

Concept and Emergence of Time in the Modernist novel: A Note

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Abstract- This paper particularly focuses on time in the modernist novel. Time, a component quantity to sequence events or the intervals between them and it is a fundamental element in Literature. The setting of time in novel may involve specific reference to dates or events. Traditional novel talks of the past and the readers enter the novel at a certain point of time. Bringing home the point time has emerged to a new point of perception in the modern novel.

Index terms- Internationalism, affinities, consummation, syntactical, preserver, destroyer, stream-of-consciousness, memory

INTRODUCTION

Literary modernism turned its back on the traditional concept of art as an imitation. It considered art as an autonomous activity. The fundamental principle of aesthetic before the modern era was that 'art imitates life' and hence answerable to it. Art must tell the truth about life and contribute more to making life better. But by the end of the nineteenth century, it has turned its head. Oscar Wilde declared, "Life imitates art". The course of fiction was altered not merely by radically new techniques, but by a new radical vision of experience. The roots of change in the novel lie deep in the modern experience of the modern man in the modern society. A confluence of psychological, philosophical, political, social and scientific causes might be considered as contributory factors responsible for this shift in perspectives.

The modernist novels upset the old conventions of realism by ignoring or violating the linear flow of narrative. They do not care for the traditional ideas about unity and coherence of the plot and character. It is a literary response to the condition of man in modern time. The literary revolt against Victorian values and religious rigidities led James, Lawrence, Woolf, Joyce and Conrad to find new area of faith in

art itself or in religious of their own making. What seems to happen in the modernist novel is that the effort to capture reality in fiction, pursued with a certain degree of intensity, makes the writer bring out something on the other side of 'realism'. The aim is to discover original ways of presenting new subjects and new feelings. The novelist finds himself relying more and more on literary strategies and devices like allusions to literary models and mythical archetypes, the repetition of images, symbols and other motifs which belong to symbolist poetry. Alan Friedman opines that as the nineteenth century advanced into the twentieth the novel began to offer not merely new techniques, but new patterns of information about the process of life. In doing so, the English novel moved gradually from a closed form of experience to an open form of experience.

Edith Wharton claimed that "modern fiction really began when the 'action' of the novel was transferred from the street to the novel". Virginia Woolf called the conventions of the Edwardian novelists 'ruin' and their tools 'death', by attacking them for their neglect of the spiritual relations of the people in the flux of time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, novelists like Marcel Proust in France, and Dorothy Richardson. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in England revolted against the naturalist and realistic traditions in fiction which devoted excessive attention to external events in the lives of protagonists and their Satellites. They felt that traditional techniques of narration and characterization were not adequate to meet the social challenges of the new age. To them, 'reality' referred not to external event but to the internal mental processes of a character in his reaction to the life around him. Their novel focused on the inner thoughts and feelings of the character itself. Each writer evolved his or her own fictional techniques to

record the illogical mental life of individual characters.

The new approaches, methods and techniques were necessitated by the widening of man's horizon and the increasing complexity of his experiences. Overwhelming changes affected simultaneously almost all aspects of his life. In all parts of the world, crisis of adjustments arose. Hence, the technique itself represented man's inner crisis. It is true that the modern novel makes greater demands on the reader. Its endless reveries and reflections, its plotless and actionless drama in the mind of the character may both attract and repulse readers. There is also an advantage. The reader can turn to any page of the novel and go on reading without being troubled by the previous sections in the novel. Modern novel is not a modern colour movie which exploits that "willing suspension of disbelief" to its absurdist limits. Modern novel is an x-ray photograph. Like all x-ray photographs, this modern novel grimly presents the inner structure and reveals to man his health or illhealth. It needs a physician, an elitist, to read and interpret. It is reality, truth, perception and vision, all in one.

Modern age is nothing but an age of disintegration and interrogation and modern man is a creature of instincts and impulses. Accepted beliefs, available traditions and age-old conventions are questioned and broken. Imperialism is replaced by internationalism. England may be an island. But English literature, argues T.S.Eliot, is an integral part of the European tradition. Hence the study of Comparative Literature sounds essential. Comparative Literature can be the debt of modern literature to ancient literature and it can also be the debt of one religious literature to another laying focus on mutual influence, affinities, themes and techniques, thereby proving a rewarding experience to any reader or writer.

The modern novel is a serious form of art. It is no more a piece of mere entertainment. It is compact in body and integrated in form. It is a well-shaped garden and not a tropical jungle. New aesthetic considerations of pattern and composition and a new conception of characterization are to be found in the modern novel. It lays emphasis on the author's philosophy of life and his message. There is no story in the traditional sense. "The incessant flow of innumerable atoms upon the human mind" is recorded with an eye on the clock and the calendar,

but human consciousness is discovered deeper and deeper. There is a free forward and backward movement in time. Emphasis is laid on a single psychological moment or experience. The modern novelists do not often portray the conflict between different individuals. The individual is at war with himself. The character is portrayed outside time and space. Besides revealing the past of the character, we get introduced to the potentialities of his nature in future. Again, the hero and the villain in the traditional sense are no more. The heroism as well as villainy fades into nothingness when a deep insight into the mind of man is received and perceived.

The modern novel is psychological laying stress on the individual. Each individual is a lonely soul. David Daiches points out that the theme of the modern novel is the relationship between loneliness and love. And love is not possessive and dominant. True love is considerate and sympathetic. Marriage is not a consummation of true love but it is just an uncertain beginning of it. All these developments have enriched the art of novel thereby enlarging its scope by broadening the horizons. H.J.Miller considers the new moral as a withdrawal from external phenomena into the flickering half-shades of the author's private world". E.Bowling calls it "a direct quotation of the mind not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness". Robert Humphrey states that it is a type of fiction in which the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the prespeech levels of consciousness for the purposes primarily of revealing the psychic being of the characters. William James' concept of human consciousness together with Jung's free association was responsible for the birth of a new genre of fiction.

The traditional novel talks of the past. The reader enters the novel at a certain point of time. There is always a gap between the present to which the reader belongs and the past to which the novel belongs. But this gap has been eliminated in the stream of consciousness novel. Here the reader is taken straight into the consciousness of the protagonist. The interior monologue is a technical device which enables the reader to enter into the inner life of a character straightaway. Plot, action, character and thought are drowned in the stream of consciousness. What J.A.Cuddon coins one phrase for streams of consciousness is 'interior, monologue'. Dujardin uses the term 'interior monologue' to refer to stream of

consciousness technique. The interior monologue employs direct sentences to the syntactical minimum. The omniscient author is present in the novel but once the flow of sensations and impressions begins without any logical organisation he removes himself from the scene to enable the readers to observe them uninterruptedly. According to Leon Edel, the modern psychological novel was between 1913 and 1919. These novels are often autobiographical, characterized by search voyage and pilgrimage. These are voyages through consciousness.

The modern novelist attempts to catch fugitive thoughts in their progress through the mind, in their very moment of flow. In the modern novel, there is only one character at a time and the reader has to identify himself with that single character. The author takes the reader into this single consciousness and makes him feel with the character. This kind of novel seems to turn the reader into an author, for it is the reader who has to ultimately put the story together and interpret the novel. In the modern novel, an artistic vision of experience is presented through synthesis and refinement. Life cannot be static. The mind of man is not static. The essential characteristic of a modern novel is that the book may cover just some hours or days. But actually the novel covers the entire emotional history of the central characters. The modernist novelists upset the old conventions of realism by ignoring or violating the linear flow of narrative. They do not care for the traditional ideas about unity and coherence of plot and character. It is a literary response to the conditions of man in modern times. Change in philosophical thought and developments in the field of psychology heralded technical innovations. These novels violated chronological sequence in imitation of the human consciousness itself.

Time is the primary concern of the modern novelists. Plato's "Timeus" invests time with the dignity of the eternal. He thought of it as the neatly regulated occurrences at intervals. It was more like Newton's mathematical time. However, the later religious mystics invested time with a sense of evil on account of its utter changeability. As Shakespeare puts it,

"And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd"
The New – Platonist imitators also followed this trend. Aristotle made an interesting distinction

between moment and activity. He thought activity was endless while movement had a predetermined 'telos' (end) to which it drew and then ceased. St. Augustine approached the problem of time in an essentially Christian way. In his *The City of God – Book XI*, he says, "Thus, He comprehends all that takes place in time – the not yet existing future, the existing present and the no-longer-existing past, in an immutable and eternal present." Time and Eternity in Christian thought have ripened into opposite concepts through a process of historical theology. To the Greeks, time appeared as a perpetual circular motion in which everything keeps recurring in an appointed manner. The Greek striving for redemption is an individual breaking away from the perpetually moving cycle of time, not as a historical destiny finding its fulfillment through a redeemer, but as an individual striving to be freed from time altogether. Time becomes a mystical 'destroyer' as well as the 'preserver' because in time beings obtain their 'becoming'. It is conceived as a general cause determining the origination, duration and disappearance of all empirical beings. Thus, corresponding to these three functional aspects of time are the future, the present and the past respectively. But this division is only an appearance created by Upadhis on the unique, indivisible Time substance. Time itself is motionless, but things originate and disappear in it. Hence, the tripartite motion is reflected in time.

It is often said that the content decides the form of work of art. In the case of the new novel in which the stream-of-consciousness method is fully or partially used, the content covers the four different levels of consciousness. They are the conscious, the preconscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious. In the words of Edward Bowling, this type of novel is "a direct quotation of the mind-not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness". Shiv. K. Kumar avers that the new novel is a deliberate effort to render in a literary medium a new realization of experience as a process of dynamic renewal. Bergson's philosophical theories of time, memory and consciousness provide a more useful clue to the understanding of the new technique. Time has emerged as a new mode of artistic perception in the modern novel.

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