
Allegorical Chronotope: A Narrative Reading of C. S. Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress*

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The term chronotope 'literally means 'time-space'. This term was initially introduced in mathematics as a part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity where time is considered as the fourth dimension of space. In the literary realm, chronotope denotes the inseparability of time and space. Kant in his *Transcendental Aesthetics* considers "space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations [and these forms provide a major role] in the process of concrete artistic cognition (artistic visualization) under conditions obtaining in the genre of the novel" (Bakhtin 85). In other words, abstract thoughts of the reader are transformed into concrete artistic visualisation through the chronotope. "The chronotope makes the narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins" (250). The chronotope provides concrete shape to the abstract elements of the narrative. So, the events would remain mere information without the chronotope. The events merge with chronotope in making the fictional world believable, by materialising time in space and concretizing the narration.

A writer creates fictional chronotope using the tools available in the realistic chronotope. C. S. Lewis, the author of popular fantasies of Narnia, has defamiliarised realistic chronotope with the aid of imagination and allegory in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. It was

published in 1933. It was a reflection of his encounter with Christianity. It is similar in style to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but different in its allegorical elements. The story films the regression of John in his journey encountering various philosophies and ideologies of the time and ultimately surrenders to God. It is fictional version of Lewis' conversion from atheism to Christian faith. "Conversion to Christianity for Lewis... seems largely an intellectual process and an individual one at that" (Jasper).

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the places also gain allegorical note, just like the characters. The narrative begins in a place called Puritania. The narrator gives a detailed report of the place with specific features of the country, its landscape, rules, and customs of the place. There, the wood is full of primroses, soft green mosses, and birds. But John is not allowed to go there. People in Puritania have law. The place is under the governance of a Steward who tells them about the rules the Landlord wants them to follow. Each person who lives in the country is a tenant of the Landlord. The Landlord can at any time end their lease and call them to his castle in the mountain. It can be noted that the detailing of the places, Heaven and Hell, is limited, making the space unreal, mysterious and allegorical.

The narrator creates a vivid picture of the world (Earth) with all its imperfections, its varied philosophies and ideas. The Earth in his narration becomes a place of pilgrimage, just as the title suggests, while the ultimate destination is either Heaven or Hell. The Landlord's castle in the mountain refers to Heaven. Once the lease is up the tenant has to cross the river to reach the castle in the mountain or be put in the black hole. Crossing the river refers to Death in the mountain language.

Hell is first introduced by the Steward. The image of Hell is created thus: "He'd take you and shut you up forever and ever in a black hole full of snakes and scorpions as large as

lobsters – forever and ever” (Lewis, *Pilgrim’s* 23). This description of Hell brought horror and fear into the mind of John. The Steward added to his description of the Black Hole: “He is such a kind, good man, so very very kind, that I am sure you would never want to displease him” (23). The dialogue turned ironic. It not just brought the fear of Hell but also the fear of the Landlord. The places, Heaven and Hell, have their resonance to the Landlord. Instead of creating a picture of a ‘very kind’ God, it creates horror in the mind of John. Though Steward’s statement sounds ironic, it holds truth.

On John’s journey to the island of his desire, he gets different images of Hell from different people. For Mr. Enlightenment and others, Hell is just an imagination. Hell and Heaven become pictures of wish-fulfilment in the eyes of the Giant. When John comes out of History’s cave, he encounters a vision of Hell: “...all in one moment his inner eyes saw the black hole full of spiders and scorpions...” (166). The Black hole is not a charge of cruelty. The Landlord didn’t make the Black hole but it came into existence when the first tenants ate the mountain apple. Evil is fissiparous so it cannot be limited. But Landlord brought form and limit to it. “The walls of the black hole are the tourniquet on the wound through which the lost soul else would bleed to a death she never reached. It is the Landlord’s last service to those who will let him do nothing better for them” (181, 182).

While John and Virtue travel after their submission to Mother Kirk (Church), the Guide takes John and Virtue through the borders of Black hole. The image of the country turned different. It becomes the images of Hell and Heaven when their eyes are altered to see reality. The places gain new significance. There is no Mr. Sensible there. The Valley of Wisdom has now turned into “Limbo or twilit porches of the black hole” (179). Men like Old Wisdom live there suffering from desire but without hope. They have deep desire of the soul but are ruined

by their fatal flaws like pride, sloth, or timidity. Then they pass through Superbia who was once represented by the three pale men. She is the daughter of the Enemy. She looks like a skeleton covered with skin and “eyes flaming in the sockets of its skull” (183). She tempts them towards pride. They pass through Ignorantia which represents the ignorance of The Tough-minded and The Clavers. By the road side they find concourse of men who were disfigured. Their body parts seem to crumble. They wait to get a drink from Luxuria, the witch. She snatches the drink before each person is satisfied. The craving for the drink wrenches them. And then at last they cross the Brook (which represents Death) and reach the Castle. The narrator couldn’t see clearly how they crossed the brook or how the castle looks, but he hears the angels sing along with the new arrivals. The song reflects the place. In other words, the act of singing reflects the joy of the place, Heaven in contrast to the sufferings of the Earth.

The chronotope is the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and special relationship” (Bakhtin 84). In *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, travel is the core of the pilgrimage. “In the chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity” (98). There is strong connection between the chronotope of road and the motif of meeting. The pilgrim’s journey is constructed by meetings. He meets people on the way. Through these meetings, he learns and unlearns.

With meeting as the core motif of the narrative, being at the right time in the right place is very essential. Each encounter John faces is important, since he learns the pagan ways and about the Landlord, and later unlearns and re-learns at the hands of History, Mother Kirk and the Man.

Do the meetings and non-meetings happen by chance or by choice of the characters? In the incipit, the narrator unveils the curiosity of John through several events. He, awakened by the sweet music and the vision of the Island, goes out and reaches the window to the woods. He goes out into the woods each day until he finds the Brown girl. He commits fornication with her. He thought she is the image of his Island till he becomes sick of her. He decides to leave her and find his Island. Here it is by choice he comes and it is by choice he leaves. At a certain point, John decides to leave Puritania and his home. It is not fate but his choice to leave to find the Island. At every meeting John makes decisions. Fate has its hand in coinciding the time and place for the meetings but the choice of the character dominates.

Abstract time stretches over the expanse of the abstract (allegorical) space. The connection between time and space is purely technical. Usually the abstract space and the abstract time lack significance and are alterable. But in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, space is significant because each place is allegorical and the place has its correlation to the characters who live there and their philosophical enterprises. The time is not organic. The temporal markers found in the narration are abstract.

The narrative begins when John is able to walk and it soon shifts to a year later. Another year passes in the next page. The narrator doesn't give us exact numbers when it comes to the passage of time: "Now the days and the weeks went on again..." (Lewis, *Pilgrim's* 24). Sometimes, "one morning" (24), or "One day" (25) represent the time without the reader knowing which day it is. Suddenly John grows up and becomes a young man. His journey takes up time, i.e., his lifetime. The narrator omits several years, months, days, or hours within the narration using such (above mentioned) temporal markers. The time runs

with the events. The physical time cannot be calculated with these abstract temporal markers. The narrator often ellipses over a certain period of time to arrive at the desired events.

The abstract time gains significance in its effect on the characters, John and Vertue. Time does act on other characters but they do not change. John and Vertue do change with the passage of time. Each philosophy and ideology affects them temporarily and changes their perception. At the end they submit to Mother Kirk and do all that she requires even though it seems painful. Time does act on them. They change biologically as well as spiritually. This metamorphism transforms John and Vertue, not by extraordinary incidents, but by simple truth. The space remains the same but these two pilgrims transform. The transformation affects their space in the future – whether they go to Hell or Heaven. The fact is that both the places – Heaven and Hell as well as the Landlord and the Enemy are more talked about but never actually come into the picture of narration. They are the center of discussion but never appear, except the picture of Hell from the side road.

Considering the first frame in the fictional level of communication which constitutes the dreamer and the audience, the temporal and the special realm falls into a dream. In the dream chronotope, “the hours are dragged out, days are compressed into moments, it becomes possible to bewitch time itself. Time begins to be influenced by dreams; that is, we begin to see the peculiar distortion of temporal perspectives characteristic of dreams” (Bakhtin 154). For example, “Still I lay dreaming in bed, and looked, and I saw John go plodding along the road Westward in the bitter black of a frosty night” (Lewis, *Pilgrim’s* 35). In this passage from *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, the actual space is the bed and the time is denoted by sleep. On the other hand, within the mind of the reader (in the second level of

fictional communication where John goes on pilgrimage), the spacial marker is the road and the temporal marker is the 'frosty night'.

Within this dream chronotope, the details of space are limited. John, on his journey, reaches "the top of a little hill" (40). He is now sure that there are no landlord and no black hole. Here the narrator gives some detailed description of the setting. "Frost was gleaming like silver; sky was like blue glass; a robin sat in the hedge beside him; a cock was crowing in the distance... and up at the highest of all the sun was smiling steadily on the ultimate crags" (40). The sight around is not just the background space, but a reflection of the character's emotions. The space has strong connection with the character. "...now that there was no Landlord he perceived that they [the place around John] were beautiful" (40). Moreover, the details are not isolated and unique. It neither portrays the strangeness of the place nor defamiliarises it from the real world (earth). It is unlike the fantastic lands Lewis has created. In creating Malacandra, Lewis creates unique set of people, vegetation, animals and landscape which are similar to that of the earth's, but different. For, instance, "The purple stuff was vegetation: more precisely it was vegetables, vegetables about twice the height of English elms, but apparently soft and flimsy" (Lewis, *Out* 45). The narrator compares it with earthly vegetation but make it look unique and different. In turn the effect helps the narration. But here in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, he draws parallels with earth showing similarities. The realistic descriptions create almost a realistic chronotope for the dream narrative, making the allegorical work look more ordinary and realistic in *The Pilgrim's Regress*.

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