by the idea of incorporating temporality in his paintings, Manet tried to create incongruities of space and time in many of his works. Manet's "Luncheon on Grass" is an excellent example where the woman's figure in the nude seems to belong to an entirely different era than the men accompanying her. The composition of the woman figure is similar to the style depicted in classical Greco-Roman paintings, whereas that of the male figures corresponds to the contemporary style of realism. This representation of different styles in the same painting is interpreted as Manet's protest against the uniformity advocated by the Paris Salon. However, it might have been his effort to make two timelines converge in the hermeneutic space of the woods to create a seamless whole or a 'chronotope'. The manifestation of the 'chronotope' is different in each of his paintings; however, its use is most effective in his last painting, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère", painted in 1882.



Figure 1: The Bar at Folies Berger

The picture simultaneously represents different spatial and temporal planes. It contains a background comprised of spectators belonging to the fashionable Parisian society brightly lit by chandeliers and electric lights. While, the foreground is dominated by the barmaid Suzon, the mirror and the reflection of the man in a top hat who all but disappears from the foreground. He should have been present in the foreground, a little to the right of the barmaid, across the counter, to have his reflection appear on the right-hand side of the mirror; however, he is nowhere to be seen in the foreground. Besides that, critics have also been puzzled by the bar table's position as it seems to be hovering mid-air with no floors or railings to contain it visible in the reflection. Naturally, the question arises where are the barmaid, the table and the man in space and time? Though Duve, in his essay, says there is no way of knowing for sure what Manet's intentions were, the theory of the 'chronotope' might make it possible to conjecture upon. The 'chronotope', in the painting, is the reflection in the mirror where the man and the barmaid interact. The moment brings about an intersection of time and space and creates Bakhtin's fourth

dimension. As was the case with the short stories, the onus is placed again on the viewer to deduce the nature of the interaction between the two. Based on their lived experience or 'pure duration', many have conjectured that the man might be propositioning her for a sexual encounter.

The chronotopic moment also brings two significant spaces (background and foreground) together- a figure in the likeness of the man in the top hat is visible in the background sitting beside the woman in the white gown. Thus, the reflection in the mirror brings an element of the background and one from the foreground (the barmaid) together to the undetermined space of the mirror and creates the chronotope. This juxtaposition in the reflection also brings about a transformation of the spatial into the temporal explained best by Duve in his essay. He thinks that the man in the top hat is temporally located at two different levels, one where he is part of the crowd of the music hall reflected in the mirror, while at other, he stands right in front of the barmaid propositioning her. It is also quite possible that events depicted in the picture took place in different temporal planes; maybe, the reflection in the mirror is a memory of the barmaid or her wishful thinking. Whichever the case might be.

Manet brings the different spatio-temporal planes together by disposing the man from the spatial plane of the foreground and creating the 'chronotope' in the mirror, leaving it, like Mansfield, upon the viewer to determine the meaning of his painting. Thus, the spatial gap (absence from the foreground) deliberately created by Manet can be explained by the temporal identification of the reflection. Duve also sees the man in the first temporal plane joining the salon crowd where the picture was first displayed (while himself being absent from the visual pyramid of the picture) and the second in Manet's place, that of the omniscient painter aware of the barmaid's thoughts. "Let me say this differently and, as it were, unfold the allegory: the man in the mirror, reflecting a man standing sideways to the bar and outside the visual pyramid, stands to the same man in the mirror, reflecting a man standing this side of the bar and facing the barmaid at the Folies- Bergere, as the latter man stands to a man standing this side of the picture plane and facing the painting at the Salon" (Duve 30).

The painting, like the stories, can also be divided into the three levels that Zoran has formulated. At the first level of 'topographical structure' is the world of the Parisian music hall, the likeness of which no other nation would ever see at any other point in time. The era of commercialism signified by the Bass Ale arranged on the table, lit harshly by the bright electric lights, creates a complete picture of the milieu like Mansfield's stories. However, Zoran says explicitly that, unlike a topographical map, this space has more to do with "quality - patterns of colours, substances, types of objects" rather than their actual location and thus, the inconsistencies in the painting- the floating bar counter, the absence of a floor or railings, the arrangement of the bottle, different in the reflection than on the actual

table, the tilted frame of the mirror and others possible in the picture plane but not in real life (Zoran 10). It also comprises the different characters in their different temporal and spatial zones- the barmaid, the man in the top hat in the mirror, his likeness sitting in the crowd, the woman in the white gown, the man sitting beside her, the acrobat whose feet are barely visible at the top left hand corner of the frame all belong to this different narrative level with their respective problems.

Things get more complicated at the next level of 'chronotopic structure' than in the short stories. Unlike in the stories, there is no way of knowing the actual chronology of events concerning the chronotope. If Duvé's argument of the changing position of the man in the top hat is accepted, there is no way of guessing which position he had occupied first. The possibility of switching from one temporal zone to another is much more fluid in the painting, even though it uses the same technique of spatio-temporal interaction. Another component in the painting adding to the impression of movement from one spatial/temporal plane to another, at this level, is the pair of feet visible at the left-hand corner of the painting. The trapeze artist (owner of the dangling feet) had to be moving, as there is no way he/she could have been suspended in mid-air without movement and this tiny detail acts almost as a clue for the viewers. Just as temporal movement allows the invisible trapeze artist to change his position throughout the space of the painting, temporal movement of the man in the top hat also allows him to change his spatial position and leads to the formation of the chronotope.

At the last level of 'textual structure', the "discussion [that] is not that of the text itself as a verbal medium, nor that of its linguistic materials, but rather an organisation of the reconstructed world" (Zoran 14). This consists of the various components of the painting, which, though inspired from the real world, renders symbolic meaning to the world of the painting and exists independently of the real world. Manet included many inanimate objects in his paintings to demonstrate his skill as a figure and a still-life painter. However, each of the elements chosen has a symbolic meaning of its own and is not a random selection. Most of these objects do not come within the purview of the primary visual triangle created by the vanishing point formed at the level of the barmaid's lips; instead, each of the objects- the bowl of oranges, the beer bottles and other assorted condiments create separate vanishing points within the picture creating spatial inconsistencies and making sure that the eye of the viewer falls on them. This endows significance upon the objects that crowd the foreground of the picture and act as hints left by the painter in the painting, similar to

the part played by the authorial voice at this level in the short stories. The Bass Ale, as discussed earlier, is a symbol of new age consumerism, while oranges were to symbolise prostitution, among other things.

Space and time, thus, are employed for similar purposes and create similar complexes in Impressionist literature and painting, as seen in this exploration of the works of Manet and Mansfield. For both, different plot levels merge to form a whole in the 'chronotope'. The three different levels of construction exist in the individual pieces simultaneously, sometimes overlapping, allowing the viewers to make sense of the work. All these stray bits of information that might not make complete sense in individual levels of construction come together in the 'chronotope' to create an impression of the scene that the author or painter wants to render on paper.

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