



The Refraction Of Time In The Novel *Ring Square*

Dr. Elda Talka

"Aleksander Xhuvani" University, Faculty of Human Sciences, Department of Italian and French languages, Elbasan, Albania

ABSTRACT

This article focuses particularly onto analyzing time in the novel "Ring Square" by the writer Zejnullah Rrahmani. The novel, which is as modern as it is contemporary, is too complicated in its evolvment, with such an agile plot swaying into several time categories: by analyzing the novel it can formerly consider qualifying it as a "time symbol", with each element entailing a certain meaning or symbolization and with the time as the motive mechanism of this mega-symbol. Time has been featured almost on each single page, yet not in the same form, making its explication, from the time point of view, seemingly even more difficult. The time is the most important element with the space of the city. By the point of the events there are two kinds of time in the novel: the real time, the one which has been encountered frequently and the legendary or the mythical time which has been written in italics.

KEYWORDS : time, symbol, refraction, ellipsis, regression, anticipation.

INTRODUCTION

In order to give expression and meaning to the Time as a phenomenon as well as to argue what we want and degree of understanding and possessing it, humans have set up a range of notions and terms associated with an entire universe of symbolic ties giving shape to what has been considered as the cultural experience of time. (Ricoeur P, 1994). This article focuses particularly onto analyzing time in the novel *"The Ring Square"* by the Kosovo writer Zejnullah Rrahmani (1952). With regard to this novel, it can surely allege that in terms of the time aspect, it moves to different time periods, moreover, the writer "exploits" time by making it a function of the novel's own being. The novel, which is as modern as it is contemporary, is too complicated in its evolvment, with such an agile plot swaying into several time categories: by analyzing the novel we can formerly consider qualifying it as a "time symbol", with each element entailing a certain meaning or symbolization and with the time as the motive mechanism of this mega-symbol. Time has been featured almost on each single page, yet not in the same form, making its explication, from the time point of view, seemingly even more difficult. One of the frequently encountered symbols is "Sc" - the name of the city where the greatest part of the events takes place. The city has not been given a clearly defined denotation, being solely named by the two initials 'Sc' which associate narration to the end. The names of the main characters have also been presented in symbols, such as the priest, (being the only character surviving to the end), Mr. S, Mark M, the beggar, etc. Besides being symbols entailing disguised meanings, these denotations are also elements which make us feel astonished while reading the novel. One must admit that apart from these denotations, many other parts of the novel sound so weird that at the first read one can hardly understand the plot. Only a detailed analysis which follows can work out the thread that links all the pages of the novel.

The novel *"The Ring Square"* was firstly published in 1978, in Pristina, by the Rilindja Publishing House. There are 33 chapters in the novel as a whole lying in 510 pages, excluding the preface, the epilogue and an embedded chapter titled: "Folk Stories". The main theme treated by Rrahman is the stamina of the Albanians, the Kosovar obsession with liberty and with death and the resurrection of a city-state. In addition, the novel does not abide by a linear involvement of the events, from the beginning to the end; linearity is frequently broken by reversing far backwards in time, which makes one think that there is no defined chronology in this novel. This becomes possible by using the events' regression and anticipation. Regression is obvious at the end of the novel as well as somewhere in the middle:

"A day is coming when things commence from the very start again, as it has happened hundreds and hundreds of years ago, since everything has converged to the point where they must join over anew..." (p. 320).

What makes more impression in the novel is that the writing style has not been maintained the same through the narration as a whole: once and again a special writing in italics has been used (usually in cases

of regression), making a clear distinction from the rest of the writing style. There should be said that reading the lines with such writing style indicates the past events, therefore, in the past. Whereas the normal writing style in the novel shows that the events continue to advance from the point they had been interrupted. There are cases when a chapter as a whole has been written in italics to provide us with the specific information about the past of the "Sc" city foundations. It is to be emphasized that, usually these parts of the novel refer to the main events, those in the foundations the "Sc" city has been raised on. In this point of the events we have to say that there are two kinds of time in the novel: the real time, the one which has been encountered frequently and the legendary or the mythical time which has been written in italics.

We are using the denomination 'legendary time' because in the "Sc" city foundations lies the legend of Gjergj Elez Alia, his duel with the monster, the dryness of the land, lakes and rivers which later on revive again with the arrival of many people who founded the "Sc" city. This legendary time has been introduced at the beginning of the novel:

"Behold my friend, the elders tell stories that passed from one generation to another by word of mouth, from those who eye-witnessed and heard about those events themselves, that the "Sc" city was founded following the long and dreadful years of drought and long-lasting wars and the kindred was threatened with extinction. It was at that time, they all say, that the most dreadful monster of all times had emerged..." (p. 6).

The presence of the narration- people is surely, the most prominent pattern of embedding (Todorov T., 2000), persisting in many other pages of the novel, but in pages 259-270 the legend has been evolved from start to finish, with all its compound elements:

"Sc" was founded at the end of a two thousand- year long period of time... the Capital was coming into existence".

While we can maintain that the legend is persisting in fragmentary forms in many pages of the novel, it has utterly been shaped as legend in those pages, i.e.: 259-270, although in a normal and not in italic style of writing, as the past events are usually presented with, which makes the integration of the legend into the novel plot possible, by so making it part of the narration flowing.

We will not name this time as a legendary one anymore, due to the simple fact that the legend of Gjergj Elez Alia is not the only one treated in this novel, there are also the legends of Rozafa, that of Alexander the Great and even more important, the author evolves the Illyrian Ages when Kings Agron and Gent were ruling the Illyrian State. The novel provides fragments of the Illyrian-Roman wars in which Romans were led by Pretorian. It is for these reasons that, at a concluding remark, we will refer to it as a historical time. Whereas the other time, the one which is the fundamental part of the plot evolvment, will be considered as the novel's real time.

The novel's real time is closely linked with the events that were occurring in Kosovo in the last decades of the twentieth century. These times, both the historic and the real one are narrowly intertwined between them and in a final analysis they are integral part of the narrative events.

While the narrative time of the novel's events is very slow - a slowness which goes through the novel as a whole, it is associated by the frequent reversals into the historical time which decelerate the evolution flowing of the novel's events. It is to be emphasized that the same legend has been told in alternative ways in different parts of the novel. Thus considered, this is when the novel's plot as a whole covers a twelve-year time period making up the time of the novel as such. The following illustrates the idea:

"The crowded corridors - full of soldiers. Guards of the public order. Noises. Fierce and strange orders. Going upstairs while being aware of nothing. His table seemed to be dark and chilly. "Been in this place for twelve successive years" - the priest thought ..."; (p. 273).

Twelve year time has passed but it seems as if one-hundred years have passed. If the historic time has been included, too, millenniums should be taken across to approach it. This time coincides with the antiquity and the history of formation of the Albanian nation. Time as a feature, as a dimension of the reality gets into the literary work and submits to the transformation rules within the literary text, even undergoing through refraction.

"Time refraction, or the ways of its metamorphosis, comprise the greatest ramifications of the prose styles. They constitute the main source of its actualization" (Kuçuku B., 2000). Also, another compound element of the events narration time is the Ellipsis, (the deceleration of the events persisting through years on end by condensing them in a few lines), which is widely used in this novel and by means of which the essential moments of the novel have been crossed through rapidly. Therefore the ellipsis is frequently encountered in the novel. The following are examples showing the use of the ellipsis:

"The citizens had fast realized that they could not live outside the impregnable walls so they retreated and never built the incinerated houses darkening downward the lawn and under the hill's foot... was quickly cleaned, the roads took shape etc, etc, etc..."(p. 7).

"The successive excerpt shows that the "Sc" city took shape after the difficult years, during which the kindred as a whole was threatened by total extinction..." (p. 36).

"The first months were full of such toilsome events, then they began to catch the words flying over them and to realize what their secret meanings implied, which strangely awakened their curiosity. They began to comprehend things distinctly even with the words they knew..."(p.272)

In addition to the real characters mentioned above there are also historical characters such as Alexander the Great, the behemoth, Gjergj Elez Alia, King Agron, Rozafa, Safo, etc. It is an incontestable fact that, theoretically, there is a conjunction between the characters and the narration action. We even can say that it is the action pulling the characters' strings and taking them through the labyrinth where it evolves, meaning that the narration time is actually the action time, while at meantime the action per se is a direct product of the writer's perceptive abilities (Boçi L., 2005). One of the characters surviving to the end is the priest, whose real name is not known, but it is mentioned solely as 'the priest'. He provides data about the city, the war and the weather while being the city and army leader and being obliged to make difficult decisions. Around him act characters like Mark M, who dies, Mr. S and Vera, his wife, his son Keraum etc.

Another time element is the war which has long been smothering the city. A state of war, nightmare, tension, chaos, anxiety and incessant murder prevail the city. The invader's language was prevailing due to the invasion and via the war and the native language was being cast to oblivion. What is to be emphasized is that some of the foreign words dissonate in the novel's historical time. Without the slightest hesitation we can say that there is also a lexical time which appears in the words such as: *deportation, officer, guards of the public order, etc.* For the

time the events take place these words are featuring the novel's real time and by means of which is alluded about the wartime which is characterized by deportations, murder, terror and imprisonments, etc. Therefore, while they feature the novel's real time, other words feature the novel's historical time. They bring us to the conclusion that two different historical periods are characterized by means of different linguistic lexis.

Time is the one which leaves indelible trails in humans and what it provides in this novel are trails of terror, anxiety and torture, with the characters feeling its burden for the rest of their lives and not being freed from grief. Many of them die, despite the prediction of the future, at the end of the novel, page 320:

"A day is coming when things commence from the very start again, as it has happened hundreds and hundreds of years ago, since everything has converged to the point where they must join over anew..."

However, there are also other fragments alluding for the "Sc" city future in the book:

"The city counted the passing years while its life kept pending over the death abyss. Everyone new that the war would go on for the long forty-five years. In the aftermath everything about the war, the casualties and the forthcoming life would become known..." (p.194)

Some more fragments of the novel's real time would be worth mentioning:

"This is the third year. It's the third year. The third year. The third, etc (p. 114).

"In the third year of the war, when everything was getting closer to the end, the foreign cities were suddenly commencing to deal with the war in "Sc".... (p. 51).

The most frequently mentioned site in the "Sc" city is **the ring square**, which also constitutes the title of the novel. A lot of events and occurrences happen in this very place, namely, in the ring square. It is the site where every city dweller commutes, coming together to hear the news, where people can have access to the main city roads, moreover, it is the place where a lot of assassinations take place and where columns of women brought to the city pass through. Therefore, it is the site where the most of the novel's events take place. Consequently, if we refer to the novel's time as a whole, in which both the past and the contemporary realities have been incorporated, then we can enunciate we have a mutual junction between the history and contemporariness in an interdependent relation with each-other. These two realities have set up parallelisms between each-other and provide as much information from the past as they bring from the present. The historic time cannot be realized devoid of the present time, and the present time cannot be realized without the historic one. Therefore, they are as much distinctive from each other as they are related and this interaction, this link, which is as natural as it is logic, constitutes the subject of the novel as a whole. The novel cannot be perceived out of these two periods of time. Basing upon the aforesaid clause, this novel, without any hesitation, can be qualified as an historical novel. According to Eco (1964) *"The scene is so important that even the most outstanding authors have based their destiny in its unchangedness"*.

Now a few more words about the narration aspect and the role of the narrator in the novel. As a start, it is to be emphasized that, the narrator in the novel is the same character, from start to finish. It does not change, except for the cases when there is narration inside narration, in which it is told by one of the characters. Narration is in the third person but not linear. It has ups and downs which can be illustrated with the aforesaid clause, namely, the breaking of the chronological order, with retrospective, anticipation, ellipsis, etc. The narrator observes everything and recounts what he observes. The following are excerpts of the narration inside narration:

"I am recalling a conversation I had a long time ago with the pottery master. While I was young he told me he was ninety but his hands were so deft and I was surprised to see that those hands, although trembling so much, could produce such perfect shapes... (p.114).

"Some parts of that letter are still locked in my mind for ever and those are what I am telling you now: Vicinity of "Sc" September ...

... my dear friend, until this moment I have been lucky enough, that's why I am writing this letter....(p.67).

The language used by the writer is simple, clear and without insinuations. The novel includes dialogues, monologues, descriptions of the events, descriptions of the war and descriptions of the city, etc. The work on its move is not an invitation to enter into a world that has been shaped as the author wants it to be, (Eco 1962).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can say that Rrahman's literature is a proustian fusion of prose and poetry, some parts of which constitute sublime art, (Hamiti S., 2002), such as the time, place, the events, the characters which have been created and literary figured, a literature which has been qualified by the modern Albanian Literary School to have an undeclared contract with itself (Hamiti S. 2002). The analyzed novel is dominated by a weird

colloquialism in which the dramatic situations have been articulated in a lyric language, with a very rich and well-studied means of the native (Albanian) language. It can say that the work is prevailed by the time-space rapport, in which the time plays the leading role and where the simple time attributes mean the space in which this time moves to, as well. It to be emphasized that the time is to be considered and qualified it as a "time symbol", with each element entailing a certain meaning or symbolization and with the time as the motive mechanism of this mega-symbol.

So, thanks to the attributes this time refraction displays, the novel gets magic powers and becomes attractive to the readers.

"Solely the time went by and those who had not died yet kept being alive" (p. 113)

REFERENCES

- [1]Boçi, L. (2005), "Koha në poetikën e romanit" Shtëpia Botuese Sejko, Elbasan, p.75. | [2]Eco, U. (1964), "Apocalittici e integrati" Bompiani, Milano, p.247 | [3] Eco, U. (1962), "Opera aperta" Bompiani, Milano p.58 | [4]Hamiti S. (2002), "Letërsia moderne" Vepra letrare 8, Faik Konica, Prishtinë, available on line portale Dervina.com Shkolla letrare shqipe, p.6-7 | [5]Hamiti S. (2002), "Kritika letrare" Vepra letrare 6, Faik Konica, available on line portale Dervina.com Shkolla letrare shqipe, p.1-7 | [6]Kuçuku B. (2000), "Kadare në gjuhët e bëtës" Shtëpia Botuese, Onufri, Tiranë, p.19 | [7]Ricoeur P. (1994), "Tempo e racconto" Jaca Book, Milano, pg.133-141 | [8]Todorov T. (2000), "Poetika e prozës. Studime të zgjedhura dhe kërkime të reja rreth rrefimit" Shtëpia Botuese Panteon, Tiranë, p.31 | [9]Zejnullah Rr. (1978), "Sheshi i unazës", Rilindja, Prishtinë.