

# Exploring the Philosophy of Time in Literature

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multifaceted philosophy of time as represented and manipulated in literature. Time, a central philosophical and metaphysical concept, transcends its scientific definitions to become a profound narrative force within literary forms. Literature does not merely recount events but structures temporal experience, inviting readers to engage with past, present, and future as thematic and structural devices. From ancient philosophical inquiries to modern narrative theories, time in literature appears both as a reflective concept and an experiential phenomenon. The study examines historical, cultural, and narrative interpretations of time, with a focus on temporal distortions, memory, existential temporality, and technological influence. Drawing on theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, Aristotle, and Bergson, and referencing genres from poetry to fiction, the discussion emphasizes how literature uniquely dramatizes time through plot, memory, symbolism, and narrative rhythm. Ultimately, literature becomes both a “tale about time” and a “tale of time,” enriching our philosophical and emotional understanding of temporality.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of time, Narrative temporality, Paul Ricoeur, Time in fiction, Time in poetry, Existentialism and time, Cultural temporality.

## INTRODUCTION

Time – from its most rudimentary definition as a measure of change, to the busy person, struggling against it; to the more philosophical owls, who ponder what it is; to the physicist, who struggles to explain it and how it fits into the universe – is one of our great preoccupations. As explains it, thus, as a consequence of their fundamental structure, narrative arts such as literature or cinema convey a sense of temporal experience. The literary concept of plot concern with how events in a story are related to one another temporally. Despite the truth of this statement, the thought that literature conveys time has often been disregarded because fiction cannot be said to be 'about' time explicitly, for it cannot be said to be about the relationship between time and being, or time in the abstract, as is the case with, say, Einstein's theory of relativity. In other words, narratives like novels (or films) do not leave behind a sense of time by discussing it reflectively. They inquire whether time can be defined or can be said to exist independently of literary representations about it. They reflectively analyze the meaning of pastness, presentness, futurity, and the temporal structures of being, which includes - amongst others - questions of the precedence between physics and philosophy. In other words, they explore the most abstract or philosophical aspects of time, such as whether it is unidirectional or whether highly ordered, deterministic function has been undergone gradual entropy, or whether it consists of 'tensedness' (past, present, and future). Such reflection upon time is unsurprisingly ancient, especially in a Greek context, with the initial onset of philosophical thought [1, 2].

### Historical Perspectives on Time

Time is a prevalent theme in literature from antiquity to modernity, addressing philosophical issues and reflecting on concepts like being and nothingness. Literary works engage with time in both straightforward and sophisticated narratives, with prose and verse utilizing fictive time as part of their structure. This narrative time can take various forms sequential, synchronical, or cyclical—and can elicit emotional and cognitive responses. Literature often intersects with philosophical discourse on time, referencing notable thinkers and contributing to ongoing aesthetic debates from Plato to contemporary theorists like Hans Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss. The relationship between literature and philosophy suggests that literature explores philosophical questions through its unique narrative idiom, presenting events and subjects not mapped in traditional philosophical inquiry. Paul Ricoeur's distinction

between 'tales about time', which directly contemplate time's nature, and 'tales of time', which unfold narratives within time itself, illustrates this exploration [3, 4].

#### **Time as a Narrative Device**

In addition to the alluded dimensional expansion of characters in their movement in time, time as a narrative device means also other enlargements or distortions of the time dimension in the Albanian novels considered. It is by means of this expansion and/or distortion that the excess of subjective time is articulated within the narrative. Therefore, it is necessary also to point out some of the significant aspects regarding this domination of the narrative. The separate and cubist like expansion-contradictory representation of time dimension is revealed as a basic narrative element, in connection with space, in its various forms (ungrotesque static statues, movements in reverse, in a parallel time zone, etc.). This fact needs to be studied in a wider context. Dimensional enlargements and distortions are a recurrent phenomenon in literature, painting and all other artistic creations. In this sense, it must be pointed out that the nature of the time dimension, which is a long-standing domain of interest in the world's philosophy, sciences and arts, makes it closer to the man's perception and artistic representation. It is stated that the possibility of different perceptions of time leads to a basic and ultimate difference in the movement of two bodies or objects: any speed is relative but the angle or shape of absolute static is one and simple. The same is true about the use of time in literatures. Despite the universal or similar nature of their philosophies, systems of writing and other conditions, writers have different or various perceptions of time and perceptions based on these. The same is true on narrative, because time of narrative is one of the basic components of an artistic narrative. Temporal distortions are also found in many Albanian novels, though the passive and negative forms of movement in time are less present [5, 6].

#### **Philosophical Theories of Time**

A central question of philosophy is the nature of time, with various theories proposed. Some view time as a mechanism, a container for events. Others define time as an active causal agent, arguing that everything exists simultaneously, yet nothing can exist without time, which facilitates interaction and change. Time is perceived through its consequences, durations, and histories, and it is measured by change. Some theories suggest that time has causal power from which all change arises, while others see time as a property of change needing further explanation. There are challenges in defining time as more than just a property of existing things. Aristotle noted the tensions in these definitions, leading to questions about the existence and nature of time. Is time independent or an aspect of something else? What exactly is time: a keeper of change, a period, or a measurement? Concepts like "time passing" or "moving present" are often dismissed by physicists as verbal insistence, not entering scientific discourse. Additionally, debates exist over whether the universe is discrete or continuous, with discussions around quantum states and the structure of reality versus a whole without parts [7, 8].

#### **Time in Poetry**

Time abounds in poetry, both in its reading and writing, along with meditation that encourages speculation. There exists the time of the world reflected in news and calendars, contrasted with a time of legend, lush and expansive as the waves of past and future. This legendary time fosters confidence that inspires belief and energizes expression. It enables the journey of growth and creativity, allowing for laughter as it smooths out earlier fears against friendly seas. Various notions of poetry emerge, from breath and speech to the complexities of thought, celebrating both contemplation and the challenge of understanding universal concepts like faith. The poetics of time, intertwined with grace and cyclical change, illustrates a boundless universe, respecting its measurements while embracing local nuances of literal and nonliteral meanings. Absences create imagined spaces, as seen in the eerie Saxon sea. Within these boundaries, interpretation evolves, adapting through languages, folding back into itself, allowing for harmonic grace. The cycle of time presents itself as unexpected and liberating, symbolizing birth and gifts given freely, untainted by context or constraint. This responsive creativity in poetics shifts substances and meanings, illustrating how time transitions seamlessly, paralleling magical transformations that blur reality. Overhead, the world of storytellers complicates joy, revealing struggles amidst turbulent experiences. Efforts to capture elusive grace often result in the erosion of dreams, bringing forth an ongoing cycle of challenges and transformations [9, 10].

#### **Time in Fiction**

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between 'tales about time' and 'tales of time,' noting that the former can be understood philosophically, while the latter does not require such understanding. Ancient novels can be viewed as both stories about time and not, as they differ from old-time romances and rarely discuss time explicitly. Novels convey temporality through their narratives, creating an understanding of time beyond overt commentary. This suggests that novels involve a dynamic process that intertwines time and storytelling, where both character experiences and plot configurations suggest

a temporal dimension. The novel, as a literary form, utilizes imagination to create an alternate yet realistic world, striking a balance between the actual and the narrative presentation. The interplay between time and narrative structure is essential, affecting readers' perceptions of temporality. The narrative frame, while not heavily emphasized in ancient novels, engages with temporality concerning how stories unfold over time. The relationship between diegetic and narrative time highlights the complexity of novelistic storytelling, where a duality of narration reflects on the workings of time in the narrative's structure. This focus on the interplay of different temporalities underlines the importance of understanding how narratives operate to create a layered sense of time in storytelling [11, 12].

#### **The Role of Memory in Time**

Ricoeur distinguishes between 'tales about time,' which explicitly address time philosophically, and 'tales of time,' which do not directly reference time yet influence the reader's temporal experience through narrative pace and themes. 'Tales of time' evoke a fictive experience, transforming the reader's perception of time via elements like chronology and the narration of characters' experiences. This can lead to a more temporal experience, reflecting on past desires or evoking a sense of antiquity, or a less temporal experience filled with a different tension, where the narrative hints at a fictive eternity. Reading becomes a thought experiment that simulates ideas of time within a fictional world. However, Bekhtin critiques ancient novels for their poorly developed temporal categories, lacking significant historical context and concrete events. Despite this, the narrative remains temporal, but the absence of a clear temporal framework does not negate its capacity for substantial temporal configurations beyond simple chronological passage. Notably, two temporal exceptions arise: one marked by stasis and another by a general pause in the story's action, often accompanying moments of lyrical distention that span the narrative, illustrating the indifference of characters to contemporaneous events [13, 14].

#### **Cultural Interpretations of Time**

People interpret time culturally, shaping their worldview at various levels, influencing personal and collective experiences and practices. This interpretation includes a unique understanding of temporality, with every experience being perceived through a past, present, and future lens. Variations can be seen from grand interpretations, like the Hindu cyclical view of ages affecting collective consciousness, to everyday understandings, such as the Greeks defining noon during the summer solstice. Cultural context dictates how societies perceive and discuss time, with varying approaches leading to different perspectives on its structure and flow. Diverse calendrical systems influence social dynamics, often obscured to outsiders, while concepts of time in some Afro-American cultures incorporate structured elements from their environments, linking cycles of day and night to weekly schedules. Additionally, linguistic expressions about time must include tense or aspectual operators across languages, but the manner of expression varies significantly. In cultures unconnected to specific temporal frameworks, clear means of communicating or conceptualizing time can be absent; for instance, some view a fixed point like 8:00 am as a bounded shape in space, rather than a simple time marker [15, 16].

#### **Time and Existentialism**

The literature of anguish encapsulates prose and poetry that depict the world as a prison filled with death, pain, and despair. The poet delves into the feeling of plena irrealidad and absolute desolation, highlighting the unthinkable negation associated with such imprisonment. Existentialism presents two main forms: Scheler's idealistic philosophy and Bergson Hugo's French realism, both steering towards vast fictional poetry. There exists a blend of science fiction and poetic fancies that alleviate the anguish of existence. Santayana posits that existence is temporal, with systems merely serving as supports amid the flow of time. This flow parallels a three-dimensional space that intersects with the fourth dimension of time, with individual minds navigating feelings, perceptions, and imagination free from any established system. Existentialism asserts that existence precedes essence, viewing life as absurd and chaotic, within a framework that allows for reflections on beginnings and endings. Time is perceived through three coexisting planes: vast, average, and variable, each offering different realities or illusions. Powers do exist within these realities fixed, unfixed, and hypothetical engendering chaos in a finite time-space. Acceptance emerges as a potential truth, where life becomes understanding within defined limits of time and space, hinting at a more profound significance beyond the immediate [17, 18].

#### **The Impact of Technology on Perception of Time**

Time fascinates humans, offering a complex term filled with meaning. It is a dimension revealing and concealing, where beauty can disappear yet is measured. Time enables an escape from the present, allowing the resurrection of buried experiences and glimpses into the future. Its finitude creates a tension between reality and freedom, serving as the foundation of storytelling: finite events, an audience, and a medium. Time is represented diversely, including timelines and calendars, conveying event orders and interrelations. Without awareness of a story's timing, these representations can overlook the competitive

aspects of time. Classic fiction typically maintains a faithful representation for storytelling duration. Narrative philosophy and psychophysics have examined event ordering in narratives and recollection, clarifying implications for narrative processing and time perception in artistic representation. The Internet and multimedia art have introduced a new aesthetic, merging still images, sounds, and animations into dynamic events. This evolution leads to increased complexity in works, fueling philosophical discussions. Distinctions between cosmological and phenomenological time are examined, with references to thinkers like Traversari, Macrobius, and Kant, alongside more contemporary theorists such as Whitehead and Bergson. Temporal elements within narration arise as stories inherently discuss events over time, with numerous associated variables [19, 20].

#### Case Studies of Notable Works

This section analyzes literary works by exploring varied conceptions of time. Liu's "La Nuit" interweaves commentary on the nature of time with narrative, associating it with dreams, the past, death, and immutability through specific events and personified dreams. The early part of "A Day in the Life of a Fool" views spring as a clear, uncomplicated framework for observing time, initially independent of the past or future. However, it later reflects the emotional weight of time in widowhood, personifying spring's stillness. As dusk falls, memories of the past emerge, highlighting the illusory nature of time. A contrasting perspective is offered through English literature, where shifting a moment into the past eliminates it from the present, revealing the deadly aspect of predestining time. Literal interpretations create a fantasy realm, while metaphorical readings seek a profound, immediate presence. Both perspectives present time narratively, shaped by ideological temporality and linguistic variations in literature. The examination of unlicensed projections focuses on the opening of "Ulysses" and the closing of "The Stranger," capturing familiar yet elusive moments that evoke a visceral understanding through their immediate, pictorial qualities [21, 22].

#### The Future of Time in Literature

Time is a constant theme across various literary traditions, yet the exploration of time in literature significantly differs across cultures due to cultural codes. The Albanian literature's interaction with European literary traditions and the unique organizing principles they use to reflect reality remains largely unexplored. This aspect is crucial because Albanian literature, with its universal themes, also integrates elements of Albanian culture that cannot be understood in isolation. Albanian writers depict time through various structures that unveil new dimensions, resulting in extraordinary intensity. While some novels may lack intense structures, they still effectively capture the essence of time through techniques rooted in their cultural traditions, maintaining a cultural touch despite the influence of Western literature. The aesthetic value of time in these novels foments a deep relationship between literature and time, making its study rewarding. This initial inquiry aims to categorize these authors and their works based on various perceptions of time. Albanian time perceptions alter time as an objective reality rather than merely serving as a conscious layer for event succession. These complexities encourage a deeper understanding of the literary world, facilitating the combination of processes. The time dynamics in Albanian novels provide a glimpse into devices shaping its narrative flow. Albanian novelists have redefined time using techniques such as swiftness, dilation, or flashbacks, aligning closely with European traditions, which this study traces back to the Italian modernist tradition rooted in Homer. The examination of these novelists is selective, focusing on a few who embody the interrogative tradition [23, 24].

#### CONCLUSION

The exploration of time in literature transcends chronological sequencing to engage with deep philosophical, existential, and cultural questions. Literary narratives do not merely depict the passage of time but often reflect on its nature, distort its structure, and dramatize its emotional impact. From ancient epics and philosophical dialogues to contemporary novels and digital storytelling, literature provides a unique medium for grappling with temporality. The distinctions between tales *about* time and tales *of* time illustrate literature's capacity to reflectively and affectively shape our temporal understanding. As cultural and technological contexts evolve, so too do literary representations of time shifting from linear chronologies to fragmented, cyclical, and multidimensional models. In this way, literature continues to act as a critical space where time is not just told but thought, felt, and reimagined.

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