

TRANSFORMATION OF CHRONOTOPOS  
AS THE COMPOSITIONAL BASE  
OF MODERN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN FEMALE PROSE

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**Abstract**

*The article studies the approaches to organising the time-and-space structure realized in the fiction works created by the modern English and American female authors. It also investigates the transformations of the chronotopos as the compositional base of the contemporary female prose.*

**Keywords:** *transformation, chronotopos, compositional base, modern English prose, American female prose.*

**Rezumat**

*În articol, se studiază atât organizarea spațio-temporală a ficțiunii în lucrările literare ale scriitorilor moderne britanice și americane, cât și transformările cronotopului ca element de bază al prozei acestora.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *transformare, cronotopos, bază compozițională, proză engleză modernă, proză feminină americană.*

Time and space concepts seem to exist in our lives and to follow us since our first hours of the arrival, but one – space – can be changed, transformed and personally altered (we can move somewhere else, refurbish the space we are living in, or simply imagine being in another country, state, continent while staying in one and the same surroundings), but that is not the thing with time. It has its own flow, an irreversible one, that we are not capable of changing. All the efforts of the mechanical and artificial intrusions in time's flow sooner or later fall pitifully flat – we can never get younger even having gone through hundreds of plastic operations, we cannot stop time duration by mechanical stop of a watch, etc. In fact, these concepts are so much independent and are so much not in the power of a man that they rather often make the latter succumb to them, force him to get conquered by them – and it is the very moment when all the representatives of the humankind start differentiating themselves into the winners – the ones who managed to rule the time and space given to them by destiny – and the ordinary people, who easily and with unexpected and frustrating readiness take time and space let to them, getting used to their conditions.

In the works on the theory of language and the theory and history of literature time and space notions taken together are traditionally termed chronotopos. Having once been introduced to the philology theory by M.M. Bahtin<sup>1</sup>, who according to his own words, coined the term from math

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<sup>1</sup>Bahtin, 1975.

natural science and came to the idea that chronotopos denotes inseparable connection between the space and time.

What concerns the modern female prose, we should stress here that rather often the unity of time and space acts as the triggers for the characters' becoming emotional. A female character gets them not only as the reaction to the interpersonal communication itself, but also as the result of time and space scrutinizing.

It is extremely difficult to tell which of the triggers more often makes a female character get emotions – time or space – as they are the components of the inseparable complex of chronotopos structure, but still detailed study of the modern female discourse gives us a chance to answer that question. Time in female fiction turns tense and exaggerated thus making the space lose the physical boundaries, its physically realized limits (the female characters easily change the cities for dwelling in, they travel around the world, they have and even adore the feeling of territorial freedom and independence, they are mobile and are open to new impressions and emotions). Time is usually connected in female fiction with the emotional state of the communicants – the happier a person feels, the less obvious for her the time duration, the characters seem to be following the motto saying that *happiness takes no account of time* and that *time flies when you're having fun*.

The idea of chronotopos can be applied to any type of work – to epic, lyric and dramatic piece. But the most effective is its application in the framework of the analysis of the epic works, as the chronotopos in such works is obvious in every detail possible – in the plot, full of monologues and dialogues, landscape descriptions, character's drawing and the narrator's speech. As A.Ya. Esalnek metaphorically put it, “everything in them is connected with the space and is breathing the time as the space is the place where the action is laid, where different events revealing the inner world of the characters happen. And the time is, first of all, the historic time that influences the way of life of any people's circle in this or that historic period. Secondly, time in the fiction work is a novel time in which the characters inhabit the novel's space – it's the duration, the tensivity and the degree of its influence on the life of the novel's characters. Thirdly, time is rendered as the time of the narration about the events”<sup>2</sup>.

The female fiction of today is rather unanimous in choosing the historic time – S. Kinsella's, E. Gilbert's and C. Ahern's characters live at the turn of XX-XXI centuries, they are modern and forward-minded, deprived of any doubts concerning their chances to get happiness and love, they are cosmopolitan feeling in their element in every town, city and country. What concerns the second approach to the time notion of the novel, we should point out that the female writers tend to create the characters who are of

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<sup>2</sup>Esalnek, 2004, p. 127.

about 25-35, may be 40 odd as if hinting that these fictional people do have some background that makes them more interesting to decipher and also they get the reader's trust as we can guess that at such an age a person already has something to say to the world, to the readers' world in particular. Such an age group is also a right and wise choice as the reader is to feel that there is much for the characters in future, that they can further develop and perfect themselves. Thus the idea of constant upgrading one's personality is clarified.

Time is the universal characteristic of both the physical reality, and of semiotic system. But the semiotic time, the time of the novel, the time of culture, have inverse relation to the time of physical reality. The greatest peculiarity of the latter is its anisotropy that is the irreversible development in one direction<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, there is an obvious and widespread tendency to split the chronotopos structure of the novel in modern American and English female fiction. The time of the female narration is often turned backwards with all the recollections of the character's childhood (Elizabeth in C. Ahern's "If You Could See Me Now"), the reminiscences of past married life and its difficulties (autobiographical E. Gilbert's "Eat, Pray, Love"), reviving oneself after three-year period of living the life of another person (S. Kinsella's "Remember Me?"). In "If You Could See Me Now" the text reflects two types of time that are conversive to each other – the real time in which Elizabeth lives and the time of Ivan (illusiv character) that is absolutely different from the one we are ready to perceive as it destroys the essence of the concept of time that presupposes ageing, growing from young, through adult to old.

This isn't the case with Ivan who is said to be of about thirty and can no way get old: "I watched as she looked around for me and couldn't find me, as she closed her eyes, made a wish and blew out the candles like the little girl that never had her twelfth birthday party and who was living it all now. It brought back to me what Opal had said about me never having a birthday, never ageing while Elizabeth did and would this day, every year. The local crowd smiled and cheered as she blew out the candles, but for me they represented the passing time, and as she extinguished those dancing flames, she extinguished a tiny bit of hope that was left inside me. They represented why we couldn't be together, and that stabbed my heart. The cheery mass celebrated while I commiserated and I couldn't help but be more aware than ever that with every minute that ticked by she was getting older"<sup>4</sup>. Some might suppose such an ability not to get older a rather lucky thing, but for the characters it creates the chasm that they can't bridge. This is the way how time influences the space transforming it in the female narration.

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<sup>3</sup>Rudnev, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ahern, 2006, p. 375.

Another example of time, let's say, dissolving in the space is with S. Kinsella's Lexi Smart who used to have an uncoordinated 'time-space' concept system after leading a life of an absolutely different person having turned from a person with disastrous love life and ugly appearance into a posh looking, married to a millionaire woman.

What should also be added when talking about the chronotopos of the present female discourse is that the authors prefer to change the locale of the novels – the female protagonist is much on the way, travelling either for learning about the spiritual disciplines and for having some rehab after a divorce (E. Gilbert), or for radical changing of the life style and profession (S. Kinsella's "The Undomestic Goddess"), but while doing this the woman is pretty aware of the fact that the travelling and changing the routine will help her to find her real place in this world of great fuss and problems, and she will finally gain psychological stability and balance: "I have made the biggest mistake of my career. I have quite possibly lost my job. I will never be a partner. One stupid mistake. <...> My heart-rate has gradually subsided, but I have a bad, throbbing headache. I'm sitting with a hand over one eye, trying to block out the light. 'Ladies and gentlemen...' the conductor is crackling over the loudspeaker. 'Unfortunately ... rail works ... alternative transport ...' I can't follow what he's saying. I don't even know where I'm headed. I'll just wait for the next stop, get out of the train and take it from there"<sup>5</sup>.

A present woman can afford herself to do something with no practical goal – she travels for pleasure, though she is rather determined at the same time: "But why must everything always have a practical application? I'd been such a diligent soldier for years – working, producing, never missing a deadline, taking care of my beloved ones, my gums and my credit record, voting, etc. Is this lifetime supposed to be only about duty? <...> And this, finally, was how my whole idea about this year of traveling began to gel. I absolutely needed to get myself back to Indonesia somehow, on my own dime this time. This was evident. Though I couldn't yet imagine how to do it, given my chaotic and disturbed life. <...> To make matters even more confusing, I'd also been dying lately to get over to Italy, so I could practice speaking Italian in context, but also because I was drawn to the idea of living for a while in a culture where pleasure and beauty are revered"<sup>6</sup>. As we can see a female of today can pamper herself doing what she wants without watching the reaction of the people around – she does what she has in the mind and has full responsibility for her actions, she finds it easy to get acquainted with new people, she is relaxed and is deprived of any prejudice that could limit her actions or choices in life.

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<sup>5</sup>Kinsella, 2006, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert, 2006, p. 29, p. 36.

It is noteworthy that the space in the analyzed discourse can be interpreted in two ways – as the inner space of the female character that determines the degree of her personal freedom and the outer space that organizes all the objects of the world surrounding her and triggering her emotional feedback.

The basic feature of the time as the physical phenomenon is its anisotropy that makes time develop in one possible direction, but it is the very feature that the time in the female fiction of today lacks. The women authors, as we managed to find out, are very resourceful when looking for the ways how to make the vector of time move in backward direction or how to make the movement of the vector multidirectional. On the one hand, it allows the female protagonists to co-exist with the readers in the same historic period, but on the other hand, the characters are able to reminisce about their childhood or youth. Such a method of introducing into the narration the recollections of the adult character about his youth or the dreams of a adolescent one about his future adult life is rather widespread in the history of the world literature. But what makes the present female fiction stand out on this background is the deliberate slowdown of the fictional time vector's development, its full stop, resulting in the characters' living out of time, giving vent to all their emotions. Meanwhile, the characters are always put into definitely shown space, otherwise their existence out of time and out of space could lead to their disappearance.

To slowdown or to stop the time vector the character presenting a striking contrast with the female protagonist is introduced to the text – the difference, for example, can be in the absence of ageing of the first (Ivan in C. Ahern's "If You Could See Me Now"). It means that the vector of his personal time is immovable and he functions as the time coordinate for the female protagonist's development: getting older or ageing she is perfecting her emotional self by gradually acquiring the ability to show love and sympathy for the close people in public, the readiness to take the changes in their spirits and react to their emotional ups and downs without excessive verbal aggression. Moreover, moving forward in time and becoming physically adult the female protagonist of the modern female prose doesn't become emotionally exhausted or tired, on the contrary, she develops right understanding of life objectives and of people surrounding her, especially of her family and friends.

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