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Série Estudos da Linguagem

# BAKHTIN AND THE CHRONOTOPE

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## Série Estudos da Linguagem

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**Dados Internacionais de Catalogação na Publicação (CIP)**  
**(Câmara Brasileira do Livro, SP, Brasil)**

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Borges Filho, Oziris

Bakhtin and the chronotope [livro eletrônico] / Oziris

Borges Filho. – Campinas, SP : Mercado de Letras, 2026.

– (Série estudos da linguagem)

ePub

Título original: Bakhtin e o cronotopo.

ISBN 978-85-7591-991-0

1. Bakhtin, M. M. (Mikhail Mikhailovitch), 1895-1975

2. Literatura - Filosofia 3. Literatura - História e crítica -  
Teoria I. Título. II. Série.

26-347630.0

CDD-801.95

---

**Índices para catálogo sistemático:**

1. Crítica literária 801.95

*capa:* Studio Rotta Design Gráfico

*gerência editorial:* Vanderlei Rotta Gomide

*preparação dos originais:* Mercado de Letras

*revisão final do autor*

*bibliotecária:* Eliete Marques da Silva – CRB-8/9380

DIREITOS RESERVADOS PARA A LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA:

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VR GOMIDE ME

Rua João da Cruz e Souza, 53

Telefax: (19) 3241-7514 – CEP 13070-116

Campinas SP Brasil

[www.mercado-de-letras.com.br](http://www.mercado-de-letras.com.br)

[livros@mercado-de-letras.com.br](mailto:livros@mercado-de-letras.com.br)

1ª edição

**2 0 2 6**

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## OREWORD

There are theoretical concepts that, due to their strength and versatility, take the risk of becoming victims of their own success. Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" is undoubtedly one of these concepts. Often reduced to a mere classificatory label or a scholarly synonym for "setting", sometimes loses its original power to reveal how reality is assimilated by art. The book you hold in your hands was born precisely from the need to rediscover that potency.

This work is not merely another contribution to the vast Bakhtinian critical scholarship; it aims to be a rigorous exegesis that seeks to reintegrate what has been fragmented. By articulating Bakhtin's two seminal texts on the subject – *The Forms of Time and Chronotope* and *The Novel of Education* – we seek to offer a unified vision, demonstrating that the chronotope is not simply technical device but the "architectonics of meaning", a category of content-form in which time thickens and space pulsates with the movement of history.

The key point of this investigation lies in its systematizing character. We are not content to list the historical types of novels; we seek to dissect the internal mechanics of the concept, revealing a thought-provoking systemic interdependence. Here, we demonstrate how the genological function (which defines the

genre) acts as a matrix that inevitably shapes an image of humanity (the anthropological function), which in turn dictates the logic of the plot (the narratological function), ultimately materializing a worldview (the ideological and axiological functions).

The reader is invited on a journey that retraces the steps in the evolution of Western consciousness. We begin with from the static nature of the Greek novel, where time leaves no traces and the hero embodies a fixed identity that is only tested. Then, we the explore the crises and metamorphoses of Apuleius, the externality of the ancient public square, and the medieval rupture, culminating in the exuberant and productive materiality of Rabelais.

However, it is in the analysis of the *Bildungsroman* and Goethe's vision that the concept reaches its theoretical climax. Here, the chronotope attains full maturity: the ability to "read time in space", to perceive historical necessity within the concrete world. It is the moment when the novel learns to represent "man in becoming", whose individual formation is inseparable from the transformation of the world itself.

In addition to reviewing the main ideas regarding Bakhtin's historical poetics, we also aim to illuminate the concept's relevance today. However, perhaps the most daring aspect of this book lies in its final pages. In some sections of the book, we attempt to apply the chronotopic lens onto our dizzying present. From this perspective, we ask: What are the chronotopes of the digital age – the reticular space where public and private merge into a new virtual agora? How is Anthropocene literature reshaping our perception of time in response to the climate crisis?

Ultimately, this work confirms that Bakhtin's theory remains a relevant and, perhaps, indispensable compass. It reminds us that the way we conceive our relationships with time and space is, fundamentally shapes our understanding of what it means to be human. This book invites readers to reflect on this timeless, yet contemporary and essential, question.





## INTRODUCTION

Between 1937 and 1939, Bakhtin wrote the text *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel – Essays on Historical Poetics* (hereinafter FTCT). In 1973, he added a text at the end of the original essay, which he titled “Concluding Remarks”. This essay appears in the book *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*, published in Brazil by UNESP Press in 1988. Subsequently, a direct translation from Russian, based on the most recent version of the text published in Moscow in 2012, was released by Editora 34 in 2018. Regarding this book, Campos (2009, p. 113) provides the following information:

The collection of essays, written between 1924 and 1941 with an addition in 1973, was organized by the author in Moscow during the final years of his life, but only published posthumously in 1975 under the title *Voprosy literatury i estetiki: issledovaniia raznykh let* (Problems of Literature and Aesthetics: Studies from Various Years). Brandist considers these essays to be among the most influential and valuable contributions to the study of European languages and literatures.

And further, she adds

Reading the essays, which vary in length and complexity, requires the reader to bear in mind that they were produced by the nomadic Bakhtin, who lived in various Russian cities: Neved, Vitebsk, Leningrad, Kustanai (in Kazakhstan), Saransk, Savelovo, Saransk again, and then Moscow. Adding to this long pilgrimage are problems with the first Russian edition, as the editors removed many references to contemporary Soviet linguists, causing the reader to lose touch with the intellectual context (p. 113).

In addition to the aforementioned FTCT text, the Russian scholar discusses the concept of chronotope in the text *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism* (hereinafter BSHR), which appears in the book *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*. This essay has been translated into Portuguese twice: once in 1997 via French and another directly from Russian, in 2007. Both translations were published by Martins Fontes. The direct translation from Russian was done by Paulo Bezerra. The text was written between 1936 and 1938, contemporaneously with the first text, forming a cohesive whole.

The concept of the “chronotope”, introduced by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, represents a seminal and transformative contribution to novel theory and the humanities at large. Its importance lies in overcoming the dichotomy between form and content, providing a fundamental analytical framework for deciphering the complex ways in which reality is artistically assimilated and represented in literature. More than a mere technical term, the chronotope works as an operational concept for understanding not only what is narrated but, more importantly, how the very structure of reality is shaped by the inseparable interaction of time and space within a work of art.

At the heart of Bakhtin’s theory, the chronotope is defined as the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships as they have been artistically assimilated in literature” (2018, p. 11). It is a “form-content category”,

indicating that it is neither an empty structure nor a mere theme, but the unity in which form and content become mutually constitutive. In this dynamic and organic fusion, as Bakhtin describes, “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; space intensifies, incorporates itself into the movement of time, plot, and history” (2018, p. 12).

The depth and complexity of this concept, shaped at the intersection of science, biology, and critical philosophy, warrant a thorough investigation of its multiple ramifications, thereby paving the way for the research problem that guides this work.

Although the concept of the chronotope is widely recognized and celebrated in literary studies, its analysis often remains fragmented. Many studies emphasize its historical-typological aspect – the classification of genres such as the Greek novel or the chivalric novel – at the expense of an integrated understanding of its multiple and interdependent functions. This partial approach obscures the cohesive conception in Bakhtinian thought, reducing a comprehensive theory of the materialization of meaning to a mere classificatory tool.

The gap in the scholarship that this work aims to fill lies in the absence of a systematic analysis demonstrating how the various facets of the chronotope operate in a unified manner. This thesis centers on the following key question:

How do the multiple functions of the chronotope – genological, anthropological, narratological, ideological, and axiological – operate in an integrated and interdependent manner to constitute not only a method for analyzing historical genres, but also a comprehensive theory of the materialization of meaning, whose diagnostic potential extends to the analysis of contemporary cultural forms?

The answer to this question will guide the investigation.

This work is a theoretical and analytical investigation grounded on bibliographic sources, following a methodological approach that unfolds in three logical and progressive stages:

- 1) *Conceptual exegesis*: An analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal texts, notably Theory of the Novel II – The Forms of Time and Chronotope and The Novel of Education in the History of Realism, to establish the foundations of the concept in its most comprehensive formulation.
- 2) *Historical-typological analysis*: involves applying a theoretical framework to examine the evolution of the chronotope across different genres and historical periods, following the path outlined by Bakhtin himself – from ancient forms to Goethe's historical view.
- 3) *Critical application*: The use of the consolidated theoretical framework to interpret and diagnose contemporary cultural and narrative phenomena, demonstrating the enduring relevance of the concept.

The research confirms the chronotope as a fundamental framework of literary representation, capable of shaping genres, conceptions of humanity, and worldviews. The study concludes that this strength of the concept lies in its flexibility, enabling not only an understanding of the transition from static worlds in Antiquity to the historical fullness in Goethe, but also to decipher the new chronotopes in the digital age, thereby affirming its effectiveness as a tool for interpreting the present.

This work is organized into two main parts, guiding the reader from the foundational concept of the chronotope to its more complex applications and developments in the history of the novel and cultural analysis.

## Part I – *The forms of time and chronotope*

Dedicated to the theoretical foundations and historical analysis of the principal chronotopic configurations from Antiquity to the Renaissance.

- *Chapter I:* Analyzes the theoretical foundations of chronotope, exploring its intellectual origins through a dialogue with Einstein, Ukhtómski, and Kant, and its multiple interdependent functions – genological, anthropological, narratological, ideological, and axiological.
- *Chapter II:* Examines ancient forms of the novel, including the Greek novel, Apuleius' novel, and biographical forms, with a focus on the chronotopes of trial and metamorphosis.
- *Chapter III:* Investigates the chronotopes of the Middle Ages, contrasting the “wonderful world” of the chivalric novel with the critical and parodic chronotopes of the picaro, the buffoon, and the fool.
- *Chapter IV:* Is devoted to the reconstruction of the world within the Rabelaisian chronotope and to the analysis of the matrices of folkloric and idyllic time as foundations for the perception of reality.
- *Chapter V:* Explores the maturation of the theory in Bakhtin's later writings, analyzing the expansion of the concept beyond the work itself, including the chronotopes of the author and the reader, and its implications for a theory of the aesthetic event.

Part II – *The educational novel and its importance  
in the history of realism*

Focused on the emergence of the hero in formation and the culmination of the assimilation of historical time within the novel.

- *Chapter VI:* Presents the typology of the Bildungsroman, demonstrating the progression toward the hero in the making and choosing Goethe's vision as a realization of the historical chronotope, characterized by his ability to "read time in space".

*Conclusion*

Presents a final synthesis of the arguments, reaffirms the centrality of the chronotope as an architecture of meaning, and highlights future lines of research, consolidating the relevance of Bakhtin's theory for literary and cultural studies in the twenty-first century.

P

ART I – THE FORMS OF TIME  
AND CHRONOTOPE







## Chapter I

# THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRONOTOPE

The concept of the “chronotope”, formulated by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, represents a seminal and enduring contribution to the theory of the novel, as well as to the broader fields of historical poetics and social analysis. In Bakhtin’s work, the chronotope emerges as a fundamental analytical tool that offers – more than a mere technical term – a key to deciphering the complex way in which reality is artistically assimilated and represented in literature. It enables us to understand not only *what* is narrated but, more importantly *how* the very structure of reality is shaped by the inseparable interaction of time and space within a work of art.

This chapter has a dual objective. First, it aims to provide a precise conceptual summary of the notion of the chronotope, as defined by Bakhtin in his essays on the novel. Second, it seeks to analyze its surprising intellectual origins, with a specific focus on the triad of influences cited by the author himself: Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, the studies of physiologist A. A. Ukhómski, and the critical dialogue with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Thus, the analysis will proceed from the formal definition of the concept to an investigation of its scientific and philosophical origins, culminating in a critical reflection on its scope, internal tensions, and enduring relevance as an instrument of literary analysis.

To fully grasp the power of Bakhtinian thought, it is essential to understand the precise definition of the chronotope as a category of “content-form”. This designation indicates that the chronotope is neither a purely formal element (an empty structure) nor merely reflection of content (a theme), but rather a unity in which form and content become mutually constitutive and inseparable.

Bakhtin defines the chronotope, which etymologically means “time-space”, as: “...the intrinsic connectedness of the relationship between space and time as they have been artistically assimilated in literature” (2018, p. 11).

This “intrinsic connectedness” does not refer to a mere juxtaposition of spatial setting and timeline. Rather, it is a dynamic and organic fusion, a true interpenetration that transforms the nature of both. In Bakhtin’s own words, within the artistic chronotope, “time thickens and gains corporeality, becomes artistically visible; space intensifies, incorporates itself into the movement of time, plot, and history” (2018, p. 12). In this dynamic, time ceases to be an abstraction and manifests concretely in the narrative’s spaces – the road, the castle, the public square – while space ceases to be a static backdrop and becomes an active agent in the plot’s progression and the story’s construction.

The function of the chronotope in Bakhtin’s theory is therefore decisive. It not only organizes narrative material but also establishes the very foundations of representation. Bakhtin argues that the chronotope “also determines (to a large extent) the image of humanity in literature; this image is always essentially chronotopic” (2018, p. 12). In other words, the

conception of the human being in a work is inseparable from the time-space matrix in which it acts and exist. Even more categorically, Bakhtin states that “genre and genre modalities are determined precisely by chronotope” (2018, p. 12), elevating it to the status of an organizing principle of literary history itself.<sup>1</sup>

To illustrate the analytical power of the concept, Bakhtin offers a masterful analysis of the “Greek novel”, whose chronotope he defines as “adventurous time”. The structure of these novels is marked by an “extratemporal gap between two moments in biographical time” (2018, p. 19). At the beginning, the hero and heroine meet and fall in love; at the end, after overcoming countless obstacles, they finally marry. The entire vast plot of adventures – shipwrecks, kidnappings, fake deaths – unfolds within this interval. However, this adventurous time leaves no trace on the protagonists: they do not age, their

- 
1. The concept of literary genre has a long history in literary theory and literary studies in general. It is important to consider the conceptualization of genre as inferred from the FTC and REHR texts. In the two foundational texts by Bakhtin that we are using, the concept of genre is limited to a few definitions. Genre is understood as a form of *artistic assimilation of real historical time and space*. In Bakhtin theorization, the concept of genre is defined by the category of the *chronotope*. The *image of man* is, in turn, essentially chronotopic. The typology of genre reflects temporal assimilation: for example, the Greek novel employs an *extratemporal* adventurous time in which the hero is *immutable* and passive. In contrast, the coming-of-age novel, especially the realistic one, is characterized by a man in *the process of making* (evolution), integrated into *real historical time*. The novelistic genre is distinguished by its constitutive engagement with *unfinished reality*. Therefore, Bakhtin primarily uses thematic reflection to conceptualize genre. In short, for Bakhtin, literary genre is a historically changeable category, whose essence lies in *the spatiotemporal organization (chronotope)* of the work. This organization, in turn, structures the image of the hero and the plot and reflects a specific method of apprehending and representing the world at a given time. For a more in-depth exploration of the novel as a genre in Bakhtin, see the book *Theory of the Novel III – The Novel as a Literary Genre* (2019).

character do not mature, and their love remains exactly the same as when they first met. Time, in this case, becomes visible as a pure succession of contingencies that does not alter the essence of the characters. This example concretely demonstrates how the chronotope shapes the image of the human being, who here reveals itself as an absolutely passive and immutable figure, whose identity is only proven but never transformed.

In short, the chronotope is the nexus that shapes the worldview in literary works – the melting point where time and space become visible and constitutive of human action. Once its centrality is understood, it becomes essential to investigate the intellectual origins that Bakhtin draws upon to substantiate his concept.

The originality of Bakhtin's approach lies, in part, in his willingness to base a central concept of literary theory in an explicit and bold dialogue with the mathematical sciences, biology, and critical philosophy. This tripartite foundation endows the concept of the chronotope with a theoretical depth that transcends the boundaries of traditional literary criticism, revealing a thinker deeply engaged with the great intellectual transformations of his era.

The terminology chosen by Bakhtin is directly appropriated from the field of mathematical sciences, specifically from Einstein's theory of relativity. However, Bakhtin explicitly delimits the scope of this borrowing, emphasizing its primarily metaphorical nature. He clarifies that he transferred the term to literary studies "almost as a metaphor", adding, with remarkable subtlety, "(almost, but not entirely)".

The crucial point does not lie in the "specific meaning in the theory of relativity", but rather in what the concept expresses more broadly: the "inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)" (2018, p. 11). He appropriates the fundamental intuition of modern physics – that time and space form a four-dimensional continuum – to explore how literature

constructs its worlds. The caveat “not entirely” signals his serious philosophical intent: although this is not a direct application of physics, the concept is more than mere literary flourish; it is a genuine attempt to understand artistic representation through a fundamental truth about reality. This movement demonstrates the interdisciplinary and deeply creative nature of Bakhtinian thought, which uses science not as a model to be followed but as a source of powerful metaphors for rethinking art.

Less well known, but explicitly mentioned by Bakhtin, is the influence of the Russian physiologist A. A. Ukhómski. In a crucial footnote, Bakhtin reports having attended a lecture by Ukhómski in 1925 “on chronotope in biology”, during which the scientist also addressed questions of aesthetics. This brief mention reveals that the origin of the concept in Bakhtinian thought predates its literary formulation and has roots in a field beyond physics.

The existence of a “chronotope in biology” reinforces Bakhtin’s view of the concept not only as a literary device but also as a fundamental category for perceiving and organizing living reality. This biological root suggests that the interdependence between time and space is an inherent condition of organisms and their environments. By invoking this influence, Bakhtin adds greater depth to his argument, grounding his literary analysis tool in a broader understanding of the interaction between living beings and the world. This strengthens the idea of the chronotope as a form of “artistic assimilation” of concrete and factual reality.

The third intellectual pillar of the chronotope is a direct and critical engagement with Immanuel Kant’s “Transcendental Aesthetics”, presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Bakhtin acknowledges his shared starting point with the German philosopher, stating that he accepts “the Kantian appreciation of the significance of these forms [space and time] in the

process of cognition” (2018, p. 12). Both agree, therefore, that space and time are indispensable forms for all human cognition.

However, the agreement ends there, giving way to a fundamental philosophical divergence. Bakhtin articulates this rupture unequivocally: “unlike Kant, we do not conceive of them as ‘transcendental’ but as forms of factual reality itself” (2018, p. 12).

The impact of this rupture is profound. By rejecting Kantian transcendentalism – the notion that space and time are *a priori* forms of sensibility, subjective conditions that structuring our experience of the world – Bakhtin grounds his concept in a materialistic and realistic framework. For him, time and space are not merely categories of consciousness but dimensions of concrete reality itself, which art, in turn, assimilates and represents. Thus, the Bakhtinian chronotope does not organize perceived reality but rather the factual reality that the work of art captures and formalizes.

At this point, Bakhtin’s conception reveals itself in its entirety: his departure from Kant’s *a priori* forms toward the “forms of factual reality itself” is intellectually reinforced both by Einstein’s physical chronotope, which anchors time-space in the material universe, and by Ukhtómski’s biological chronotope, which roots it in living organisms. These influences, far from being eclectic, are strategically mobilized to support a cohesive, materialistic, and anti-idealistic theory of literary representation.

In summary, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope is defined as the indissoluble and formal-content unity of time and space in literature. Its intellectual foundation is notably eclectic, combining metaphors from relativistic physics, observations from biology, and an assertive critique to Kant’s idealistic philosophy to forge a powerful analytical tool. The strength of this concept lies in its ability to transcend the dichotomy between form and content, providing a concrete

method for analyzing the evolution of literary genres based on how they structure reality and, consequently, the image of man.

However, analysis reveals an inherent tension within the concept. The “almost metaphorical” appropriation of a scientific term, combined with the assertive shift from a transcendental to a “factual” paradigm, raises complex philosophical questions about the relationship between artistic representation and objective reality. Bakhtin boldly introduces this issue but understandably does not exhaust it, leaving fertile ground for reflection on the nature of realism and artistic assimilation.

The relevance of the chronotope remains significant. In an era characterized by digital narratives, virtual realities, and increasingly fragmented temporalities, Bakhtin’s concept of “time-space” provides an indispensable theoretical framework. The ability to analyze how new forms of artistic expression construct and represent their worlds – whether in open-world video games, a series with multiple timelines, or transmedia narrative – demonstrates that the chronotope not merely a relic of 20th-century literary theory but a vital analytical tool essential for both the present and the future.

### *The Essential Functions of The Chronotope*

The artistic representation of reality rests fundamentally on the treatment of time and space. However, the analysis of these categories goes beyond merely describing a setting or a sequence of events; it becomes a crucial key to understanding the underlying structure of the literary work, revealing the worldviews that inform it. It is in this context that Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory introduces a concept of extraordinary analytical power: the chronotope.

In the artistic chronotope, temporal and spatial elements merge into a concrete and comprehensible whole: “time thickens and gains corporeality, becoming artistically visible; space intensifies, incorporating itself into the movement of time, plot, and history” (2018, p. 12). The chronotope is therefore not merely a technical element but a category of “content-form” that gives substance to the artistic vision.

The chronotope, in Bakhtin’s novelistic theory, serves multiple interdependent functions that define the very nature of the narrative. All the functions discussed later are mutually interconnected. The objective is to critically analyze these functions, as outlined by the Russian author, demonstrating that the concept transcends its role as a mere organizer of events to become the fundamental matrix of literary representation.

To this end, we will analyze the primary functions of the chronotope. Demonstrating that this fusion of time and space is not merely a backdrop but the very condition of possibility for narrative, revealing its first and most fundamental function: that of being the determining matrix of the genre. Next, we will examine how this genological matrix influences the modeling of the image of the human being. Subsequently, we will explore how the human image thus shaped dictates the internal logic of the plot and, finally, how this narrative organization materializes specific worldviews.

### *The Genological Function*

For Bakhtin, the chronotope is not merely one compositional element among others but the primary force that defines the very identity of a literary genre. The time-space structure of a work is the condition of possibility for its fictional universe. This premise is stated categorically: “It can be said, without mincing words, that genre and genre modalities are determined precisely by the chronotope” (2018, p. 11).



A comparative analysis of different types of ancient novels reveals how distinct chronotopic structures give rise to radically different genre forms.

An analysis shows that the fundamental structure of time-space is the necessary condition for the existence of each of these genres. In the Greek novel, the “extratemporal hiatus” is essential for a plot centered on pure trial. For the hero’s identity to be *tested* rather than *formed*, events must occur within a temporal vacuum that prevents aging, maturation, or psychological change. Time cannot leave any marks, as such marks would alter the very object of the test. In contrast, Apuleius’ chronotope, by linking the path of life to a real and concrete road, enables the representation of metamorphosis, thereby generating a genre focused on transformation. The public square of classical biography and the wondrous universe of the chivalric novel, in turn, create the specific conditions for the portraying of a public figure and a hero of magical feats, respectively.

If the chronotope defines the genre, it does so precisely because its spatiotemporal structure prescribes the limits and potentialities of the human figure that can inhabit it. The nature of time and space, therefore, conditions the very image of man – an anthropological function that is central to Bakhtin’s poetics.

### *The Anthropological Function*

Bakhtin’s theory posits an intrinsic connection between the narrative universe and the human figure that inhabits it, stating that “the image of man in literature [...] is always essentially chronotopic” (2018, p. 12). The type of human being who can exist and act in a literary work is a direct consequence of the nature of its time-space. This is why the chronotope not

only situates man but also shapes his essence, since the very reality that constitutes him is chronotopic.

The chronotope of the Greek novel, characterized by an adventurous time that “leaves no trace anywhere”, produces a man who is “absolutely passive and absolutely unchanging”. In this universe, events neither shape nor transform the hero; they merely test him. The protagonist is a “physical subject of action” whose sole function is to endure trials in order to ultimately confirm his “absolute identity with himself”. The absence of an “elementary biological lifespan” is so striking that it became the target of Voltaire’s parody in *Candide*, where, as Bakhtin points out, the author measured the real time necessary for the adventures and demonstrated that, in the end, the heroes would be old and decrepit. In Greek novels, however, all initiative belongs to external forces – fate, the gods, villains – and man is left only with passivity.

In stark contrast, the chronotope of Apuleius’ novel, centered on a time of crisis and rebirth and situated along a “royal road”, allows for the portrayal of a man who “becomes another”. The life trajectory intertwines with spatial wanderings, and time leaves indelible marks on the hero. Although chance still operates, its power is limited and, subordinated to a higher logic of “guilt-punishment-atonement-bliss”. The fault, it’s initiative, belongs to the hero, whose “untimely curiosity” places him under the sway of “blind fate,” but salvation belongs to the deity, who guides him toward a new self-image. Thus, “diverse, and markedly diverse, images of the same man” are presented (2018, p. 52), and metamorphosis becomes the very essence of human representation.

The chronotope of *the agora*, the public square of classical Greek life, produces a type of being whose existence is entirely outward-looking. He is “open in every sense, entirely externalized; there is nothing in him ‘only for himself’”. This exteriority is not a behavioral choice, but an ontological

condition of that time-space. For the classical Greek, “every being was visible and audible”, and the very notion of a silent and invisible inner life had not yet emerged. Self-awareness was formed and expressed publicly as a civic-political act, resulting in a malleable human image devoid of the interiority that would characterize later eras.

In the Rabelaisian chronotope, the fusion of historical time with the folkloric time of productive growth creates an image of humanity on an epic proportion. The human being is no longer a private, isolated entity; instead, their physical and vital growth mirrors the historical growth of the community. The image of man expands in direct proportion to the material world and to the cycles of food, drink, work, and procreation. He becomes the embodiment of the historical people, and his life, far from being private, is a collective, material event in constant flux.

This modeling of the human figure, governed by time-space, in turn determines the very logic of the events that can occur in their life, thereby shaping the structure of the narrative plot.

### *The Narratological Function*

The chronotope is not merely the setting in which the action unfolds; it also provides the internal logic that structures the sequence of events constituting the plot. The specific nature of time and space dictates the types of events that can happen, how they connect, and the forces that drive them. Thus, each chronotope generates a distinct principle for the plot.

The plot of the Greek novel is structured around the logic of “mere chance”, which manifests through “casual simultaneity” and “casual heterotemporality”. The concepts of

the “sudden” and “at just that moment” serve as the propeller of the plot, generating encounters and adventures that disrupt the normal flow of life. Within this chronotope, initiative does not rest with the heroes, who remain passive subjects of events; instead, it belongs to “non-human forces: fate, the gods, and villains”. The narrative unfolds as a potentially infinite series of adventures governed by this irrational power.

The “chronotope of the road” emerges as a fundamental organizer of plots. On the road, “the unity of space-time definitions [...] reveals itself with exceptional precision and clarity” (2018, p. 29). This setting is the quintessential place for encounters – events that serve as “the starting point, sometimes the culmination, or even the (final) outcome of the plot”. For Bakhtin, the significance of the encounter transcends narrative technique, reflecting a universal category of human experience. This motif manifests in the “mythological and religious” spheres, such as epiphanies; in philosophical currents like those of Martin Buber (cited by Bakhtin); and in the very “organization of the life of society and the state”, exemplified by diplomatic encounters. Thus, the hero’s spatial journey becomes the backbone of the narrative.

In the novel of manners, the observer’s unique position organizes the narrative in an innovative way. The plot revolves around the ability of a “third party” – whether Lucius transformed into a donkey, a rogue, or a servant – to “peek and listen” to the private lives of others. In the presence of the donkey, “no one is shy, everyone reveals themselves completely”. This distinctive chronotopic position enables the revelation of bedroom secrets, crimes, and intrigues that would otherwise remain hidden, structuring the narrative as a series of unveilings of private life.

In Rabelais, the plot is organized not by a linear sequence of biographical events but by the intersection of grotesque and material *series*: the series of the body, food, sex, death, and excre-

ment. The narrative logic aims to “disunite what is traditionally linked and bring together what is traditionally distant” (2018, p. 123), reconstructing the world on a material basis. This narrative logic is the only way to represent the “historical and collective man” analyzed above, whose very essence is the material growth of the body, mirroring the growth of the people. Events do not follow psychological causality but rather a logic of material association.

It is precisely this ability to dictate the logic of events that elevates the chronotope from a mere structural mechanism to an ideological vehicle, as the organization of the plot materializes, in the final analysis, a specific conception of causality and world order.

### *The Axiological Function*

#### According to Bakhtin:

The chronotope determines the artistic unity of a literary work in its relationship with authentic reality. Therefore, in a work, the chronotope always includes the axiological element, which can only be highlighted from the artistic chronotope as a whole in an abstract analysis. In art and literature, all determinations of space-time are inseparable and always tinged with an axiological-emotional nuance. Abstract thought can undoubtedly conceive of time and space separately and abstract their axiological-emotional element. However, lively artistic contemplation (which is of course also full of thought, but not abstract) separates nothing and abstracts nothing. (2018, p. 217)

Therefore, it can be seen that the axiological function is nominally cited by the Russian theorist. Thus, the chronotope transcends its structural function to become a category that enables philosophical or ideological worldviews to take shape and become artistically visible. The way time and space are organized in a literary work reveals a fundamental conception of reality, humanity, and history. Each chronotope, therefore, materializes an ideology.

A fundamental contrast emerges between the “abstract and [...] more static” chronotope of the Greek novel and that of the realist Bildungsroman. In the former, “the world and man are absolutely finished and immobile”; time does not produce change but only tests what already exists, reflecting a worldview in which identity is predetermined and immutable. In the latter, the fifth type of novel, “the evolution of man is inseparable from historical evolution”. Man is formed “at the same time as the world” (2011, p. 240), and time is the force of becoming, expressing a dynamic and historically conscious worldview.

The shift from a theocentric to a humanistic worldview is clearly expressed in the transformation of the chronotope. Dante’s universe is described as an “extratemporal vertical”, where “everything on earth that has been separated by time converges in eternity in pure simultaneous coexistence”. In contrast, Rabelais’ chronotope destroys the “medieval vertical” to restore the “material spatiotemporal totality of the universe”. This destruction occurs through the “logic of material series”, which organizes the plot along a horizontal axis that celebrates the body and the earth, embodying the secular worldview of the Renaissance and enabling the emergence of collective human being.

The highest function of chronotope, according to Bakhtin, is the full assimilation of real historical time, as exemplified in the analysis of Goethe’s vision. This vision is characterized by the “ability to see time, to read time in space” (1997, p. 225).

For Goethe, the spatial juxtaposition of objects reveals a “multi-temporality”; the past is not a dead ruin but a creative and active force in the present. The trees planted by a burgomaster decades earlier are not mere objects but the “substantial and living mark of the past on the present”. This perspective represents a worldview in which history is a living and productive necessity, and time gains its fullest expression.

It can be inferred that this analytical framework allows for the examination of more recent chronotopes. For example, the fragmentation of time and space in many modernist and postmodernist narratives can be analyzed as the chronotopic expression of worldviews characterized by uncertainty, chaotic simultaneity, or radical subjectivity. Such chronotopes stand in the stark contrast to the “fullness of time” and visible historical necessity achieved in Goethe’s work, reflecting the diverse conceptions of reality in their respective eras.

Bakhtin’s definition of the chronotope, though concise, is rich with implications that reveal its axiological dimension. By dissecting the components of his theory, the function of the chronotope as an propeller of value and emotion becomes clear, demonstrating that it is much more than a formalist category.

It is from this foundation that the axiological-emotional function emerges. Bakhtin uses the “motif of encounter” as his primary example to illustrate how a chronotopic node becomes imbued with value. An encounter is, by definition, a chronotopic event: the convergence of different trajectories at the same time and place. However, this event is never neutral. Bakhtin explains that, when incorporated into a concrete work, the motif of the encounter “takes on different and concrete nuances, including evaluative-emotional ones”. Depending on the encompassing chronotope, the encounter can be “...desired or undesirable, joyful or sad, sometimes terrible, and it can also be ambivalent” (2018, p. 29).

The value of the encounter – its emotional charge and significance within the plot – is not inherent to the act of meeting itself, but is conferred by the specific chronotope in which it takes place. This same logic applies equally to all other motifs and events in the narrative. Thus, the chronotope functions as a system that qualifies the action, imbuing it with weight, tone, and meaning. With this theoretical basis established, we can now analyze how this function manifests itself in its first concrete application: the Greek adventure novel.

The Greek novel, also known as the “adventurous trial novel”, serve as the starting point for Bakhtin’s historical analysis. In this type of chronotope, the axiological function is revealed paradoxically: through the passivity of the heroes, the immutability of their characters, and the apparent emptiness of time. By examining how a time that “leaves no traces” can still generate a complex system of values, we gain insight into the subtlety of Bakhtin’s concept.

Bakhtin describes the “adventurous time” of the Greek novel as an “extratemporal hiatus”. The narrative unfolds between two pivotal biographical moments – the awakening of passion and the consummation of marriage – but the vast period of adventures that separates them does not change the heroes or their feelings. The marriage occurs at the end “as if nothing had happened between these two moments”.

It is within this structure that the value system (axiology) of this chronotope is revealed. The universe of the Greek novel is dominated by two main forces: “chance”, which manifests as the interference of irrational forces, and “trial”. The supreme value is not growth or transformation, but *immutability*. The unwavering fidelity and chastity of the heroes are the qualities to be tested. The function of the entire plot, with its chain of abductions and pursuits, is not to forge character but to “verify and establish its identity, its solidity, and immutability”. Value lies in the ability to remain unchanged.



The emotional tone resulting from this configuration is marked by fatalism and disorientation. The action unfolds in an “alien universe”, an abstract space where the heroes are strangers. This “alienation” is an axiological necessity; it creates a world stripped of predictable laws, making it the perfect setting to test an immutable identity against pure chance. As Bakhtin observes, “Any concretization [...] would introduce its regularity [...] With this, the power of chance would suffer an essential limitation” (2018, p. 29). In this world, initiative does not belong to the heroes but to “irrational forces”. The atmosphere is dominated by perpetual vulnerability, where dreams do not guide action. As Achilles Tatius states, dreams exist not so that heroes may avoid suffering, “but so that they may bear their sufferings more easily”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the axiological-emotional landscape of the Greek chronotope is one of passive resistance, in which value is measured not by growth but by unyielding resistance to time itself.

This fundamental staticity, which serves only to confirm a pre-existing identity, represents a value system that is radically challenged by Apuleius’ novel. In it, crisis becomes the driving force of a new axiological system, ushering in a fundamental evolution in what is considered valuable: from the preservation of identity to the capacity for redemptive change.

In stark contrast to the immutability of the Greek novel, the chronotope that Bakhtin analyzes in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* introduces a radical change. Time, which previously “left no trace”, now leaves a “deep and indelible mark” on the hero’s life and character.

The organizing principle of Apuleius’ novel is *metamorphosis*, specifically the transformation of Lucius into a donkey. The plot ceases to be an extratemporal hiatus and instead becomes a representation of the “hero’s life trajectory” during

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2. *Apud* Bakhtin 2018, p. 26.

moments of crisis and rebirth. This trajectory is based on the “real path of wanderings”, creating a new chronotope in which the road serves as the concrete space of inner transformation.

From this structure emerges a radically new axiology that subordinates the logic of chance to a teleology of redemption: the superior sequence of *guilt-punishment-atonement-bliss*. The initiative, although negative, returns to the hero; it is his “untimely curiosity” that triggers the chain of events. Salvation is also not accidental but providential. As the priest of Isis explains, Lucius’ suffering was not mere misfortune but a necessary path:

However, blind fate, subjecting you to the most distressing shocks, led you – unwittingly, in its imprudent malice – to this true beatitude. [...] You have now been taken under the protection of a clairvoyant fate that illuminates even the other gods with the rays of its light. (Bakhtin 2018, p. 55).

The opposition between “blind fate” and “clairvoyant fate” is central to the new axiology. The supreme value is no longer a static identity but the capacity to be reborn through suffering.

Lucius’s journey, which takes the hero from individual guilt to redemption, establishes a new value in the transformation of the self, paving the way for the exploration of other forms of self-awareness. This evolution continues in biographical chronotopes, which shift the *locus* of value from the redemptive path to the social construction of identity itself, distinguishing between the public and private selves.

The history of the novel is intrinsically connected to the development of biographical and autobiographical forms, which introduce new ways of understanding and valuing human life. The shift in the real chronotope – from the entirely public space of the Greek city-state to the more private domains of Roman and Hellenistic life – radically reconfigures the axiology

of the self, creating a tension between external identity and an emerging inner world.

Bakhtin identifies the Greek “square” (*agora*) as the true chronotope in which Western self-consciousness was formed. This was a space where all instances – state, justice, art – were visibly present. The resulting axiology reflected a “wholly externalized” man, whose life and identity were “purely public”. An individual’s value was measured by their civic performance; there was no distinction between the self for oneself and the self for others.

The contrast emerges with the chronotope of the “Roman family”, which introduces a historicity based on lineage. Self-awareness here is “family-tribal”, experienced as a link in a temporal chain connecting ancestors and descendants. This chronotope generates new axiological categories, such as *prodigia* and *ventura*. *Prodigia* are omens that intertwine individual destiny with that of the state, while *ventura* is the particular fortune of a leader (such as Sulla or Caesar) who embodies this fusion. Although still public, this axiology deepens the historical dimension of the self.

The most decisive transformation occurs in the chronotopes of the Hellenistic-Roman era, marked by the emergence of the private and solitary individual. Literary forms such as the intimate letter and philosophical meditations – exemplified by St. Augustine’s *Soliloquies* – create a new space-time framework for exploring interiority. Within this new chronotope, seemingly insignificant events in the public square – such as the death of a daughter or personal doubts – acquire unprecedented axiological significance. A new axiology of the inner self emerges, seeking validation not through public recognition, but in a dialogue with oneself. Thus, the evolution of biographical chronotopes reflects a shift in the value of the self, from purely public performance to its constitution within an inner, private, and solitary domain.

This transition from the old forms, which valued the public self, to a growing appreciation of interiority heralds the disintegration of the old world. With this dissolution, radically new chronotopes will emerge, reconfiguring value systems through forces such as laughter and a new conception of history.

With the disintegration of the ancient world, radically new chronotopes emerged that redefined the value systems and emotional tones of literature. Bakhtin's analysis highlights three such transformations that are crucial to understanding the evolution of the axiological function of the chronotope: the wonderful universe of the chivalric novel, the restoration of productive time in Rabelais, and the synthesis of historical vision in Goethe.

The chronotope of the chivalric novel represents a "wonderful universe" where the "sudden", which in the Greek novel was a rupture, becomes the norm. The axiology of this chronotope shifts from the trial of identity to *feat and glorification*. The knight's value lies in his active pursuit of adventures to demonstrate his honor. The emotional tone is one of wonder. Crucially, the *subjective play with time* emerges here: time can stretch or contract according to the hero's emotional experience, and dreams take on a formative function. This appreciation of the subjective perception of time was "entirely foreign to Antiquity", signaling a new axiology focused on the emotional life of the individual.

The Rabelaisian chronotope restores folkloric time as a polemical force against the medieval hierarchy. The axiology in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is that of *direct proportionality* between goodness and physical-material growth. As Bakhtin states, "everything that is valuable, that is qualitatively positive, must realize its qualitative significance in a space-time significance, expanding as much as possible" (2018, p. 120). Rabelais uses his famous *series* (of the body, food, drink, death) to destroy the medieval worldview by materializing everything. The emotional

tone is one of all-encompassing laughter. Rabelaisian laughter functions as an axiological force that dismantles the medieval fear of the end. The “joyful death” in Rabelais is not a terminal judgment but a necessary and even festive moment within the continuous, collective, and material cycle of renewal, affirming the immortality of the people.

The pinnacle of the assimilation of time in the novel is found, according to Bakhtin, in Goethe’s chronotope, which embodies a “vision of historical time”. The axiology here is grounded in *necessity* – a visible, creative, and historical necessity that unites the past, present, and future. Goethe possessed an exceptional ability to “read time in space”, perceiving in a landscape or ruin the traces of a continuous process. The deep emotion Goethe experiences in places like Rome, the “great chronotope of human history”, is a sense or feeling the *fullness of time*. He perceives himself as a participant in the vast and uninterrupted process of universal history, evoking a feeling of belonging to a historical totality.

This evolution, from marvelous subjectivism to cheerful materialism and historical fulfillment, demonstrates the flexibility of the chronotope as an essential framework of value in literary art.

When examining Mikhail Bakhtin’s historical typology, from the static time of the Greek novel to the historical fullness found in Goethe, an unequivocal conclusion emerges: the primary function of the chronotope transcends merely organizing space and time. Analysis of various novel types reveals that the chronotope serves as the central mechanism that gives concrete and tangible form to a work’s system of values. It is the arena in which the author’s worldview materializes, where abstract ideas about man and existence take on body, movement, and a specific emotional tone.

For Bakhtin, the axiological-emotional function of the chronotope lies precisely in its ability to materialize a specific

worldview. It not only *situates* the action but also *qualifies* it. The chronotope determines what is central or peripheral, noble or base, tragic or comic, possible or impossible within a given fictional universe. In the Greek novel, adventurous time and alien space value immutable identity. In Apuleius, the chronotope of the road and metamorphosis emphasizes crisis and redemption. In biographical forms, the transition from the public square to intimate space creates a new axiology of the inner self. In Rabelais, folkloric time materializes a value system based on growth and collective laughter, while in Goethe, the perception of historical time in space values necessity and continuity. In each case, the chronotope is the place where value becomes visible and time becomes emotionally palpable.

The demonstration that the chronotope operates simultaneously on the genological, anthropological, narratological, and ideological planes – each function being an inseparable facet of the others – consolidates it as the central category of a truly historical poetics.

The analysis of the multiple functions of the chronotope in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel reveals the depth and centrality of this concept. As demonstrated, its operation is a unified mechanism with interdependent facets: it possesses a *genological* force, determining the very structure of genres; an *anthropological* force, which emerges from the former to shape the image of humanity; a *narratological* force, which in turn governs the internal logic of the plot; and, finally, an *axiological* force, through which the narrative structure materializes worldviews.

It is clear that the chronotope, in Bakhtin's theory, is much more than a technical device or a mere backdrop for action. The way time thickens and space intensifies in a work is not an artifice but a direct manifestation of how a culture or an author perceives human existence within the flow of history.

The power of the concept lies precisely in its ability to enable a "historical poetics" that does not separate form from

content, nor the literary work from its historical and cultural context. By analyzing the interconnection of time and space, the critic can unveil the foundations on which not only plots and characters are built but also value systems and ideologies. The chronotope thus proves to be an analytical tool of extraordinary depth and lasting relevance, indispensable for understanding the complex relationship between literature and human experience in the world.

The power of Bakhtin's analytical tool extends beyond the literary forms he originally studied. The concept of the chronotope remains indispensable for understanding how contemporary genres construct their own worlds of value and emotional experience. Unique space-time configurations – such as the cyberspace of science fiction, the fractured temporality of the postmodern novel, or the secondary worlds of fantasy – can be analyzed as chronotopes that generate new images of humanity and distinct axiological systems. The ability to fuse time and space into a meaningful whole continues to be the means by which literature explores and shapes our deepest conceptions of life, value, and humanity's place in history. The chronotope is not only a category of historical poetics but also a fundamental key to deciphering the very nature of artistic creation.

### *Considerations*

The analysis presented in this chapter establishes the concept of the chronotope as a theoretical category whose significance extends beyond its role as a mere classificatory tool for literary genres. Defined as the inseparable fusion of the coordinates of time and space in artistic representation, the chronotope is revealed throughout the discussion as the

foundation of a distinctly historical and materialist poetics. By tracing the intellectual genesis of the concept – a dialogue that integrates the metaphor of relativistic physics, insights from biology, and a critical transcendence of Kantian idealism – use literary analysis not on transcendental categories of consciousness but on the concrete framework through which factual reality is assimilated and reconfigured by art, becomes evident as a project.

The unfolding of the functions of chronotope – genological, anthropological, narratological, and ideological – confirms its centrality. It is demonstrated that the spatiotemporal matrix does not act as a passive backdrop but as a dynamic agent that prescribes the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a genre, which, in turn, shapes a specific image of the human being. This human image conditions the internal logic of the plot and ultimately materializes a worldview. The interdependence of these functions solidifies the chronotope as the nexus where form and content become mutually constitutive, allowing for an analysis that avoids the sterile dichotomy between the structure of the work and its historical-cultural meaning. In short, the chapter establishes that the way a literary work organizes its time-space is the most profound manifestation of its epistemology and ontology.

A critical assessment of the scope of this concept, however, requires shifting its application from historical genres to the configurations of literary production and the current historical moment. If the strength of the concept lies in its ability to diagnose how reality is artistically assimilated, it becomes imperative to question what the dominant chronotopes are in a contemporaneity marked by digital acceleration, ecological crisis, and the fragmentation of subjective experience. The historical analysis presented, centered on worlds with relatively cohesive temporalities and spatialities, serves as a counterpoint to illuminate the dissolution of these same coordinates in the present.



In this context, one can discern the emergence of a “digital” or “reticular” chronotope as a defining force in contemporary literature. Within this new time-space, temporal linearity, associated with the journey or the historical progression of the coming-of-age novel, is replaced by chaotic simultaneity and layered temporality. Space is no longer represented by the public square or the castle but by a deterritorialized network of connections: a constant flow of information in which the concepts of “here” and “now” lose their conventional boundaries. The image of humanity that arises from this matrix is that of the networked subject, whose identity is not shaped through a journey or existential crisis but in the continuous performance of a profile and in the curation of fragmented aspects of the self. Consequently, the narrative abandons causal logic in favor of collage, *hyperlinks*, and overlapping windows, reflecting a worldview where coherence is transient and reality is experienced as an interface.

Simultaneously, the socio-environmental crisis of the Anthropocene appears to create a new chronotope characterized by “imminence” or “deep temporality”. Unlike the historical fullness in Goethe’s work, which perceived in space as bearing the marks of a creative past, the contemporary chronotope often reveals a space saturated by a collapsing future. Time is no longer defined by progress or productive cycle but as a countdown – a present haunted by the consequences of past actions and the impending catastrophe. This time-space challenges the centrality of the human figure, generating narratives in which protagonism shifts to ecosystems, non-human matter, or geological time scales that diminish the significance of individual biography. Here, the humanity is portrayed as a species aware of its destructive power with plots centered on survival, the memory of lost worlds, or speculation about post-human futures.

Thus the persistence of the chronotope as an analytical tool lies not in its ability to frame current production within

historical models, but in its flexibility and capacity to reveal new and radical forms of artistic assimilation of reality. Its critical application to the present demonstrates that the fusion of time and space remains the battleground on which literature negotiates the meanings of existence, identity, and history itself. While classical chronotopes organized stable worlds, the chronotopes of our era shape experiences of instability, interconnection, and uncertainty, confirming that literary art remains a sensitive gauge of transformations in the foundations of human experience. The enduring relevance of the concept ultimately lies in its ability to force us to ask: in what time and space do we live, and what kind of human beings does this experience make us, has made us, will make us?



## Chapter II

### THE ANCIENT FORMS OF THE NOVEL

#### 1. *The Chronotope of the Greek Novel*<sup>1</sup>

We will begin this chapter by analyzing the chronotope of the Greek novel – the first of the three types of ancient novels. According to Bakhtin, this chronotope *inevitably produces*

1. It should be noted that Bakhtin's project is not to create a static classification of "types" of novels. His goal is to trace the *historical evolution* of the novel and the perception of time-space in literature. For Bakhtin, the "Novel" (with a capital N) is not merely a literary genre; it is a dynamic force, a principle, almost an "anti-genre". It is the only genre that is constantly evolving, perpetually "unfinished" (*inacabamento*) and maintains direct contact with "contemporaneity" (the present). When Bakhtin uses the term "novel" to refer to the "Greek novel", "chivalric novel", or "baroque novel", he is doing two things:

1. *Using the term broadly*: He uses "novel" to refer to virtually any lengthy fictional narrative written in prose.

2. *Tracing a lineage*: He argues that these *historical forms* (which he calls "romances") are the *precursors* of the modern novel. He is searching for the roots of the "romantic" (quality of the novel) throughout history.

Therefore, when Bakhtin refers to the "Greek novel", he is not suggesting that it is the same genre as *War and Peace*. Rather, he is identifying an "ancestor" of this genre and using the chronotope to define the specific "personality" of this ancestor.

a passive and unchanging hero whose sole narrative function is to undergo a test of identity (“trial”). By deconstructing the structure of time and space in this genre, we will address the question of its “axiological-emotional coloring”, arguing that the unique configuration of its chronotope deterministically governs all other elements, from the passivity of the heroes to the ideological purpose of the narrative.

By exploring the structure of adventurous time and abstract space that define this genre, we can see how Bakhtin’s analysis reveals a fictional world that is cohesive in its own logic, albeit radically different from the novelistic forms that would follow.

To understand the internal logic of the Greek novel, it is strategic, according to Bakhtin’s analysis, to deconstruct its most fundamental components: time and space. The unique nature of that time-space relationship decisively governs all other elements of the genre, from the conception of characters to the organization of the plot. Therefore, the chronotopic structure serves as the master key to unlocking this fictional world.

Bakhtin’s central argument is that time in the Greek novel constitutes an “extratemporal hiatus between two moments in biographical time” (2018, p. 19). The narrative unfolds during the interval between the lovers’ first encounter, when sudden passion ignites, and their eventual marriage. However, this vast period of adventures is not integrated into the heroes’ lives. It exists outside real biographical time, as “it does not alter the lives of the heroes in any way, it adds nothing to them” (2018, p. 19). The protagonists neither mature nor age, and their feelings remain completely unchanged.

The internal logic governing this time is that of *mere chance*, which manifests through moments of *suddenly* and *at just that moment*. For Bakhtin, this time *of chance* is not merely random; it is “the peculiar time of the interference of irrational forces in human life” (2018, p. 25). The initiative of events does

not belong to the heroes but to Fate (*Tyche*), gods, demons, or villains, who employ “casual coincidence” and “casual heterotemporality”<sup>2</sup> as their instruments. For instance, an unwanted marriage is postponed because, *suddenly*, an eagle steals the sacrificial meat. A hero is saved from execution because, at that *very* moment, a religious procession approaches. Thus, chance serves as the narrative mechanism through which non-human forces exert their influence, effectively neutralizing the agency of the protagonists.

The temporality of chance cannot operate in just any scenario; it *requires* a corresponding space – an *abstract spatial extensiveness*. The world of the Greek novel is vast, spanning multiple countries, but this diversity is purely functional. As

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2. When analyzing the chronotope of the Greek adventure novel, Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term “casual heterotemporality” to characterize the specific logic governing time in this genre, marked by ruptures and fortuitous coincidences. However, a careful examination of Bakhtin’s text reveals that this “heterotemporality” is never described as a purely temporal phenomenon. On the contrary, Bakhtin consistently associates it with spatial elements, such as the specific “place in space” where events occur, the “abstract space” necessary for adventure, and the relationships of “distance and proximity”. This intrinsic link between temporal anomalies and their spatial manifestations aligns fully with the central concept of the chronotope, defined by Bakhtin as the “essential interconnection of the relations of space and time” and their “inseparability”. In this sense, the term “heterotemporality”, taken in isolation, risks underestimating the spatial component, which is inseparable from Bakhtin’s analysis of the Greek novel. Considering this constitutive fusion, we propose adopting of the term “heterochronotope” to designate the specific spatiotemporal dynamics of this genre. The use of “heterochronotope” seeks to emphasize, through the terminology itself, the inseparable nature of space-time in this particular manifestation. It highlights that both temporal distortions (heterotemporality) and spatial configurations (which could be thought of as a “heterospace”, although the unified term is more faithful to Bakhtin’s conception) deviate from expected linearity or normality, resulting in the complex interaction of random events in specific locations, as described by Bakhtin for the Greek adventurous chronotope.

Bakhtin analyzes, the universe of the novel must to be an *alien universe*. The function of this “alien universe” is crucial because a concrete and familiar “native universe” would introduce to its own “regularity” and “indispensable bonds”. Such social and historical laws would severely limit the “absolute power of chance”, which depends on the indeterminacy of space to manifest itself.

This abstract space is not filled with a cohesive representation of cultures but with “isolated and disconnected curiosities and rarities”. Detailed descriptions of exotic animals, such as the hippopotamus and the crocodile, do not serve to characterize a region; rather they function as “adventurous objects”, described as something “isolated, unique, and exclusive”. Instead of constructing a coherent world, these descriptions reinforce its fragmented nature and the logic of chance.

The resulting adventurous chronotope is characterized by a purely technical connection between time and space. Since time leaves no traces, events possess theoretical *reversibility*: they could be reordered without changing the final outcome. Similarly, events exhibit spatial *mobility*: what occurs in Babylon could just as well happen in Egypt. This abstract configuration, with its empty time and interchangeable space, decisively shapes the novel’s representation of human beings.

The chronotopic structure analyzed is not merely a step for the action; it constitutes the sole possible ontology for the hero, compelling him into a state of absolute passivity and immutability. The values upheld by the narrative and the emotions it conveys – its “axiological-emotional coloring” – are direct consequence of the logic of a world where initiative does not reside with the individual and where time leaves no marks.

Bakhtin characterizes the hero of this genre as *absolutely passive and absolutely immutable*. In a world governed by chance, “things just happen to man”. His identity is neither forged nor

transformed by events; rather, it is a pre-existing quality that must be preserved intact.

This logic transforms the Greek novel into an *adventurous novel of trial*. The entire plot functions as a test of the heroes' identities, verified through narrative motifs such as *recognition*, *disguise*, *fictitious death*, and *fictitious betrayal*. All these devices serve to challenge and ultimately reaffirm identity. Bakhtin uses a precise metaphor to illustrate this point: "The hammer of events neither crushes nor forges anything; it merely tests the solidity of a finished product" (2018, p. 40).

The fundamental values (the axiological component) examined in this test are the heroine's *chastity* and the mutual *fidelity* of the lovers. The ideological purpose of the novel is to confirm that this initial identity remains unshaken. The happy ending does not signify an evolution but the restoration of the original balance, demonstrating that the initial identity endured through every challenge.

A fundamental contradiction, highlighted by Bakhtin, shapes the way this inner world is represented. The hero of the Greek novel is a *private, particular man* whose life is defined by love. However, this private life is conveyed through "inappropriate external public-rhetorical and public-state forms".

This dissonance between content and form defines the "emotional color" of the genre. The most intimate emotions are processed through lengthy rhetorical speeches and legal proceedings, in which fidelity and chastity undergo an almost legalistic scrutiny. The result is an "external, formalistic, and conventional" unity of the human image. This contradiction reveals a fundamental historical limitation that shapes the emotional texture of the genre. As Bakhtin concludes, this novelistic form demonstrates that, in general, "Antiquity did not create an adequate form or unity of the private man and his life" (2018, p. 44).

Using the concept of the chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin reveals that the Greek novel is characterized by a deeply abstract and static world structure. His analysis demonstrates how the interconnection of adventurous time – a hiatus governed by chance that leaves no traces (heterotime) – and abstract space (heterospace) – an “alien universe” that serves solely as a stage for adventures – constitutes the deterministic matrix shaping all other elements of the genre.

In this world, values (the axiological component) manifest as tests of an immutable identity centered on fidelity and chastity. Emotions (the emotional component), in turn, are filtered through a public and rhetorical form that is incongruent with their private nature. The result is a fictional universe that is “absolutely finished and immobile”, where nothing changes and everything is merely reaffirmed.

Despite its apparent rigidity, Bakhtin acknowledges the “enormous vital force” inherent in the concept of the “trial” as an organizing principle of narrative. Although transformed, this structure has persisted with remarkable resilience, shaping everything from Baroque and chivalric novels to later narratives that test vocation, genius, or, as Bakhtin notes, the identities of the “Napoleonic *parvenu*”, the “Nietzschean”, or the “emancipated woman”.

The strength of Bakhtin’s analysis lies in his ability to reveal how the earliest form of the European novel, despite its apparent simplicity, contained the foundational elements of time, space, and human identity. These elements, presented here in their most abstract form, would later be concretized, elaborated, and problematized throughout the rich and continuous history of the novelistic genre.



## 2. *Adventure Novel of Everyday Life*

The strategic importance of analyzing metamorphosis in *The Golden Ass* lies in understanding it not merely as a plot device but as a fundamental concept that redefines novelistic time. Unlike the Greek novel, where adventurous time represents an extratemporal hiatus that does not affect the heroes' identities, in Apuleius work, metamorphosis structures the protagonist's life trajectory, becoming the engine of a profound and irreversible transformation.

The trajectory of Lucius, the hero, centers on his transformation into a donkey. His life is not presented as a continuous biography because, as Bakhtin points out, "here there is no formation in the precise sense, there is crisis and rebirth" (2018, p. 52). This temporal structure, based on crisis, generates distinct and sequential images of the same individual. The novel thus offers three fundamental representations of the protagonist: "Lucius before his transformation into a donkey, Lucius the donkey, and Lucius purified and renewed by the mysteries" (2018, p. 52). This succession of states contrasts directly with the time of the Greek novel, which "leaves no traces". In Apuleius, on the contrary, the adventurous time leaves a "deep and indelible mark on the man himself" and on his entire subsequent life.

The concept of metamorphosis, although present in folklore and ancient philosophy, undergoes a complex evolution before acquiring its specific function in Apuleius. In its mythological origins, as seen in Hesiod, metamorphosis had a cosmic and historical scope, capable of unifying extensive temporal sequences, such as the succession of ages or the theogonic process. However, in a later phase, exemplified by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the concept becomes fragmented. Metamorphosis transforms into a collection of "particular

and disconnected cases”, and the mythological unity that once unified time disintegrates. In Apuleius, this evolution culminates in an even more restricted use: metamorphosis assumes a “private, isolated, and distinctly magical” character. Its function deepens, becoming a means of representing “the private destiny of man”, yet it retains sufficient energy to encompass the critical moments of individual existence, granting the novel a new capacity to explore subjectivity in crisis.

This profound transformation of the hero, which redefines the temporal dimension of the narrative as a process of crisis and rebirth, is intrinsically linked to his physical journey through the world, which becomes the stage for observing life and customs.

The element that materializes the time of crisis and makes it concrete is the “novelistic chronotope of the road”. Within this concept, there is a fusion of “man’s vital path with his real path-road in space”, a realization of the ancient metaphor that interprets the physical journey as a representation of life’s journey. This organic fusion of time and space allows the realm of customs – the lowly everyday – to be seamlessly inserted into the narrative cohesively, not merely as a backdrop, but as an essential part of the hero’s experience.

Lucius’ relationship with everyday life is that of a stranger. He does not belong to this world; he merely observes it as an “outsider force” that invades him. In the process of atonement, Lúcio is compelled to descend into this sphere, which symbolically functions as a “hell” or “grave”. Bakhtin characterizes this daily life as a universe “totally removed from nature”, a place “where even the sun does not shine”. It is fundamentally a “priapic” world, governed by the logic of indecency, crime, and violence. Lucio’s permanence in this lowly daily life represents a kind of symbolic death, from which he will ultimately resurrect. Paradoxically, this demotion grants him a privileged position as an observer.

The figure of the donkey addresses a fundamental problem in the literary representation of private life: the contradiction “between the public nature of the literary form itself and the privacy of its content” (2018, p. 62). By definition, private life is closed off to outside observers, constituting what Bakhtin describes as “the literature of eavesdropping and listening”. The condition of being a donkey transforms Lucius into an ideal witness, for, as he himself notes, before him everyone feels comfortably: “without caring about my presence, everyone spoke freely and at ease in front of me”. His “long ears” become an instrument for hearing everything, enabling him to eavesdrop on the secrets of the bedroom, the small deceptions and acts of violence that compose the fabric of everyday life.

The figure of the “third” observer, introduced by Apuleius’ donkey, is perpetuated in a remarkable way throughout the history of the novel. Later archetypes such as the rogue, the servant, the adventurer, and the courtesan inherit this same marginal position, which allows them to “peek and listen to private life”. According to the Russian thinker, this narrative structure – where a marginal observer reveals the intimacy of a closed world – becomes a cornerstone of the Spanish picaresque novel, exemplified by *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and extends throughout the European tradition, from *Gil Blas* and Diderot’s *Jacques, the fatalist* by to Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and the works of Balzac and Stendhal.

However, Lucio’s journey of observation is not merely a collection of fortuitous episodes. His passive observation of everyday life is, in fact, guided by a higher logic that actively organizes his experiences, subordinating chance to a greater moral purpose.

The concept of “chance” in Apuleius’ novel differs qualitatively from that governing the Greek novel. Although chance still influences specific events, its role is constrained by a

higher moral structure that encompasses and imparts meaning to it. Chance operates only within its designated domain and does not govern the beginning or the end of the hero's journey.

The causal chain that frames the adventure does not begin with chance but with the hero's own guilt. It is his "voluptuousness, youthful levity, and 'ill-timed curiosity'" that lead him to dabble in witchcraft, thereby bringing the power of chance upon himself. The initiative, therefore, stems from a character flaw. Similarly, the final link in the chain is not chance but divine intervention. The goddess Isis does not act as a "happy accident" but as a "clairvoyant destiny" that actively guides Lucius to salvation, demanding purification rites from him.

This structure is made explicit in the speech of the priest of Isis, who contrasts the "blind fate" of chance with the "clairvoyant fate" of divine providence. The priest reveals that Lucius's trials, although driven by the malice of chance, were, unbeknownst to him, the path to "true bliss". The entire series of adventures is thus reinterpreted as "punishment and atonement". Suffering is not gratuitous but a necessary consequence of initial guilt and an indispensable means of final purification.

The sequential series – guilt, punishment, atonement, bliss – imparts time with a "substantial and irreversible" quality, contrasting with the abstraction of Greek adventurous time. As Bakhtin emphasizes, "man's responsibility is the foundation of this entire series" (2018, p. 57), and the passage of time is reflected in the very transformation of his identity. However, this new temporality has significant limitations. Like in the Greek novel, the hero's transformation remains a strictly private and isolated matter. As Bakhtin states, "this temporal series leaves no traces in the surrounding world". Man changes, but he does so "in a manner that is absolutely independent of the world;

the world itself remains unchanged” (2018, p. 57). Despite its advances, this moral structure still fails to establish a historical connection between individual destiny and the surrounding world.

The chronotope of Apuleius’ novel, as analyzed by Bakhtin, is characterized by the fusion of a time of crisis and personal metamorphosis with the concrete space of the road. This setting serves as a stage for observing of an alienated and degraded everyday world. The interaction between the hero’s internal transformation and his physical journey through daily life creates a complex and innovative narrative structure, in which time becomes substantial and space is imbued with moral significance.

The “axiological-emotional color” of this chronotope stems directly from its structure. The everyday life observed by Lucio is given an entirely negative evaluation: it is a “priapic” world – fragmented, violent, and “removed from nature”, as a purgatory in which the hero atones for his guilt. In contrast, the final redemption, associated with the intervention of the goddess Isis and purification through mysteries, is assigned the highest positive value. Suffering in the “hell” of everyday life is justified and validated by the “true bliss” attained in the end.

By subordinating adventure to a trajectory of moral transformation and developing a sophisticated mechanism for observing private life, this type of novel represents a decisive step in the history of the genre. It bequeathed to subsequent literary tradition not only themes but also enduring narrative structures, such as the figure of the marginal observer. However, its temporality remains closed and ahistorical, and it was necessary to wait for works such as Petronius’ *Satiricon* for the first “still unstable traces of historical time” to begin to appear in the novelistic genre.

### 3. *The Biographical Novel*

The biographical and autobiographical forms of Antiquity novel, although they did not produce a biographical novel in the modern sense, were essential precursors to the development of the European novel as a whole. At the core of these ancient narrative structures lies a fundamental innovation: the creation of “a new type of biographical time and a new, specifically constructed image of man walking his life path” (2018, p. 71). An analysis of these primitive forms reveals not only the genesis of the representation of subjectivity but also a foundational crisis in Western self-awareness.

The evolution of the ancient chronotope – from the public space of *the agora* to the interior monologues of *the Soliloquia* – represents not a merely formal change but a fundamental rupture: the loss of an integrated “popular chronotope”, whose absence inaugurated a conflict between the “self for oneself” and the “self for others” that has never been fully resolved. By tracing the configuration of space, time, and “axiological-emotional color” in ancient biography and autobiography – from the externalized totality of Greek individual to the emergence of solitary consciousness in the Hellenistic-Roman period – we demonstrate how the foundations of literary subjectivity were established, culminating in a reflection on the echoes of this tension in contemporary times.

Understanding the concept of the Greek public man, whose identity is characterized by the absence of a distinction between the internal and external spheres, requires a dissection of the chronotope of the public square (*agora*). This real space-time, where life was publicly revealed and validated, had profound implications for the construction of subjectivity and emotional expression in classical Greece.

Greek self-awareness manifested itself in two essential types of autobiography. The first, Platonic in nature, is exemplified in works such as Socrates' *Apology*. Its chronotope represents the "vital path of those who seek authentic knowledge", an idealized journey in which real biographical time is "almost entirely dissolved in the ideal and even abstract time" of philosophical metamorphosis. However, this idealization imposes a crucial limitation: "The significance of the image of Socrates is not revealed in this biographical-ideal scheme", since concrete and formative time is sacrificed in favor of an abstract model.

The second type, based on encomium – the civic speech of homage – has a radically different character. These were not literary works but "verbalized civic-political acts of public praise or public accountability of real men" (2018, p. 73). The defining chronotope here is not that of represented life but that of representation itself: the public square, the *agora*. This real and concrete space was the stage where life was revealed and evaluated, functioning as "the state itself... the supreme court, all science, all art, and, in it, the entire people" (2018, p. 73).

The axiological-emotional colorfulness of the *agora*, therefore, reflected the essence of public totality. The image of the biographical man is characterized by a "total exteriority", devoid of any "intimate-private, secret-individual, self-centered" component. The classical man "is open in every sense, completely externalized; there is nothing in him that is 'only for himself'". For the Greek mentality, the totality of being existed within the same public dimension, visible and audible both to others and to oneself.

This exteriority is vividly evident in the representation of emotions. Homer's heroes, for instance, "express their feelings very harshly and very loudly" and "often... cry and sob loudly" (2018, p. 75). Such expressiveness is not a characteristic of primitive psychology but a logical outcome of a worldview in

which “every being was visible and audible”. To exist, inner life had to manifest itself, as there were no silent or invisible spheres to contain it.

The solidity of this unity is such that the question of the “admissibility of self-praise” only arises later, with Plutarch. The very emergence of this debate is a clear indication that “the classical public integrity of humankind has disintegrated”, marking the transition to a new paradigm – the Roman one – which introduced an unprecedented temporal and historical dimension.

Roman biographical and autobiographical forms represent an evolution of the Greek model. The shift of the chronotope from the public square to the bosom of the family signifies a fundamental change in the perception of time, individual value, and destiny, which come to be understood within a historical and state framework.

Roman autobiography is grounded on the chronotope of the “Roman family”. This was not a private entity but an institution inseparable from the state, where ancestors embodied the national ideal. Consequently, self-awareness was not directed toward an audience present in the public square, but was guided by the memory of ancestors and a sense of responsibility toward descendants. This orientation imparts Roman temporality with a distinctive historicity: the individual perceives himself as “a link in a chain between dead ancestors and descendants who have not yet entered political life”. Life is no longer sculptural and synchronic, as in Greece, but diachronic, imbued with a deep awareness of one’s place within the lineage of the state.

The Roman axiological-emotional palette is defined by two central concepts: *prodigia* (omens) and the category of *ventura* (luck or fortune). These elements are not merely plot devices but structuring principles that “indissolubly fuse” individual destiny with that of the public-state. The omens, which guided every step of the state, also applied to its leader, whose personal



destiny was inseparable from the fate of the nation. In this context, Roman *ventura* is intrinsically linked to “state initiatives in wars”, encompassing notions of “gift”, “intuition”, and “genius”. “Faith in one’s star”, as exemplified by Sulla or Caesar, was faith in the fusion of individual ability with Rome’s destiny. However, this solid unity would not endure, paving the way for the emergence of a new type of human being.

The Hellenistic-Roman period marks a crucial turning point. The fragmentation of public life created a vacuum that was filled by new biographical approaches and the earliest signs of private subjectivity. The consequences of this change are profound:

His self-awareness, having lost the popular chronotope of the square, was unable to find a chronotope that was as real, unique, and integral; consequently, it disintegrated and fragmented, becoming abstract and idealized. In the private life of the private individual, many spheres and objects emerged that were generally not subject to publicity (the public sphere and others) but were confined to expression of intimate and conventional alcove. (2018, p. 78)

The biography of this period was influenced by the Aristotelian doctrine of *entelechy*, which posits that character is revealed rather than formed. From this foundation, two types of biographical construction emerged. The first, Plutarch’s “energetic” type, conceives of being as action, manifested through deeds and speeches. In this model, time is “phenomenal, the essence of character exists outside of time”, with historical reality serving merely as “an arena for this revelation”. The second type, Suetonius’ “analytical” type, disrupts the “temporal biographical series” by distributing biographical material into thematic categories (such as virtues, vices, etc.), organizing the narrative around a predetermined totality of character rather than its chronological development.

At the same time, changes emerged in public-rhetorical forms that signal the rise of the “isolated and lonely man”. The text highlights three types of this transition: the *satirical-ironic* modification (Horace, Ovid), which parodies heroic models; the *intimate-rhetorical modification* found in Cicero’s letters, where “closed private spaces” emerge and nature becomes a “landscape”, specifically “an environment... of a private and solitarily inactive man”, appearing as “pictorial fragments” in contrast to the “vigorous, spiritualized, and independent whole of nature as in the epic poetry”; and, finally, the **Stoic** type. With Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Saint Augustine, “a new form of relationship with oneself” arises, captured in the term *Soliloquia* (“Solitary conversations with oneself”). Self-awareness seeks support within itself, explicitly struggling against the “point of view of ‘the other,’” and the weight of intimate events increases dramatically.

Despite these innovations, loneliness in Antiquity “remained relative and naive”. Its forms were still “considerably public-rhetorical”, and self-awareness, although eroded, continued to rest on a public foundation. The totally internalized man had not yet been born, but his contours were already taking shape.

The analyzed trajectory reveals a transition from the open and public chronotope of *the agora* to progressively enclosed spaces, culminating in the threshold of solitary introspection. However, this evolution should not be seen as a linear or inevitable progression toward interiority. The loss of ancient public totality inaugurated a dialectical tension that produced not only the private man, but also, in later times, “magnificent” attempts to create a “new and total exteriorization of man”, as exemplified by Rabelais and Goethe.

This fundamental tension between the “self for oneself” and the “self for others”, which Bakhtin traces back to the end of Antiquity, has become increasingly radicalized and remains

a central axis of subjective experience. By contrasting the “total exteriority” of the Greeks with the hyper-interiority of modernist literature or the contemporary paradox of the public performance of intimacy on social media, one can observe the persistence of this dilemma.

Therefore, Bakhtin’s analysis of ancient forms not only illuminates the genesis of the novel but also provides a tool for understanding the complex configurations of the “I” in the contemporary world. It demonstrates that the conflict between public unity and private fragmentation, which began more than two millennia ago, continues to drive cultural production and shapes the very definition of what it means to be an individual.

#### *4. The folkloric chronotope and the inversion of time*

In the fourth chapter of *Forms of Time and Chronotope*, Bakhtin’s analysis of the ancient novel reveals a fundamental and perennial tension in culture: the struggle between a temporality that seeks refuge in the past and another that projects human power into the future and materiality, a dialectic that continues to shape contemporary narratives. To this purpose, we will focus on the opposition between *historical inversion*, a mechanism that idealizes the past, and the *folkloric chronotope*, its affirmative counterpart.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, we aim to answer central questions regarding the structure of the ancient world and its representation. To unravel this complex relationship, we must begin with the premise that Bakhtin himself establishes as fundamental for any coherent literary image: the concept of the “fullness of time”.

Understanding Bakhtin’s concept of the “fullness of time” is a crucial condition for any literary analysis. For Bakhtin,

a narrative image gains consistency only when it is embedded within a cohesive temporal flow, maintaining a living relationship with the past and the future. An era can “reverberate” in a work only if its time is represented in its fullness. Outside this context, the present disintegrates into a “conglomerate” of isolated phenomena. Thus, the fullness of time serves as a measure of an era’s vitality and its capacity to narrate itself.

In evaluating the ancient novel, Bakhtin identifies the presence of a “minimum fullness of time”, which he characterizes as essentially fragile and dual in nature. This duality reveals a fundamental tension within the consciousness of the era. On one hand, this fullness is rooted “in the mythological-popular fullness of time”; on the other, it contains “fragile embryos of new forms of fullness of time, linked to the unveiling of social contradictions” (2018, p. 92). The direct consequence of this fragmented temporality is the inability to forge a cohesive narrative unity. The old folkloric forms no longer encompassed the new social content, while the emerging temporal consciousness remained “too fragile”. The result is a “novelistic disintegration”. It is precisely this crisis – the lack of a cohesive and powerful present-future – that creates the conditions for the emergence of a decisive compensatory mechanism: historical inversion.

Bakhtin identifies *historical inversion* as a fundamental mechanism in mythological and artistic thought that imparts substance and value to its ideals. Understanding this operation is crucial because it reveals the value structure of the ancient world and its problematic relationship with the future. Essentially, it is a temporal shift that projects into the past what, in reality, belongs to the future as a goal or duty. Bakhtin defines it precisely, stating that in historical inversion “what can or should be achieved only in the future is represented as having already existed in the past” (2018, p. 92). Ideals such as justice or social harmony are situated in a “Golden Age”, transforming a goal to be achieved into a lost reality to be restored.

The effect of this mechanism is profound. The past (“there was”) and the present (“there is”) acquire a status of superior reality, endowed with a “real ponderability” that is denied to the future (“there will be”). The future becomes “half empty and rarefied”, as all its positive energy is transferred to the past. This inversion, in Bakhtin’s words, effectively “bleeds” the future, draining it of its creative potential. Bakhtin identifies two other forms that, following similar logic, contribute to this emptying:

- *Vertical superstructures*: this form locates ideals not along a horizontal timeline, but on a vertical axis – “in heaven” or “under the earth”. By situating perfection in the “extratemporal and eternal”, they make it simultaneous with the present yet radically separate from it, and superior to the future, which “does not yet exist”.
- *Eschatology*: the future is conceived as an imminent and absolute end. nearness of this end diminishes the value of the remaining time, transforming it into an “unnecessary continuation of the present”, an insignificant interlude.

The axiological-emotional tone emanating from historical inversion is one of profound mistrust toward the potential of what does not yet exist. It reflects a worldview that seeks security in the established and values origin over becoming. However, this temporality, which looks backward in search of validation, is countered by a radically different model found in the popular roots of culture: the chronotope of folklore.

In direct opposition to the logic of historical inversion, Bakhtin presents the *folkloric chronotope* as an alternative and powerful model for organizing time and space. Far from being a primitive form, authentic folklore reveals itself to be

an “inexhaustible source of realism” for literature, precisely because of its affirmative relationship with the material world and the future. In folklore, the energy of the desired future does not empty the present but, on the contrary, “deeply intensifies the images of material reality here” (2018, p. 95). This intensification does not result in abstraction but in the materialization of an idealized human potential in the figure of the “great man”.

The figure of the folk hero embodies an expansive temporality. His ideal greatness “was never separated from spatial dimensions and temporal duration”. He is, quite literally, “a physically large man who walked with long strides”, a being whose moral stature is reflected in his physical presence. The magnitude of this hero, in contrast to ordinary men, is captured in the verse by Lermontov quoted by Bakhtin: “You are not the bogatyrs”. Crucially, this hero is not merely a representative of the people, like a “ruler who reigns over a great people”; in Bakhtin’s analysis, “he himself is this great people”, great in his own right, embodying collective potential.

This logic gives rise to what Bakhtin calls *realistic fantastic*. It is a form of fantasy that does not escape from material reality into supernatural realms but operates “in the vastness of space and time” of our own world. Its foundation lies in the exploration of the “eternal and always immutable possibilities of real human nature”. The axiological-emotional coloration of the folkloric chronotope is therefore expansive, affirmative, and deeply materialistic. Human value is not measured by ideal compensations or nostalgia for a lost past but by “the direct and honest growth of man, on his own and in this real world” (2018, p. 96). The apparent simplicity of these two worldviews conceals a lasting dialectic, whose resonances extend to the narrative dilemmas of our own time.

Bakhtin's analysis of the assimilation of time in Antiquity reveals a fundamental opposition that transcends its original time. On one hand, there is historical inversion, which idealizes the past and diminishes the creative power of the future. On the other hand, the folkloric chronotope harnesses the energy of the future to enrich the image of man in the present world. Bakhtin's logic enables us to understand how these models persist as narrative matrices in contemporary culture.

- *Echoes of historical inversion:* The culture of nostalgia, which aestheticizes past eras as more authentic, and political discourses that idealize a “lost past” as a solution to present dilemmas, can be understood as manifestations of a modern historical inversion. In these phenomena, the future is perceived as empty or threatening, prompting a search for value in a reality that is imagined to be more “tangible” because it has already existed.
- *Permanence of the Folkloric chronotope:* The logic of the “great man” and the “realistic fantastic” resonates strongly in superhero epics and science fiction. In these genres, the scale of action and the protagonists' capabilities are hyperbolized to express ideal human potential. As in folklore, this expansion occurs within the material logic of its universe – scientific accidents, alien biology, advanced technology – reinforcing the principle of not escaping the real world but exploring its latent possibilities.

After all, Bakhtin's analysis demonstrates its enduring relevance. The tension between emptying the future, projecting our ideals onto a secure past, and harnessing the energy of the future to enhance the image of man in the present remains one of the central axes defining how contemporary society narrates itself. This dialectic is not merely a literary technique but a reflection of how culture grapples with fears, aspirations, and the very nature of lived reality, confirming the deep connection Bakhtin consistently established between the novel and the unfinished flow of life.

### *Considerations*

The analysis of ancient novel forms, as detailed in this chapter, reveals a fundamental path not only for the history of a literary genre but also for the very archaeology of Western subjectivity. The exposition demonstrates that the evolution of narrative structure, from its earliest manifestations in the Greek novel to more complex biographical and folkloric configurations, corresponds to a radical transformation in the artistic assimilation of reality and, consequently, in the image of the human being that emerges from this process. The journey begins with a chronotope of trial, characterized by an abstract and static time-space, in which a passive and immutable hero has his pre-existing identity tested by external and irrational forces. This model, based on the preservation of an essence, contrasts sharply with the subsequent structure centered on metamorphosis, in which the individual's journey through a concrete space and a time of crisis becomes the catalyst for an irreversible inner transformation, subordinating the logic of chance to a moral design of guilt and redemption.



This development is further explored through the analysis of biographical forms, which reveal a fundamental crisis in self-awareness. The transition from the chronotope of the public square, where human beings constituted themselves in their externalized totality, to the progressively private and introspective spaces of the Hellenistic-Roman period marks the emergence of an unresolved tension between public and private identity, between the “I for others” and the “I for oneself”. Finally, the chapter exposes an even more fundamental dialectic underlying these forms: the conflict between, on one hand, historical inversion – a mechanism that idealizes the past as a repository of all value, thereby emptying the future of its creative potential – and, on the other hand, the folkloric chronotope, an affirmative worldview that projects the energy of the future to expand the image of man in the material and present world. It is thus established that these ancient narrative configurations are not merely outdated stages but archetypal matrices whose internal logics continue, in an underground and persistent way, to inform the ways contemporary culture structures its fictions and conceives its own existence.

A critical appreciation of the legacy of these forms requires recognizing the remarkable persistence of their structures in contemporary cultural production. The chronotope of the trial, for example, finds a surprisingly literal echo in the universe of modern entertainment media, such as competitive *reality shows*. In these formats, participants are placed in an “alien universe” – an island, a monitored house, a kitchen – an abstract space governed by artificial and external rules. Time becomes a hiatus, disconnected from real biographical life, and events are driven by a “chance” orchestrated by the production. Individuals do not fundamentally change; rather, they undergo a series of tests to verify a predetermined quality – resilience, talent, or “authenticity”. The supreme value, as in the Greek novel, lies in immutability: the ability to preserve one’s original

identity under pressure. The image of the man that emerges is that of a passive subject who reacts to stimuli; their journey does not forge a new being but only confirms what they have always been, revealing the persistence of a narrative logic that privileges proof over transformation.

Similarly, the chronotope of metamorphosis manifests itself in a secularized form within the ubiquitous culture of self-help and personal reinvention. The journey of transformation, which in its traditional model was organized around the logic of spiritual redemption, is now structured around the optimization and improvement of the self. The “path-road” becomes the journey documented on social media, and moments of crisis are commodified as necessary turning points for a “new version” of oneself. The logic of “guilt-punishment-atonement-bliss” is reconfigured as a cycle of failure, learning, overcoming, and success, often witnessed by an audience. The figure of the “third observer”, originally symbolized by the donkey who spied on private life, is radicalized in the figure of the follower or spectator, for whom the intimacy of the transformation process is deliberately performed. The narrative of personal metamorphosis has become one of the most powerful cultural products of today, but its fundamental structure – the passage through an everyday “hell” to reach a higher state of being – remains indebted to the old model, demonstrating how the need to narrate personal change continues to be a pillar of human experience.

The crisis of subjectivity, diagnosed during the transition from the public man of the agora to the private man of the Hellenistic era, has reached unprecedented complexity in the current historical moment. The dominant contemporary chronotope appears to be that of a “digital agora”, a reticular space-time that not only dissolves the boundaries between public and private but paradoxically makes them mutually dependent. Interiority, which in ancient models sought refuge in the

solitude of *soliloquies*, now finds its primary form of validation in performative externalization. The “self for oneself” seems to acquire reality only when translated into content for the “self for others”, in an incessant search for recognition that renders identity fluid and dependent on algorithms and the approval of others. This compulsory fusion of the intimate and the spectacle represents a radicalization of the disintegration that began at the end of Antiquity, producing an image of man as a being perpetually under construction and simultaneously on display, whose self-awareness is mediated by screens and engagement metrics.

In the context of fragmented subjectivity, the dialectic between historical inversion and the folkloric chronotope becomes an indispensable perspective for understanding contemporary cultural anxieties. Historical inversion is prominently evident in political and cultural discourses that advocate a return to an idealized and mythologized past, an imaginary “golden age” posited as a solution to the uncertainties of a complex present and a future perceived as threatening. The culture of nostalgia, which aestheticizes past decades through films, series, and music, can be interpreted as a symptom of this depletion of the future, a search for refuge in temporalities perceived as safer and more cohesive. In contrast, the folkloric chronotope endures within niches of cultural production that still dare to envision expansive futures. It manifests in the “realistic fantastic” of speculative science fiction or in narratives of technological and social progress, which, rather than retreating into the past, harness the energy of the future to project a collective “great man” capable of overcoming present challenges. This hero is no longer the giant of folklore but perhaps benevolent artificial intelligence, a post-scarcity society, or a unified humanity confronting a global crisis.

Therefore, the analysis of the ancient forms of the novel transcends mere historical erudition to reveal itself as

a diagnosis of the present. Archaic chronotopic structures – trial, metamorphosis, public-private tension, nostalgia for the past, and projection into the future – have not disappeared. On the contrary, they constitute the deep syntax upon which our culture continues to articulate its stories, fears, and hopes. Studying these primitive forms allows us to recognize that the conflict between preserving and transforming identity, between interiority and public performance, and between idealizing the past and envisioning the future remains the driving force that defines not only literature but the very experience of living within the unfinished flow of history. The enduring relevance of this analysis lies in its ability to equip us to decipher the chronotopes of our own time and thus understand the image of the human being they incessantly forge.



### Chapter III THE MIDDLE AGES

#### *1. The Matrix of Adventurous Time and Chivalric Innovation*

To understand the fundamental innovation of the chivalric romance, it is strategically essential to contrast it with its predecessor, the Greek novel. The uniqueness of the chivalric chronotope is most clearly revealed in this difference, demonstrating how an inherited narrative matrix was radically transformed to create a new universe of meaning.

The chivalric romance, in fact, operates with elements inherited from the “adventurous time basically of the Greek type” (2018, p. 99). Thus, time breaks down into a series of short segments corresponding to separate adventures, and the plot is often organized around the heroes’ proof of identity and fidelity. Common narrative mechanisms including fictitious deaths, recognitions, name changes, and the central role of chance. However, the crucial lies in the nature of this chance and the atmosphere it creates that the crucial change lies.

In Greek romance, chance – the “sudden” – represents a violation of normality, a series of misfortunes that divert the hero from his natural course, to which he longs to return. In chivalric romance, this logic is reversed. The “sudden” becomes normalized, becoming the very law that governs the universe. Bakhtin is emphatic in stating:

The entire world becomes wonderful, and the wonderful itself becomes habitual (without ceasing to be wonderful). The eternal “unexpected” itself ceases to be unexpected. The unexpected becomes expected, and only the unexpected is expected. The whole world is framed within the category of the “sudden”, the category of wonderful and unexpected chance. (2018, p. 100)

In this new paradigm, the unexpected becomes the only expectation. “The unexpected is expected, and only the unexpected is expected” (2018, p. 100). Chance ceases to be an external force that disrupts life and instead becomes the very fabric of reality, a force personified by fairies and wizards. Moreover, magic becomes omnipresent, so that “in it, every object – clothing, a fountain, a bridge, etc. – has some magical properties or is simply enchanting” (2018, p. 103). This complete transformation of the world necessitates an equally profound transformation in the figure of the hero who inhabits it.

The chivalric chronotope is defined as a symbiotic universe in which the hero and the world mutually constitute each other. It is impossible to understand one without the other, as both are forged from the same wonderful material. Let us analyze the nature of this “wonderful world” and the new type of heroic subjectivity that it not only permits but also demands.

In contrast to the Greek hero, who experiences adventures as “misfortunes” and lacks initiative, the chivalric hero is highly proactive. He “rushes into adventures as if into

his familiar element” (2018, p. 100). He is not a victim of chance but a “disinterested adventurer” – understanding the term, as Bakhtin cautions, not in its later sense of “a man who soberly pursues his selfish goals”, but in its original sense of someone who actively seeks the wonderful. It is only in this environment that his identity can be affirmed and his essence realized. In fact, “the very ‘code’ by which his identity is measured is designed precisely for this world of wonderful coincidences” (2018, p. 101).

This intrinsic unity between the protagonist and his environment is one of the most striking characteristics of the genre. As the analysis points out, “the hero and the wonderful world in which he acts are made of a single fragment” (2018, p. 102). This is not a relationship of estrangement or conflict; on the contrary, the hero is “flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of this wonderful world”. His origin is wonderful, his abilities are wonderful, and he moves through a world that, although geographically varied, is axiologically uniform, governed by the same notions of glory and achievement.

Additionally, chivalric heroes – such as Lancelot, Parzival, and Tristan – possess a distinct nature. For the heroes of Greek romance, “only one romance can be written about each of them; no cycles, variants, series of romances by various authors are created around them” (2018, p. 102). As a result, each hero is considered “the private property of its author”. In contrast, the knights, although deeply individual, belong to narrative “cycles” and a “common treasure trove of images”, being constantly revisited and reimagined. They are simultaneously unique individuals and representatives of a collective ideal. This new relationship between the hero and the world produces a unique “coloring” of values and emotions that defines the atmosphere of the genre.

The concept of “axiological-emotional coloring” enables us to understand the unique atmosphere of chivalric romance,

the layer of values and emotions that permeates its time and space. This “coloring” imparts the genre with its distinctive *ethos*, shaped by the subjective experience of an inherently magical and heroic reality.

Two central values emerge that fundamentally distinguish the genre: *feat* and *glory*. While the Greek hero only endured “misfortunes”, the knight performs heroic deeds that bring glory to himself and to others. These elements align the novel more closely with the epic and set it apart from the passivity characteristic of its Hellenic predecessor. Adventure ceases to be a misfortune and instead becomes an opportunity for affirmation and recognition.

This new centrality of the hero’s subjectivity manifests even more radically in the treatment of time. The chivalric chronotope inaugurates a “subjective game with time”, a concept entirely foreign to Antiquity, which regarded time with profound respect. This game reveals itself in multiple ways:

- *Fictional hyperbole of time*: Hours stretch endlessly, while and days shrink to mere moments, all shaped to suit the needs of the marvelous narrative.
- *Fabular hyperbole of space*: In many cases, great distances are overcome by marvelous means such as: fast horses, magic carpets, etc.
- *Dreamlike distortions*: The logic of dreams and visions begins to influence the perception of time, acquiring not only a role in the content but also a “shaping function” in structuring the narrative.
- *Lyrical-emotional stretching and shrinking*: Time is distorted based on the intensity of the hero’s subjective experience.



This temporal manipulation corresponds to a “subjective play with space”. Distances and spatial relationships do not follow a realistic logic but instead reflect a “subjective-emotional and partly symbolic deformation of space” (2018, p. 104), in which the environment is shaped by the inner journey and the demands of the adventure. It is from this synthesis of epic elements and innovative subjectivity that Bakhtin situates the historical significance of the genre, stating that:

The early chivalric romance in verse is essentially situated on the intersection of epic and novel, which establishes its special place in the history of the novel. These characteristics also define the original chronotope of this novel – a wonderful world set in the time of adventure. (2018, p. 103)

### *Resonances*

In summary, the chronotope of the chivalric romance is characterized by three fundamental features: the normalization of the marvelous as the fabric of reality; the emergence of a proactive hero whose identity is realized through adventure; and a profound subjectivity in the representation of time and space, which bend to emotional experience and the logic of the extraordinary. Although the integrity of this universe has disintegrated, its components have proven to be remarkably enduring, reverberating throughout contemporary culture.

The direct lineage cited by Bakhtin passes through movements such as the Romantics, Symbolists, and Surrealists, who revisited the “subjective play with space-time perspectives” to explore new dimensions of human experience. Beyond this scholarly heritage, however, we can trace an interpretive lineage

that connects its structures to genres of modern mass culture. The reverberation of the structure of a “wonderful world”, where adventure is the norm and “feats” generate “glory”, is evident in genres such as fantasy literature, exemplified by sagas like *The Lord of the Rings* or *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The same applies to the cinematic universes of superheroes, whose protagonists belong to “cycles”, and, even more explicitly, to RPG (Role-Playing Game) video games, in which the search for adventures (“quests”) in a magical world is the central element of the player’s experience.

Similarly, the “subjective play with time”, which once seemed radically new, can be seen as a distant precursor to the non-linear and psychologically focused narratives that have become prominent in modernist and contemporary cinema. The enduring nature of these narrative structures suggests that the chronotope of the chivalric romance addresses to a fundamental human desire: the search for a world where the extraordinary is possible, where chance can be magical rather than tragic, and where individual action have the power to generate glory, honor, and meaning.

## *2. The Inverted Chronotope*

The figures of the rogue, the clown, and the fool, emerging from the folkloric and satirical traditions of the Middle Ages, mark a turning point of “great importance for the subsequent evolution of the European novel” (2018, p. 109). Far from being mere comic archetypes, these characters are complex chronotopic operators that introduce a new mode of observing and representing reality in literature. Their primary role transcends simple characterization; they act as chronotopic devices that destabilize the ontology of reality represented in

the novel. These figures reconfigure the author's position and the formal structure of the genre, inaugurating a distinctive chronotope characterized by estrangement, performance, and unmasking, whose legacy that endures, albeit transformed, in contemporary discursive practices.

To understand the destabilizing function of these figures, it is essential to analyze their particular chronotope, the indissoluble unity of space and time that defines literary representation. Unlike conventional heroes, they do not inhabit the established chronotopes of the epic or the novel of manners in the same way; rather, they "create microcosms, special chronotopes around them" (2018, p. 109), grounded in a logic of exteriority and critical observation.

The space occupied by these figures is defined by their intrinsic connection to "the theatrical stages and masquerades of the public square". This is not a space of organic experience or belonging but a stage for performance and a privileged vantage point. Their place in the world is one of marginality – a position that grants them the license to observe society from the outside. Their existence is legitimized by their fundamental right to "be strangers in this world". This *outsider* status is not a deficiency but the very source of their power: because they are not integrated into the social structures they represent, they can expose their contradictions without compromise. Their space, therefore, is that of the frontier, the aisle, the public square as an arena of representation rather than as a home.

The temporal dimension associated with these figures is equally distinctive. They exist in a continuous present of action, as their being "coincides with their role, and outside that role they do not exist at all" (2018, p. 110). Because they do not sympathize with "any of the positions of life that exist there", they do not participate in the biographical or historical flow of time in the same way as the other characters. Their time is not one of action that shapes a destiny, but one of observation that

reveals a hidden truth. They live in suspended time, an eternal now of performance, which allows them to reflect on the lives of others without getting becoming involved. This temporality, detached from conventional becoming, enables them to serve as a critical mirror of society.

Based on the spatial and temporal dimensions analyzed, the chronotope of the rogue, the clown, and the fool can be defined as an intermediate chronotope of performance and estrangement. It represents a microcosm that functions as a stage or arena of observation, enabling a distanced and critical perspective on social life. Within this space-time, reality is not experienced directly but is reflected in a “figurative, sometimes inverse” manner. From this chronotope, it becomes possible to expose conventions and externalize what official ideology seeks to keep private and unspoken, thereby granting these figures a unique significance and emotional tone in the novel.

To define the value system and affective tone introduced by the rogue, the clown, and the fool into the novel’s structure, the concept of “axiological-emotional color” (2018, p. 247) is crucial. Its presence is not neutral; it injects a specific evaluative perspective into the narrative, whose main emotional manifestation is laughter and whose central objective is to expose social falsehood.

The primary axiological function attributed to these figures is the “denunciation of any bad and false conventionalism in all human relations” (2018, p. 113). They serve as agents of a truth that arises from the exposing hypocrisy and lies that “permeated all human relations” in the feudal order. To achieve this, each figure employs a distinct tool, forming a complementary triad of attack. These tools “counteract as an unmasking force” the “evil conventionalism” and its elements: the “heavy and gloomy deception” is opposed by the “cheerful trickery of the rogue”; the “selfish falsehood and hypocrisy” is opposed by the “disinterested simplicity and healthy incomprehension of the fool”; and, against all that is false and conventional, stands the “synthetic form of (parodic) unmasking of the clown” (2018, p. 114).

Laughter is the central emotional expression and the primary weapon of these characters. However, it is not a private laugh or mere entertainment. The laughter of the rogue, the clown, and the fool “has the public nature of the public square” It is a social, collective force that breaks the isolation of private life and exposes its truths to public scrutiny. This laughter is the power that “restores the public nature of the image of man”, externalizing everything that official ideology represses and conceals. Through “parodic laughter”, the body, desire, and contradictions of real life, previously relegated to “smuggling”, gain visibility and voice, undermining the hypocritical seriousness of the dominant discourse.

The existence of these figures is inherently metaphorical; they possess an “allegorical being”. What they are and what they do “has a meaning that is neither direct nor immediate, but figurative” (2018, p. 110). This condition grants them the privilege of “not being literal”, enabling them to conduct a critique that operates on a symbolic plane, removed from immediate reality. Bakhtin designates this mode of representation as “prosaic allegory”, a form of existence that does not coincide with an actor’s theatrical representation, but defines the character’s very being as a living metaphor. The effectiveness of this “prosaic allegory” in unmasking the present lies in its capacity to function symbolically; it is precisely this symbolic function, and not the literal figure, that is projected in a transformative way in the literature and culture that followed.

### *Resonances*

The transformative impact of the figures of the rogue, the clown, and the fool is not limited to the history of the pre-modern novel. Their influence extends, metamorphosed, to the narrative forms and social dynamics of the contemporary world, where the need for a critical and external perspective on “bad conventionalism” remains relevant.

One of the most profound influences of these figures was the “placement of the author himself in the novel” (2018, p. 111). Unlike the epic or dramatic poet, whose creative position “is immanent to the genres themselves”, the novelist lacks a pre-established generic point of view. Since the novel “does not have this immanent position”, there is a need for an “essential mask” that legitimizes its vision and portrayal of life. The masks of the clown and the fool offered a powerful solution to this problem intrinsic to the genre. This legacy manifests itself in modern literature through figures such as the unreliable narrator, the cynical antihero, or the author who adopts an ironic public persona. The form of “misunderstanding”, masterfully used by authors such as Voltaire and Tolstoy to expose the “senselessness” of conventions, remains a powerful resource, in which a character reveals the absurdity of normality simply by failing to understand it.

The evolution of these medieval figures culminates, at a certain point in the history of the novel, in the image of the “eccentric”, as seen in authors such as Sterne and Dickens. Eccentricity, or “shandism”, a term coined by Sterne, became “an important way to discover ‘the inner man,’ ‘free and self-sufficient subjectivity’” (2018, p. 115). This function, it is argued, is “analogous to ‘Pantagruelism’, which served to discover the integral outer man during the Renaissance period” (2018, p. 115). The unconventional behavior of the eccentric acts as a mirror that exposes the flaws of normality. This legacy can be traced to contemporary characters whose social inadequacy serves as a vehicle for profound critique of norms, demonstrating that the mask of the “fool” has become a means of accessing psychological and subjective truth.

One of the oldest functions of the fool is the right to “publicize private life with all its most secret hiding places” (2018, p. 114). In the context of contemporary culture, this function takes on extraordinary resonance, especially regarding

to the “unofficial and forbidden non-spheres of human life”, such as “the sexual and vital sphere (copulation, food, wine)” It is possible to establish an analytical inference between the medieval public square and the digital “public square” of social networks. In this new arena, the exposure of the private, collective parodic laughter, and criticism of “bad conventionalism” are omnipresent. Although radically transformed, the function of externalizing and subjecting life to public judgment – once the privilege of the fool – has become a widespread practice, with implications that continue to redefine the boundaries between public and private.

In short, the figures of the rogue, the fool, and the fool represented a silent but decisive revolution in the novelistic form. As theorized by Bakhtin, their specific chronotope – that of performance and estrangement – opened up space for a new authorial position and a new form of representing life. Their value system, centered on denouncing false conventionalism, and their primary emotion, public and parodic laughter, infused the novel with a critical power that established it as the genre par excellence for unmasking social hypocrisies.

This legacy remains profoundly relevant. In today’s world saturated with official discourse, media conventions, and identity performances, the need for an external and critical perspective is essential. The gaze of the clown – who does not belong and therefore perceives the truth – , the cunning of the rogue who subverts the system from within, and the naivety of the fool who reveals power through simplicity continue to be indispensable tools not only for literature but also for cultural criticism. Although the public square has transformed, the need for voices that expose the world’s underside is perhaps more urgent than ever.

## *Considerations*

The analysis of medieval chronotopes presented in this chapter reveals a moment of profound reconfiguration in the history of literary representation – one reconfiguration that transformed not only themes and plots but the very ontology of the fictional world. This period is marked by the coexistence of two seemingly antagonistic yet functionally complementary forces, operating as the dialectical poles of a single cultural sensibility: on one hand, there is the consolidation of the “wonderful world in the time of adventure” found in chivalric romance – a universe of heroic idealization where subjectivity gains unprecedented prominence. On the other hand, the emergence of the corrosive chronotope of the rogue, the clown, and the fool creates a counter-world that grounds the narrative in materiality and critiques conventionalism. This analysis demonstrates that the Middle Ages, far from being a period of monolithic stagnation, functioned as a laboratory of immensely creative narrative forms, in which structures inherited from Antiquity were actively dismantled and recombined for new purposes. This experimental process bequeathed to the future not only genres but archetypal models of representation of reality and subjectivity – the heroic and its opposite, the ideal and the grotesque – whose extraordinary longevity stems from their ability to capture a fundamental tension of human experience.

The analytical journey first establishes the chivalric chronotope as a fundamental reversal of the logic found in the Greek novel. Where once there was a tragic fate to be endured, there is now a wonderful fate to be sought. The passivity of the ancient hero gives way to the proactivity of the knight, whose identity is not merely proven but actively realized through feats and the pursuit of glory. This new time-space, characterized by the normalization of the extraordinary and a profound subjectivity in the perception of reality, creates an image of



man as the agent of his own destiny, a being whose essence merges with that of an intrinsically magical world. In parallel, an antagonistic chronotope emerges, represented and operated by marginal figures. These characters introduce into literature a space-time of performance and estrangement, an external vantage point from which social conventions are unmasked. Their value system, centered on denouncing falsehood, and their primary weapon, public and parodic laughter, inject prose with a critical power that exposes the hypocrisy of the established order. It is therefore clear that the Middle Ages forged a fundamental duality: the ability to build ideal worlds and, simultaneously, to create the tools for their deconstruction.

A critical appreciation of the legacy of these forms requires recognizing their remarkable persistence, albeit metamorphosed, in contemporary cultural production. The chronotope of the chivalric romance – with its symbiotic relationship between hero and a wonderful world – finds its most perfect and lucrative reincarnation in the fictional universes of mass culture, notably in fantasy, science fiction, and, paradigmatically, in *role-playing video games* (RPGs). In these new worlds, the medieval structure is recreated with impressive fidelity: the player, like a modern knight, is a proactive hero who immerses himself in a space governed by its own laws in search of adventures (*quests*) to assert his identity and accumulate glory (experience points, legendary items). The wonderful chance is encoded in the game mechanics, and the “subjective play with time and space” becomes literal, with manipulation of timelines and instant travel across vast maps. The image of the man that emerges is that of a subject whose existence is defined by action within a fantastic system of rules – a being who, like Lancelot or Parzival, can only realize his full potential within a “wonderful world” designed for him. This enduring phenomenon reveals how the search for a universe where individual action has clear and heroic meaning continues to be a fundamental psychological and cultural demand.

In contrast, the critical function of the rogue, the clown, and the fool have been absorbed and reconfigured by various contemporary discursive practices. The figure of *the stand-up comedian*, for example, can be read as a direct heir to the medieval fool. His chronotope is the stage – a space-time of performance from which he exercises his right to “be strange”, observing society from the outside to expose its contradictions. Their primary value lies in unmasking “bad conventionalism” – political hypocrisies, absurdities of everyday life, social taboos – and their tool is the collective laughter of the public square, now reimagined as the theater or *streaming* special. Similarly, the chronotope of the rogue, with his cunning survival through cheating the system, resonates in narratives of antiheroes who exploit loopholes in corporate or criminal worlds, revealing the corruption inherent in these structures. The “prosaic allegory” of these figures has been transformed into satirical commentary, parody, and irony that permeate digital culture, from memes to influencers who adopt a critical persona to analyze reality.

The coexistence of these two medieval legacies in contemporary culture reveals a deep and symptomatic tension, a true barometer of the contradictions of inherent in modern subjectivity. On one hand, there is a massive and growing demand for immersive and fantastical chronotopes: cohesive universes where heroic action is not only possible but clearly defined and rewarding. These worlds serve as a necessary refuge, providing an escape or compensation for the complexities, precariousness, and paralyzing disengagement perceived in real life – a world where individual effort often seems to dissipate into impersonal and chaotic structures. The moral clarity and direct causality of these fictional universes offer relief from the ambiguity and powerlessness of the present. On the other hand, and with equal urgency, there is a pressing need for discourses of unmasking – voices that, from a position of estrangement and dissent, whether that of the comedian, the investigative journalist, or the meme

creator, expose the falsehoods and oppressive power structures of the world we inhabit. This drive for raw truth, for satire that corrodes official discourse, represents a refusal to passively accept the reality from which one flees. What is most revealing is that these two impulses often coexist within the same cultural consumer, who may spend immersed in a digital fantasy world, exercising agency within a fair system, only to then voraciously consume political satire that criticizes the society they have just left behind. This cycle of immersion and criticism, enchantment and disenchantment, is not a contradiction but perhaps the main mechanism of psychological survival today.

This duality suggests that the primary legacy of the Middle Ages was not merely a set of themes or characters, but the very structure of a divided cultural consciousness: an ontological fracture that continues to define subjective experience. We have inherited both the capacity to construct narrative “cathedrals” of heroic idealization – complex architectures of meaning that promise order and purpose – and the iconoclastic tools of clowns, which ridicule their pretensions and expose their mundane foundations. Thus, the analysis of medieval chronotopes transcends the study of a historical period to become an essential perspective for interpreting late modernity itself, an era that yearns for grand narratives while possessing the critical tools that render sincere faith in them nearly impossible. The tension between the need for enchantment and the drive for disenchantment, between immersion in wonderful worlds and merciless critique of reality, remains the dialectical engine propelling much of cultural production. The knight and the fool are not opposing figures but interdependent poles of the same sensibility, forged in the Middle Ages, which still shapes how we narrate and negotiate our place in the world: a perpetual movement between the quest for glory in an idealized reality and the laughter that constantly reminds us of its inescapable – and at times liberating – falseness.

A counterpoint must be made, however. If the Middle Ages bequeathed the buffoon as an iconoclastic tool capable of exposing the mundane foundations of grand narratives, contemporary times operate a perverse inversion of this logic through the phenomenon of *fake news*. In the age of misinformation, the mask is no longer used to unmask power or ridicule dogmatic pretensions, as Bakhtinian buffoons and rogues once did; instead, it is employed to camouflage a sham under an appearance of official veracity. *Fake news* acts as ‘digital buffoons’ inhabiting the public square of social media, but rather than using carnivalesque laughter to liberate the subject and promote dialogism, they imprison them within a post-truth chronotope.

In this scenario, misinformation hijacks the freedom of parody and the drive toward disenchantment to construct simulacra of reality that lock the individual into monologues of confirmation. The dialectical struggle between enchantment and liberating laughter is thus replaced by a deliberate fabrication of falsehoods that, far from exposing the world’s fragilities, aim to cement new forms of narrative dogmatism. Therefore, the danger presented to modern democracies – especially in periods of political and electoral tension – lies not only in the loss of faith in the ‘great cathedrals’ of meaning, but in the technical instrumentalization of laughter and lies to corrode the very possibility of a common ground of reality, transforming the buffoon’s legacy into an instrument of control and social fragmentation.



## Chapter IV

### THE RABELAISIAN, FOLKLORIC, AND IDYLIC CHRONOTOPES

#### *1. The Definition and Controversial Nature of the Rabelaisian Chronotope*

Rabelais' space-time universe, as interpreted by Bakhtin, cannot be fully understood without recognizing its primary function: serving as a direct and provocative response to the medieval worldview. While other narratives unfold across vast spaces, Rabelais' work is distinguished by a unique connection between man and the universe, which forms the foundation for a new world. This section will define the conceptual foundations of this radical chronotope.

The fundamental principle that Bakhtin identifies is a "direct proportionality of qualitative degrees ('values') to spatiotemporal magnitudes (dimensions)" (2018, p. 119). In simple terms, this means that everything good, positive, and valuable must, by its very nature, grow, expand, and occupy as much space and time as possible. There is no conflict between value and matter. Bakhtin illustrates this idea with the Abbey of Thélème, where excellence manifests as material opulence:

seven ships arrive annually loaded with gold, and every one of the 9,332 rooms contains a mirror framed in pure gold. As Bakhtin summarizes:

This means that everything valuable, that is qualitatively positive, must realize its qualitative significance within a spatiotemporal significance, expanding as much as possible and enduring the longest possible duration. Conversely everything with genuine qualitative significance inherently possesses the strength for this spatiotemporal expansion, while the qualitatively negative – the small, the petty, and the powerless – is what must be completely destroyed and face death without resistance. (2018, p. 120)

This logic, described as “far from naive” rather “polemically sharp”, is diametrically opposed to the “disproportionality of the ecclesiastical-feudal worldview”, where values were “hostile to space-time reality as a futile, fragile, and sinful principle” (2018, p. 121). Rabelais’ task is therefore controversial: he aims to “purify the space-time universe” of the symbols and hierarchies of the medieval vertical, which disintegrated the world with a supernatural ideality. He seeks to restore belief in terrestrial space and real time, creating a new chronotope for a new man. However, constructing this new universe requires an equally radical artistic method, based on dismantling traditional bonds and forging new and unexpected contiguities.

For Bakhtin, Rabelais’ originality does not lie in the themes he addresses but in the way he organizes them to reconstruct the worldview. His artistic method serves as the strategic key to liberating things from the false and hierarchical associations imposed by official ideology.

The essence of this method lies in “the destruction of all habitual links... and the creation of unexpected contiguities” (2018, p. 121). Rabelais accomplishes this through the

construction of “series”. By grouping the world into these material series (body, food, death), Rabelais creates a new, non-hierarchical classification system that directly challenges and dismantles the abstract, vertical hierarchy of medieval thought. He separates elements traditionally linked (the sacred and the sublime) and unites those traditionally distant (the body and the cosmos).

The most basic and fundamental series is that of *the human body*. In Rabelais, the body ceases to be the sinful receptacle of medieval ideology and becomes the “concrete measure in the world”. The universe is measured and materialized in human proportions, which is manifested through grotesque and precise anatomical descriptions. For instance, in describing the death of an archer, Rabelais details how the blow “opened his spinal cord between the second and third vertebrae; and the archer fell dead” (2018, p. 125). At another point, a skull is opened “in the shape of a doctor’s cap, black on the outside and red on the inside”. In the narrator’s famous journey through Pantagruel’s mouth, the geographical world – with its mountains (teeth) and kingdoms – is literally inserted and measured by bodily anatomy.

According to Bakhtin, the critical function of the body’s centrality is twofold. It contrasts both with the “supernatural ascetic ideology of the Middle Ages”, which denied the body, and with the “libertine and crude medieval practice”, which embrace it without meaning. By giving the body a central and articulated role, Rabelais seeks, according to Bakhtin, to restore “the word and meaning to corporeality”.

This relentless method of material serialization is not merely a stylistic tic; it is the very engine that generates the unique values and emotions of Rabelais’ world. By juxtaposing the sacred with the profane, Rabelais not only mocks the former but also fundamentally re-enchants the latter, creating the celebratory and materialistic “axiological-emotional color” that defines his universe. In Rabelais’ case, this atmosphere

is characterized by universal laughter and the celebration of material life.

The *series of food and drink* is one of the primary vectors of these values. Rabelais systematically intertwines the highest themes with the act of eating, thereby leveling the medieval hierarchy. A notable example is the “monastic cabal on salted meat”, in which the divine office of matins (nine lessons) becomes the perfect time gauge for cooking lunch. The contiguity between prayer and meal leads Bakhtin to conclude that these monks “do not eat to live, but live to eat”.

The treatment of *the death series* is equally revolutionary. Rabelais removes death from the absolute boundary of time and inserts it as “an indispensable moment of life itself”. He strips it of its eschatological terror and presents it alongside laughter, food, and birth, embodying what Bakhtin identifies as the concept of “joyful death”. The death of Tripot illustrates this logic: when struck, he falls and “spilled more than four bowls of soup, and his soul mixed with the soup” (2018, p. 153). This logic is further illustrated by other notable deaths Bakhtin cites, such as that of Anacreon, who “choked on a grape seed”, and the Duke of Clarence, who, condemned, chose to be “drowned in a barrel of malvasia!”.

In short, the “axiological-emotional color” of the Rabelaisian chronotope is that of a triumphant material life, expressed through *laughter*. This laughter, for Bakhtin, is not merely satirical; it is a philosophical force that destroys the old worldview to affirm the reality of a corporeal, cyclical universe in perpetual renewal. Beyond the grotesque, the Rabelaisian chronotope also embodies a positive pole, pointing toward a new ideal of humanity and a new historical era.

In contrast to the destructive and grotesque forces, Rabelais’ work also presents a constructive and idealistic pole. It combines criticism of the medieval past with a vision of the future and human progress.



*Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel* is the most explicit document of this vision. In it, Rabelais develops a doctrine of “the relative biological and historical immortality of man on earth” (2018, p. 163). Perpetuation does not occur through the salvation of an individual soul but through the continuity of life on earth. Gargantua expresses his joy at seeing “my gray-haired antiquity blossom again in your youth”, for even after death, he will continue in his “visible image in this world” through the “lineage that comes from us in lawful marriage” (2018, p. 164).

This view directly contradicts the Christian doctrine of the soul's immortality. For Rabelais, perpetuation is dynamic and intrinsically linked to the growth of future generations. Gargantua celebrates the progress that will eventually render him obsolete: “I see today's bandits, executioners, and grooms as more learned than the doctors of my time” (2018, p. 165). Immortality resides in participating in this collective growth of humanity.

This idea of generational progress is at the heart of the new conception of time that Rabelais constructs. For Bakhtin, that author contrasts medieval eschatology – a time characterized solely by destruction – with a “fruitful time of creation, time measured by creation, by growth, and not by destruction” (2018, p. 167). It is a real historical time, connected to the earth and human development. This radical worldview, forged during the Renaissance, continues to resonate in our own era, raising questions about how we understand our place in history.

### *Resonances*

Bakhtin's analysis reveals that the Rabelaisian chronotope is a monumental construction founded on four pillars: the direct proportionality between value and matter; the centrality of the body as a measure of the world; laughter as a force of destruction and renewal; and the conception of a progressive, collective historical time. These elements provide a compelling foundation for reflecting on contemporary culture.

We can identify striking resonances and contrasts between Rabelais's universe and our own.

First, we have the digital carnival: Rabelaisian logic, creating "unexpected contiguities" to subvert hierarchies, finds a superficial parallel in meme culture and social media humor. However, this comparison reveals a fundamental contrast. Rabelaisian laughter is inherently jubilant and affirmative, aiming to restore the "true nature of things". It is therefore worth questioning whether digital humor, often steeped in cynicism and nihilistic deconstruction, actually seeks a new and more authentic contiguity, or whether it operates largely without the positive and regenerative pole that is central to Rabelais.

Another interesting comparative theme is that of death and the individual. Rabelais' "joyful death", embedded within a collective cycle, stands in stark contrasts to contemporary perception of death. Bakhtin observed that, in the Romanticism, the transformation of death into an "irremediable end" of a "closed individual life". Modern culture appears to have intensified this perspective, treating death as a personal failure or a taboo to be avoided, far removed from the productive naturalness it had in Rabelais' world.

Finally, immortality and legacy. The historical and generational immortality celebrated by Gargantua contrasts with the modern pursuit of individual legacy. Today, immortality is often understood as the continuation of a personal brand – whether through fame or a digital presence – a project that is more personal than collective.

Finally, it is necessary to address the erosion of the public square through the lens of contemporary political radicalism. When we look at the contemporary digital agora, we see an inverse movement. This dynamic of forces, which in Rabelais' work manifests as festive freedom and a suspension of hierarchies, finds a distorted reflection in the global political scene – exemplified by the rise of radical movements and polarizing

leadership figures, such as Donald Trump or the phenomenon of Bolsonarism in Brazil. We are witnessing what could be termed a ‘monologism of the masses.’ Unlike the Bakhtinian carnivalesque spirit, which celebrates the plurality of voices and the coexistence of opposites, today’s radicalism imposes a rigid binarization of reality, where the ‘other’ is not a dialogic interlocutor, but a label to be eradicated.

In this chronotope of polarization, laughter ceases to be ambivalent and liberating, becoming instead a weapon of exclusion, and the public space – which should be the ‘square’ of encounter – is transformed into a battlefield of deaf monologues. The search for a ‘third way’ or a dialogic synthesis becomes nearly impossible when narrative structures are reduced to absolute oppositions between ‘Left’ and ‘Right,’ denying the renewal and openness that Bakhtin identified as the essence of life in society. Thus, the reclaiming of carnivalization as a method for suspending dogmas and recognizing alterity becomes not only an aesthetic task but an urgent ethical and political imperative in the face of the erosion of democratic dialogue.

Ultimately, the study of the Rabelaisian chronotope through Bakhtin’s theoretical tools transcends mere literary archaeology. It serves as a powerful tool for understanding how art continues to shape our most fundamental perceptions. Rabelais reminds us that the most profound philosophical revolutions are not debated in treatises but lived.

## *2. The Folkloric Foundations of the Rabelaisian Chronotope*

This section analyzes the concept of the “folkloric chronotope”, as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in the chapter titled “The Folkloric Foundations of the Rabelaisian Chronotope”. Investigating this concept is essential because, according to Bakhtin, it serves as the matrix that enables understanding not only the uniqueness of François Rabelais’ work but also an en-

tire literary tradition rooted in popular culture and its peculiar perception of time and space. For Bakhtin, this primordial form of time – originating before class society, emerging from the collective agricultural labor – provides the key to deciphering a unified worldview, whose eventual disintegration influenced the forms of the novel and modern consciousness.

Understanding the fundamental characteristics of folk time is an essential strategic step toward comprehending its internal logic and its formative influence on archaic plots and images. It is through the structure of this temporality that one can grasp how the elements of life, death, work, and nature are articulated in a cohesive and inseparable complex. Bakhtin describes it as a time emerging from a specific phase of human development – the agricultural phase – and possessing qualities markedly different from those that would later predominate in subsequent societies.

Three axes define the primordial nature of this time. First, it is essentially collective. Thus the “individual series of life does not yet stand out” (2018, p. 169), implying the absence of psychological interiority as we understand it today. The subject does not exist as an entity separate from the community; rather, “the individual lives entirely externalized, within the collective whole” (2018, p. 170). Work, consumption, life, and death are events that belong to the whole, and time is measured not by private biographical milestones but by the great “events of collective life”, such as the phases of agricultural labor.

Secondly, it is a time of fruitful growth. Its logic is not one of finitude and loss, but that of incessant multiplication and renewal. The temporal course “does not destroy or diminish, but multiplies and increases the quantity of values”. In this system of thought, death loses its character as an absolute end and becomes an “element subordinate to growth and multiplication” (2018, p. 170). It is perceived as “sowing”, a necessary moment

within a larger cycle that ensures the continuity of collective life. This conception orients all existence toward the future – a concrete future of harvests and procreation.

Finally, this is a spatial and concrete conception of time, radically intertwined with the material world. Bakhtin argues that “time is immersed in the earth, sown in it, and ripens in it” (2018, p. 171). There is no separation between human temporality and the cycles of nature; both are measured “by the same scales, by the same events”. The ages of man and the seasons of the year are perceived through the same image categories, merging the working hand and the earth into a single productive movement. Time here is not an abstraction but a palpable, visible, and dense reality.

The direct consequence of these characteristics is the “total unity” of folkloric time. Unlike the later division between private life and historical life, here “life is one; it is all ‘historical’”. Acts such as eating, drinking, and copulating are not private matters but events of collective importance, “indissolubly linked to social work” (2018, p. 172). This absence of fragmentation imparts grandeur to all aspects of existence, which participate in a single, continuous storyline of growth.

However, Bakhtin identifies in this structure a “negative particularity” that limits its ideological productivity: its cyclical nature. Although folkloric time is oriented toward the future, its “tendency to advance is limited by the cycle” (2018, p. 173). Consequently, growth does not become an “authentic formation”, a linear and open historical development, but instead closes in on itself through perpetual repetition. This intrinsic limitation contains the seed of its eventual overcoming; yet in its pure state, it defines the contours of a complete and self-sufficient worldview. Analyzing these structural characteristics paves the way for investigating the values and emotions they produce and sustain.

To move beyond a purely structural description of folkloric time, it is essential to analyze its “axiological-emotional color”, a concept that enables us to access the values and emotions inherent in this worldview. Bakhtin suggests that the characteristics of this time are not neutral but can be “positively called axiological” (2018, p. 173), indicating that they constitute a well-defined system of values. This system is not founded on abstract moral precepts but arises directly from the collective practices of life and work.

The supreme positive values that arise from this temporal conception are collectivity, fertility, unity with nature, and productive work. Life holds meaning only as part of the social whole that grows and multiplies. The isolated individual is a conceptual impossibility and, therefore, devoid of value. Productivity and abundance are the guiding horizons of human action, and the bond with the land is not only practical but sacred, for it is from the land that the continuity of life springs.

Emotions, in this context, are not subjective or psychological but collective and externalized. They manifest and are realized in the significant events that mark the cycle of work and life in the community: harvest festivals, fertility rites, weddings, and funerals. Laughter and tears do not belong to the individual, but to the people, and are intrinsically linked to moments of death and renewal. It is a public, ritualized, and shared emotional universe.

The ambiguity of death is perhaps the most revealing aspect of this axiological system. Stripped of its tragic and individual character, death is integrated into the productive cycle as a moment of sowing. This worldview eliminates private existential fear in favor of celebrating the continuity of the collective whole. The end of a particular life does not represent an absolute loss but rather a contribution to the future growth of the community. Death, therefore, does not cause anguish but merges with laughter and the celebration of life that is

continually reborn. The disintegration of this value system with the advent of class society marks a fundamental turning point in the history of human consciousness, opening space for new ways of feeling and representing the world.

The analysis of the disintegration of unified folkloric time is crucial because, according to Bakhtin, this process not only gives rise to new literary forms, but also allows elements of the old complex to survive, reinterpreted in later historical contexts. With social stratification, the primordial unity is broken, and its components disperse, leading to a new perception of life, death, and history.

The disintegration of the folkloric complex is triggered by concrete transformations in social organization with the advent of class society. This change is not merely ideological but a material division in spheres of life that were previously unified: “worship is separated from production; the sphere of consumption is isolated” (2018, p. 175). Elements such as food, drink, and sex migrate to private daily life and, simultaneously, are sublimated in ritual, where they acquire symbolic or magical meanings. Ritual bread, for example, “is no longer the real daily bread of everyday food” (2018, p. 176).

The most profound consequence of this division is the separation between the “individual series of life” and the “series of historical time”. Time ceases to be unified. The life of the individual follows its own logic, its own plots, measured by a scale of values distinct from the life of the state or the nation. Within this new framework, death acquires the “meaning of an essential end”, as it concludes a closed individual series, while nature, once a living participant in events, becomes mere “landscape”, a “backdrop” for human action.

Despite the disintegration, Bakhtin identifies in the literary tradition the persistence of the ancient complex, which resurfaces in authors capable of reactivating its unifying logic, even in an already fragmented world.

- *Aristophanes*: In his comedies, everyday and private life are transformed into “comic myth” through ritual laughter. The elements of the ancient complex – food, obscenity, death, and renewal – form the foundation of comedy, which transfigures the private, restoring it back a universal and collective dimension.
- *Lucian*: This author employs the “low private everyday life” as a tool to unmask lofty ideologies. By reducing gods and myths to the sphere of daily life, he exposes the falseness of an elevated world that has lost its connection to material reality. He uses the elements of the ancient complex in their already degraded form to promote a “comic and definitive death of the gods” (2018, p. 186).
- *Petrarch*: It is in Petrarch, specifically in the novella *The Matron of Ephesus*, that Bakhtin identifies the most perfect manifestation of a “realistic emblem”. The narrative condenses all the elements of the ancient complex – death (the coffin), food and drink, sex (copulation in the tomb), renewal (conception), and laughter – into a “completely real and necessary plot” (2018, p. 187). Life triumphs over death in a concrete and literal way, without any mystical or symbolic sublimation. Although set in a “small slice of real life”, the plot acquires a universal depth by mobilizing the “great realities of human life”, representing the purest form of folkloric logic reused in a literary context.

The analysis of these resurgences demonstrates that folkloric time does not disappear entirely, but persists as a powerful substrate, capable of emerging and influencing the literary forms of an already fragmented world. This tension continues



into the present, raising questions about what remains of this unity and its disintegration within the contemporary cultural and literary scene.

Although Bakhtin analyzes a distant past, his conceptual framework provides valuable tools for diagnosing the condition of subjectivity and culture in late modernity, which appears to extend the process of disintegration he described to its ultimate consequences.

The “individual series of life”, identified by the Russian theorist as a consequence of the split in time, appears to have reached its peak in contemporary culture. Heightened individualism, the primacy of subjective inner time, the emphasis on performance and self-exploitation, and the extreme privatization of experience (from consumption to suffering) can be seen as the culmination of this process. Collective life, which in the folkloric chronotope was the sole reality, has now become an abstract concept, while the plot of private life has become the nearly exclusive focus of representation and interest.

At the same time, the separation between private time and historical time has deepened. History is often perceived as a distant and impersonal force, with events unfolding “over” individual lives, but not “with” them, reinforcing feelings of powerlessness and alienation. Similarly, the transformation of nature into “landscape” – a backdrop for human life – finds a grim resonance in the contemporary ecological crisis, which underscores the consequences of a profound disconnection between the cycles of human life and the productive and natural cycles.

Faced with this image of radical fragmentation, one might speculate about attempts in literature and popular culture to recreate the “ancient contiguity” and laughter that unite life and death. Movements such as magical realism, by merging the everyday with the marvelous and treating death with cyclical naturalness, appear to seek a reconnection with an undivided worldview. However, when analyzing contemporary phenomena

through the lens of “ritual laughter”, critical caution is warranted. Phenomena such as meme culture or carnival behavior in digital environments, although mimicking the form of collective laughter, often lack the connection to material production and genuine community life that defined the folkloric chronotope. Such manifestations risk becoming hollow echoes or commercialized simulacra of that lost unity, rather than authentic resurgences of a collective and transfiguring experience. Reflection on these echoes ultimately leads us to reaffirm the relevance of Bakhtin’s theoretical framework.

In conclusion, we have aimed to demonstrate that the concept of the folkloric chronotope, as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, extends beyond the analysis of Rabelais’ work to serve as a reflective tool for understanding the very history of Western consciousness. The folkloric chronotope is characterized by a collective, productive, and concrete unity of time, space, human beings, and nature, in which the “individual series of life” has not yet become autonomous from the social whole. This unity generates an “axiological-emotional color” that values the continuity of collective life, integrating death not as a tragic end but as a necessary moment in the cycle of renewal.

The analysis of the disintegration of this unity and its survivals in literary tradition – from Aristophanes to Petronius’s “realistic emblem”, reveals how the fragmentation of social experience is mirrored in the fragmentation of representational forms. The separation between the public and the private, the historical and the everyday, constitutes the central drama of modernity. Therefore, Bakhtin’s analysis remains highly relevant. Understanding the loss of this unified time is not an exercise in nostalgia but an extraordinarily powerful analytical tool for diagnosing the fragmentation of human experience. Ultimately, the theory of the folkloric chronotope transcends literary hermeneutics, serving as both a critique of modernity and a method for deciphering the traces of totality that haunt a culture defined by fragmentation.

### 3. *The Idyllic Chronotope*

To understand the profound impact of the idyll on the history of the novel, it is essential to precisely outline the conceptual pillars that underpin its chronotopic conception. Bakhtin begins his analysis by identifying the primary types of idyll – such as the romantic idyll, the agricultural idyll, the artisanal idyll, and the family idyll – which, despite their variations, share three fundamental characteristics that together create a cohesive, self-sufficient universe endowed with a distinctive axiology.

The first and most decisive characteristic is the intrinsic relationship between time and space. The idyll is defined by “the fixation, the organic aggregation of life and its events to a place” (2018, p. 193). This place is not generic; it is the homeland, with its mountains, valleys, rivers, and paternal home. The characters’ lives are inseparable from this “concrete corner in space”, a delimited microcosm that has little connection with the outside world. This spatial unity profoundly affects time: it blurs temporal boundaries, merging the life cycles of generations. The cradle and the grave, childhood and old age, coexist in the same land, in the same landscape. This fusion, in turn, generates the “cyclical rhythm of time” that is the hallmark of the idyllic universe.

The second peculiarity is the limitation of the idyll “to the few basic realities of life” (2018, p. 194). The narrative focuses on universal and fundamental events: love, birth, death, marriage, work, food, and the passage of time. However, Bakhtin notes that these realities are presented in a “toned down and to some extent sublimated” way (2018, p. 195). The idyll avoids raw realism, favoring a representation that softens the harsher aspects of existence. The sexual sphere, for example, almost always appears in a sublimated form, and conflicts are rarely intense.

Finally, the third characteristic is “the combination of human life with the life of nature” (2018, p. 195). There is a unity of rhythm between natural cycles and human events. This connection can be deeply real, as in the idyll of agricultural work, where planting and harvesting dictate the pace of community life, or it can be purely metaphorical, as in the pastoral love idyll, where nature serves as a mirror for the feelings of lovers.

It is precisely this specific space-time structure – a fixed place, cyclical time, and a life in harmony with nature – that generates the distinctive “axiological-emotional color” of the idyll.

The chronotopic conception of the idyll is not merely a passive setting; it serves as the matrix that generates a deeply coherent system of values and emotional atmosphere. The organization of time and space produces a worldview with priorities and emotions that differ significantly from those found in other chronotopes.

The core values emerging from this structure are generational continuity, a deep connection to one’s homeland, and the stability provided by a predictable pace of life. The secular attachment of generations to a single place fosters a sense of identity and rootedness that transcends the individual. Life is not a linear, unpredictable journey, but rather a cycle that repeats itself, connecting the present with the past and the future in an organic way, to such an extent that, in Bakhtin’s words: “The unity of place brings together and merges the cradle and the grave” (2018, p. 194).

This value of permanence is reflected in the emotional landscape of the idyll, which is marked by sublimation and the absence of acute existential conflicts. According to Bakhtin, the idyll “does not know everyday life” in the petty and private sense of the term. Daily activities are elevated to a level of essential importance. Agricultural work, for example, “transfigures all elements of everyday life, depriving them of their private and

petty character” (2018, p. 196). Food, far from being an act of individual consumption, becomes a social event that “brings together generations and ages”, symbolizing growth. Similarly, the image of children takes on a central role, functioning, according to Bakhtin, as “a sublimation of the sexual act and conception, in the face of growth, the renewal of life and death” (2018, p. 196), reinforcing the axiological core of continuity.

The strength and clarity of this chronotope, characterized by its well-defined value system and harmonious atmosphere, transformed the idyll from a purely literary form into a seminal element whose influence was fundamental to the evolution and growing complexity of the modern novel.

The legacy of the idyll in the novel does not reside in its pure preservation but in how its elements were absorbed, transformed, criticized, and even destroyed by various literary movements. Bakhtin outlines the main strands of this influence, demonstrating how the idyllic structure functioned as a matrix or counterpoint for exploring the complexities of modern life.

The regional novel is the most direct heir to the idyllic chronotope, reiterating “the indissoluble secular link between the life process of generations and a defined locality” (2018, p. 199). This literary form expands the idyllic microcosm by detailing its ideological aspects, such as language, beliefs, and customs, while always remaining connected to a specific place. However, Bakhtin highlights a critical limitation: by emphasizing cyclicity and fixity, the regional novel can undermine the sense of historical progress, reducing growth to an “absurd marking of time at the same historical point” (2018, p. 199).

In authors influenced by Rousseau, idyllic elements are elevated to a philosophical plane. Nature, love, and simple life cease to be mere components of a setting and become “eternal, great, and wise forces of universal life” (2018, p. 200). This philosophical idyll serves as an ideal cure for the individual conscience, which feels fragmented and alienated by modern

society. It thus becomes the foundation for a powerful social critique, directed both against the conventions of the feudal hierarchy and the selfishness of the bourgeois individual.

In the family novel, the idyllic chronotope is “markedly impoverished”, confined to the bourgeois nucleus and severed from its organic connection to the land. The unity of place is limited, at best, to the family home. The classic narrative scheme, according to Bakhtin, often depicts the hero moving from a “large but strange universe of chance to the small, solid, and wealthy natal universe of the family” (2018, p. 203). The idyll here is not the starting point but the final destination, a refuge of stability and humanity in a cold and hostile world.

Perhaps the most powerful influence of the idyll manifests itself in its negation. The theme of the “destruction of the idyll” becomes fundamental to the 19th-century novel, but Bakhtin distinguishes two approaches to this treatment. In the first, exemplified by Goethe and Jean Paul, destruction is part of a necessary and progressive process. The idyllic microcosm is doomed, but its “profound humanity” must be preserved and expanded. The hero must be re-educated for a “vast but abstract world” that must be humanized on a new and grand scale. The second approach, represented by Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert, is more pessimistic. Here, the focus is on the disintegration of the “idyllic conception of the world” of a provincial hero confronted with the “inhumanity” of the new capitalist universe. Faced with corruption and selfishness, this hero is forced to make a tragic choice: either become “ridiculous, despicable, and unnecessary”, or become corrupt, turning himself into a “selfish vulture” (2018, p. 206).

Finally, Bakhtin identifies a crucial influence of the idyll in the figure of the “man of the people”. Characters such as peasants or servants – such as Saviélitch in Pushkin or Platón Karatáiev in Tolstoy – often appear in the novel as bearers of popular wisdom and idyllic localism. They represent a “wise

relationship with life and death, lost by the ruling classes” (2018, p. 207). Their simplicity, connection to productive work, and healthy disregard for social conventions serve as a moral and existential counterpoint to the alienation of the elites.

These various reinterpretations demonstrate how the idyll provided the novel with a powerful vocabulary for exploring the tensions of modernity, a legacy whose resonances extend to our current cultural and literary landscape.

### *Resonances*

The theme of the “destruction of the idyll” resonates with particular intensity in a world shaped by globalization, digital life, and the climate crisis. These contemporary phenomena accelerate the process, described by Bakhtin, of severing the organic connection between the individual, a specific place, and the rhythms of nature. The abstraction of the capitalist “vast world” appears to have expanded into the virtual sphere, where the sense of belonging to a local and tangible community is increasingly undermined.

On the other hand, the search for a lost idyll, in the “Rousseauian vein”, resonates in various contemporary cultural movements. The pursuit of authenticity, minimalism, *slow living*, and increasing ecological awareness can be interpreted as a response to the fragmentation of modern life – a desire to rediscover a more integrated and meaningful way of existence that values place, manual labor, and connection with the environment. Simultaneously, the idyllic wisdom of the “man of the people” finds resonance in the contemporary appreciation of non-dominant knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledge and oral histories, which offer rooted perspectives as an antidote to abstract and globalized discourse.

Contemporary literature, in turn, continues to explore these fragmented idylls. They appear in narratives about urban exodus, speculative fiction envisioning ecological or dystopian futures (depicting the ultimate destruction of the natural idyll), and stories that celebrate belonging to specific cultural and geographical microcosms. These works, whether consciously or not, engage in a dialogue with Bakhtinian heritage, staging the struggle to reconstruct – albeit imperfectly – a sense of place in a world that seems to have abolished it.

Ultimately, Bakhtin's concept of the idyllic chronotope remains extraordinary vital, not only as a category of historical analysis but as a paradigm for understanding the enduring tension in human experience between the local and the global, community and isolation, nature and artifice. It reminds us that the way we imagine our relationships with time and space fundamentally shapes our understanding of what it means to be human.

### *Considerations*

At the conclusion of this analytical journey, it becomes evident that the investigation of Rabelaisian, folkloric, and idyllic chronotopes transcends mere exegesis of ancient literary forms. The central project of this chapter was to demonstrate how these models of organizing time and space constitute authentic worldviews, whose internal logics and subsequent disintegrations provide a powerful tool for diagnosing contemporary experience. The analysis revealed three fundamental matrices of world perception: one based on the radical reconstruction of reality from its material and corporeal foundations; another grounded in the inseparable unity between collective life and the productive cycles of the earth; and a third



founded on the organic fusion between human existence and a specific geographical microcosm. The trajectory outlined here began with the structure of these worldviews to unveil the drama of their fragmentation, a process whose consequences extend to the core of subjectivity and cultural production in the present.

The space-time universe forged during the French Renaissance represents the most acute point of rupture examined. It is a monumental philosophical and artistic operation aimed at reconstructing the world on the foundations of expanding matter, the body as a universal measure, and a productive, immanent historical time. Its nature is fundamentally controversial, serving as a systematic refutation of a transcendent and hierarchical worldview that devalued earthly existence. The tools for this reconstruction are equally radical: the logic of series, which disrupts conventional contiguities to create new material associations; the centrality of the grotesque body, which subverts ascetic ideality; and, above all, laughter – employed not as satire but as a philosophical force capable of dissolving the old world and consecrating a new one, guided by the joy of cyclical renewal and the celebration of life in its entirety. This affirmation of collective time and generational immortality constitutes a world project whose audacity is measured by contrast with the formations that preceded it and, even more strikingly, with the fragmented reality that followed.

In contrast to this rupture, the folkloric and idyllic models function as archetypes of a lost unity. The folkloric chronotope reveals a primordial, collective temporality, gestated in the rhythm of agricultural work, in which the individual series of life has not yet become autonomous from the communal whole. In this context, existence is one, entirely historical, and death is integrated into the productive cycle as a moment of sowing, stripped of its individual terror. Similarly, the idyllic chronotope presents this fusion on a local and family scale,

linking the lives of generations to a specific geographical space and a cyclical time that neutralizes finitude. Both models, more than mere aesthetic forms, represent paradigms of belonging and cohesion, in which the separation between human beings, community, nature, and time has not yet occurred. It is precisely the analysis of the disintegration of this unity that allows us to understand the genesis of the modern condition.

The central drama revealed by the investigation of these chronotopes is, therefore, one of profound fragmentation. The division of unified time, the separation between public and private spheres, the autonomization of individual life in relation to the course of history, and the transformation of nature into a passive landscape are direct consequences of the collapse of these integral worldviews. It is in this process that death becomes an absolute end, history becomes an external and alienating force, and the individual finds himself confined within the limits of his own biography. From this perspective, modernity can be understood as the direct heir to this disintegration, and contemporary culture appears to carry this process to its ultimate consequences, deepening the fractures identified here.

The resonances of this analysis in the present are both vast and inevitable. The Rabelaisian project of creating unexpected contiguities to subvert hierarchies finds a superficial and distorted echo in the digital carnival of social networks. However, this comparison reveals a critical chasm: whereas Renaissance laughter aimed at joyful regeneration and a reaffirmation of the materiality of life, contemporary humor often operates within a sphere of disembodied cynicism and nihilistic deconstruction. The laughter that once sought to rebuild the world seems to have been replaced by one that merely confirms its absurdity, lacking the affirmative and collective pole that gave it philosophical strength. The materiality of the body and the party has been supplanted by the immateriality of the image and individual performance.

The primacy of the individual becomes even more acutely when models of continuity and legacy are contrasted. Historical and collective immortality, ensured by the succession of generations in folkloric time and celebrated in the works of Rabelais, clashes directly with the contemporary obsession with personal legacy, the perpetuation of the individual brand, and the curation of digital memory. “Joyful death”, once integrated into a productive and communal cycle, has become an almost unintelligible concept in a culture that treats death as a technical failure, a taboo to be medically postponed and socially concealed. Death has ceased to be a collective event of transition and has become the ultimate failure of the individual project, underscoring how far current subjectivity has diverged from that primordial unity. The loss of the collective dimension of time has ultimately resulted in the loss of the collective dimension of death itself.

Perhaps the decline of collective funeral rituals is the most striking example for those of my generation. I vividly recall the afternoons of my childhood when death was not a private event, but a solemn communal crossing. When someone passed away, the entire neighborhood seemed to stir; the main streets were occupied by a slow procession, where neighbors and friends accompanied the deceased on foot to the cemetery, in a reverence that transformed urban space into a territory of shared farewell. This was the living embodiment of what Bakhtin describes as the collective and productive unity of the folkloric chronotope: a moment in the life cycle that belonged to the people and the land, where death was a public and organic event. Today, observing contemporary reality, I realize how much this chronotope has been hollowed out. The ritualistic walk has given way to a high-speed convoy of cars, where the number of mourners has drastically dwindled and the space – once charged with communal meaning – has become merely functional and abstract. The time of death has been ‘expedited’

and privatized; what was once a collective flow of grief and support has become an isolated journey inside metal bubbles. This transition highlights the loss of that Rabelaisian and folkloric ‘public square’, revealing a modernity that, by concealing death within the rush of traffic, ultimately disintegrates the bonds of belonging that once allowed us to face the end not as solitary individuals, but as part of a historical and inseparable whole.

Similarly, the legacy of the idyllic chronotope resonates in contemporary culture, particularly through its denial and nostalgic pursuit. The contemporary quest for “authenticity”, manifested in movements that idealize localism, voluntary simplicity, and “slowed-down” living, can be critically interpreted as a form of idyllic nostalgia. This search represents not only a consumer preference but a profound reaction to the abstraction and uprooting imposed by globalizing logic, a longing to restore the tangible connection between life, work, and place. This tension finds its most urgent expression in the ecological crisis, which can be understood as the ultimate consequence of the divide between human time and the cycles of nature, the culmination of the transformation of the natural world into a mere resource and backdrop for individual drama.

Contemporary literary production, in turn, continues to stage this legacy. Genres such as magical realism and certain strands of speculative fiction can be seen as attempts to recreate the “ancient contiguity”, to mend the rift between the everyday and the marvelous – in a gesture that echoes the unifying impulse of folkloric time. In contrast, much of realist production is dedicated to dramatizing the alienation that results from this fragmentation, focusing on the trajectory of the “individual series of life” against an impersonal and overwhelming historical backdrop. Thus, literature, remains to be a battlefield where the possibility of reconstructing, albeit in a precarious and fragmentary way, a sense of totality in a world that seems to have rejected it is contested.

Ultimately, the analysis of these chronotopes proves to be more than an exercise in literary criticism; it serves as a tool for critical cultural diagnosis. The research demonstrates that the most defining anxieties of the contemporary condition – such as isolation, environmental crisis, the search for community, and the sense of finitude – are closely linked to a fundamental transformation in the way Western culture conceives and represents its relationship with time and space. The study of these forms reminds us that the spatiotemporal architecture of a narrative, or of an era, is never neutral. It is the terrain on which human experience is constructed, contested, and ultimately reinvented.





## Chapter V

### THE CHRONOTOPE REVISITED

#### *1. The Time of a Theory*

In 1973, thirty-four years after writing the main body of his work on the chronotope in the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin returned to his reflections to write the “Final Remarks”. This temporal hiatus is not merely biographical footnote but the central problem that animates this late text. The passage of more than three decades allowed Bakhtin to revisit his own theory – not simply to conclude it, but to expand and deepen it – revealing a remarkable evolution in his thinking. The 1973 text represents a theoretical maturation, shifting the focus from an analysis of large-scale genre chronotopes to a more micro exploration of their dialogical interrelationships and their primary function as frameworks for meaning itself.

Before evaluating the innovations presented in the “Final Observations”, it is strategic to establish a solid conceptual basis from the 1973 text itself. This approach enables us to understand the theory in its most mature formulation in order to subsequently assess the scope of its expansions and the distance from previous ideas.

Bakhtin reaffirms his fundamental definition: the chronotope determines the “artistic unity of a literary work in its relation to authentic reality” (2018, p. 217). The final phrase, often omitted, is essential because it anchors literary analysis in the real world, distinguishing Bakhtin’s approach from sterile formalism. He deepens this concept by emphasizing its intrinsically evaluative character. For the theorist, all determinations of space-time in art are “inseparable and always tinged with an axiological-emotional hue” (2018, p. 217). This statement is crucial, as it establishes that the chronotope is never a neutral container or a mere backdrop for action. On the contrary, it is a fusion of space and time already charged with value – a lens through which reality is perceived, organized, and given meaning within the work.

A crucial distinction that Bakhtin establishes with outstanding clarity is that between the “represented world” (the fictional universe within the text) and the “representing world” (the historical and cultural universe of the author and reader). Although separated by a “sharp and categorical boundary”, these two worlds are not isolated. Bakhtin describes their relationship using a powerful biological metaphor: there is a “permanent exchange, similar to the metabolism that occurs between a living organism and its environment” (2018, p. 231). The work of art, like an organism, enters the real world and enriches it, while the real world nourishes the work, both in its creation and in its ongoing reception by generations of readers.

In his 1973 text, Bakhtin accurately outlines the dual primary functions of the chronotope, which operate simultaneously on the levels of structure and image:

- *Meaning of plot:* Chronotopes function as “organizational centers of basic events” (2018, p. 226). It is in them that “the knots of the plot are tied and untied”. Therefore, they serve as the narrative engines that generate the plot, the points of space-time condensation where crucial events occur and acquire their dramatic force.



- *Figurative meaning:* Beyond merely structuring the plot, the chronotope materializes time in space, serving as the “center of figurative concretization”. It is through the chronotope that events “are filled with flesh and blood”. All the abstract elements of the novel – ideas, philosophical generalizations, and social analyses – gravitate around the chronotope, taking shape and become part of the fictional reality.

Having established these fundamentals, which represent chronotopic theory in its most refined form, we can now turn to the expansions and nuances introduced in this later text, revealing the true extent of its innovation.

We will now focus on the central questions raised by the 34-year hiatus. What changes occurred in Bakhtin’s thinking? The 1973 text not only reaffirms but also expands the theory, introducing new typologies and concepts that elevate the analysis to a higher level of complexity and dynamism.

The main innovation of the text is undoubtedly the shift in of focus. While previous essays concentrated on the “large, typologically stable chronotopes” (2018, p. 217). that defined entire genres, the “Final Observations” turn to “chronotopic values of different degrees and dimensions” (2018, p. 217). Bakhtin proceeds to analyze smaller, more thematic, and flexible chronotopes, thereby demonstrating his comparative and historical method.

The Road and the Encounter are defined as the space of chance where “the paths traveled” (2018, p. 218) by people from different social classes “intersect at a point in space-time”, allowing distances to be overcome and destinies to intertwine. For Bakhtin, this is not an abstract concept but one with a vast literary genealogy. He traces it from the ancient novels of Petronius and Apuleius, through medieval chivalric novels, consolidating in the picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*,

crossing Cervantes' Spain, the Germany of *the Thirty Years' War* in *Simplicissimus*, until reaching the historical novels of Walter Scott and the great Russian narratives of Pushkin, Gogol, and Nekrasov. In his analysis, Bakhtin establishes a crucial analytical distinction: the road that runs through the "native country", revealing its social diversity (as in the picaresque novel), is fundamentally different from the chronotope of the "foreign and exotic world", characteristic of the Greek novel. This distinction demonstrates how different novelistic traditions mobilize the same chronotope for different functions.

The castle is a space saturated with "historical time in the exact sense of the word." (2018, p. 221). Its structures, furnishings, and legends bear the "marks of the centuries", transforming it into a privileged setting for the Gothic novel and, later, for Walter Scott's historical novel, which knew how to overcome the risk of "antiquarianism" by bringing the past to life through legend. Here Bakhtin's problematization in relation to objects: furniture is, in part, belonging to the chronotope and to the figurativization of time in space. In other words, everything that has a physical body, occupies space. Anything possessing the three basic dimensions – length, width, and height – is space and represents time, and therefore, the chronotope.

The drawing room is the point of intersection between the public-social and the private spheres, where political and financial intrigues intertwine with bedroom secrets. In the novels of Stendhal and Balzac, in this space that "the era becomes patently and thematically visible" (2018, p. 223), condensing the signs of historical and biographical time.

The provincial town is a place of "cyclical time of customs", a time that is "dense, viscous, and dragging on in space", where nothing significant happens. In Flaubert, it functions as a contrasting counterpoint to more dynamic chronotopes, a time devoid of events that serves to highlight the crises that disrupt it.

The threshold is a chronotope charged with intense emotional charge, associated with crisis and reversal, where time condenses into an “instant that seems to have no duration”. It is here that Bakhtin’s analytical method reveals its full comparative power. After identifying the threshold as central to Dostoevsky’s work, he immediately contrasts it with Lev Tolstoy’s approach. While Dostoevsky privileges the “instant” of the decision that changes a life, Tolstoy, in contrast, “liked duration, the extension of time”. The crises in Tolstoy’s works, such as that of Ivan Ilyich or the renewal of Pierre Bezukhov, are not momentary but extend over biographical time. This Dostoevsky-Tolstoy comparison is not a mere detail; it serves as a practical demonstration of how chronotopes engage in dialogue and define each other in Bakhtin’s thought.

The second major theoretical expansion concerns how these different chronotopes relate to one another. Bakhtin states that their interrelationships are “dialogical (in the broad sense of the term)” in nature (2018, p. 229). The comparative analysis of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy perfectly exemplifies this concept: chronotopes not only coexist but also converse, contrast, and illuminate each other, creating a polyphony of space-times.

This perspective also enables Bakhtin to refine the author’s position. The author-creator is situated “outside the chronotopes of the world he represents” yet “tangential to these chronotopes” (2018, p. 234). He is not immersed in any of them, which grants him the freedom to orchestrate his dialogue. From this position that Bakhtin offers one of his most significant conceptual critiques, considering the “image of the author” a “*contradictio in adjecto*”. His logic is precise: every image is a created object, not a creative entity. The author is the creator, not an image within his own creation. This theoretical refinement clearly distinguishes the author-person (biographical) from the author-creator (the artistic function), a distinction fundamental to literary analysis.

This expansion of the theory – from the static to the dynamic, and from the singular to the dialogical – does not culminate in dogmatic closure. On the contrary, it points to an opening: an invitation to the future that becomes the central theme of his final words.

Despite the title “Final Remarks”, the text serves less as a conclusion and more as a manifesto on the vitality and future potential of chronotopic theory. Bakhtin presents not a closed system but an analytical tool in constant flux, whose application and relevance he intentionally leaves open.

Bakhtin concludes his reflections with a statement of modesty and openness that serves as a powerful affirmation on the nature of knowledge: “To what extent this approach proposed in our work will be essential and productive can only be determined by the future evolution of literary research” (2018, p. 236). This sentence is an explicit invitation to dialogue. Bakhtin is not bequeathing a testament but planting a seed, recognizing that the value of his theory lies not in its completeness but in its ability to generate new questions and new investigations. He positions his work as the beginning of a conversation, not its conclusion.

However, before reaching this methodological conclusion, Bakhtin offers a philosophical insight of profound significance. He states that “any entry into the field of meaning can only be achieved through the door of chronotopes” (2018, p. 236). This is perhaps the most radical and important idea in the late text. The chronotope ceases to be merely a tool for literary analysis and becomes a fundamental condition for the very existence and apprehension of meaning. For any meaning – whether artistic, philosophical, or social – to become part of our experience, it requires a “spacetime expression”, a sign form that we can see and hear. The chronotope is, therefore, the essential threshold between the abstract and the concrete, between idea and experience.

This final reflection elevates the theory to a new level. Bakhtin is not merely concluding his typology; he is solidifying the chronotope as an epistemological category, a fundamental structure through which human beings interpret and give meaning to the world. It is this open-ended theory, that resonates with particular force in contemporary times.

### *Reverberation*

Bakhtin's "Final Remarks", written under the weight of 34 years of reflection, represent a theoretical contribution of great significance. This late text marks a notable evolution in the author's thinking: a shift from large genre structures to the dialogical interactions within smaller, more flexible chronotopes, culminating in a forward-looking and intentionally open vision. In its mature form, the theory reveals itself not as a classificatory system but as a dynamic method for understanding the materialization of meaning.

This vision resonates deeply with contemporary cultural production. The concept of the "threshold chronotope", refined by Bakhtin in 1973 through his analysis of Dostoevsky, has become an indispensable tool for understanding modern and postmodern narratives centered on crisis, transformation, and the fragmentation of identity. Similarly, the dialogic interaction between the "represented world" and the "world that represents" takes on entirely new dimensions in the era of digital culture and transmedia narratives, where the boundaries among creator, text, and audience are constantly negotiated and redefined. Bakhtin's reflections provide a theoretical framework for analyzing how the real space-time of social networks and online life dialogues with the fictional worlds we consume and co-create.

The enduring legacy of Bakhtin's later reflections lies precisely in his refusal to provide definitive answers. He left us not a closed system but a powerful and relevant analytical tool, a continuous invitation for each new generation to discover, through the "door of chronotopes", the meanings of their own time.

## 2. *Once Again: Bakhtin*

With the publication of the book *Teoria do romance II – As formas do tempo e do cronotopo* (Theory of the Novel II – The Forms of Time and Chronotope) in 2018 by Editora 34, the public gained access to another significant text for reflecting on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope. Mikhail Bakhtin's "Scattered Leaves", written probably in the early seventies, and recently made available to the Brazilian public, represent more than mere archival curiosities. They offer a privileged glimpse into the genesis of his theoretical perspective, allowing us to witness the dynamic process behind the formulation of one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. The origin and purpose of these fragments are explained in a note by translator Paulo Bezerra, who contextualizes the material as part of the project: "These scattered leaves were found in Bakhtin's archive and are drafts for variants of the themes developed in the last chapter of this book, 'Final Observations'" (2018, p. 238).

These notes by the Russian theorist transcend the status of mere drafts to constitute a crucial expansion of chronotope theory. In them, Bakhtin effectively dismantles the formalist separation between text and context, proposing a unified view of the aesthetic event – a dialogical event radically rooted in the materiality of the acts related to creation and reception. The starting point for this expansion lies in the text's most striking conceptual innovation: the distinction between the multiple chronotopes that govern the aesthetic event.

Bakhtin's decision to distinguish multiple chronotopic levels represents a strategic shift of significant theoretical consequence. This differentiation marks a fundamental advancement in his thinking, as it establishes the necessary architecture for his concept of exteriority (*exotopy*)<sup>1</sup> that is, the necessary distance that allows the author (or the chronotopanalysis researcher) to see the work as a whole without merging with it. By separating the author's time-space from that of the work, Bakhtin creates the conditions necessary for the creative act, expanding the analytical focus beyond the fictional universe to include the material realities of both the author and the reader. In "Scattered Leaves", he clearly outlines the existence of three spheres of time-space which, although interconnected, must be understood in their specificity.

- The fundamental distinction he proposes can be summarized as follows:
- *The chronotope of the represented universe*: This is the classic chronotope, the time-space immanent to the narrative, in which "the represented events" unfold and where the characters inhabit. It constitutes the fictional world in its temporal and spatial concreteness.
- *The representing chronotope (of the author)*: Herein lies the great innovation. This is the real and historical time-space "from within which the author contemplates" the work. The author is not inside the world he represents but positioned "on the tangent" to it. Crucially, this chronotope is not hermetic; Bakhtin

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1. While the concept of exotopia is primarily developed in *Author and Character in Aesthetic Activity* (Bakhtin, 2023), it serves here as the *theoretical underpinning* for perceiving the chronotopic boundaries revisited in 1973.

states that “the chronotope of the listener enters it, whom the author seeks to anticipate and to whom he addresses his narrative” (2018, p. 239), making dialogism an inherent condition of the moment of creation itself.

- *The chronotope of the listener or reader:* A work does not exist in a vacuum; it is received within a concrete time-space. Bakhtin postulates that the reader “finds himself in the same world as the author” (2018, p. 240) and, through reading, participates in an encounter with the author via the text. This is the chronotope of reception, in which the work is actualized and its meaning is completed.

It is in the “essentially distinct, but also essentially linked” (2018, p. 240) interrelation among these three spheres that the new proposition of Bakhtinian thought reveals its new proposition. The aesthetic event is no longer confined to what happens in the book; rather, it encompasses the complex interaction among the created world, the world of the creator, and the world of the reader. This new perspective on the aesthetic event consequently redefines the position and function of the author in the creative process, relocating them to a place of dialogical exteriority.

By situating the author in his own chronotope, external to the represented universe, Bakhtin reinforces one of his central concepts: the author is not as an omniscient presence but an active and fundamentally external participant in the dialogue with the work. This position of exteriority is what Bakhtin calls *exotopy* – the productive “exteriority” that constitutes a condition of possibility for the creative act. Only from this external position can the author perceive and give aesthetic form to the entirety of the hero and the work, something the characters themselves



cannot achieve. According to Bakhtin, the author “cannot become an image” within his own work; he is “all exterior”, a creative consciousness that does not enclose itself.

To deepen this analysis, Bakhtin draws on the Greek philosophical distinction between *energeia* (activity, the process of creation) and *ergon* (the work, the final product). This distinction is fundamental to understanding *the* author’s unfinalizability. Because the author is pure *energeia* within his own chronotope – a continuous and open activity – he can never be reduced to an *érgon*, a completed object within the represented world. This reinforces his exteriority and dialogical openness, preventing him from becoming a mere character or a monological, divine voice.

This exotopic position underpins the inescapably dialogical nature of literary works. Texts are never monologues; they are constructed based on a fundamental orientation toward the other. As Bakhtin forcefully states: Every word is addressed, not to other words in the context, but to those outside it” (2018, p. 241). The work always presupposes “an other, a dialogical context” (*ibid.*) in which the reader is an active participant. This complex web of dialogical relationships finds its most concrete manifestation in the naming of new chronotopes, which exemplify the fusion of time, space, and human relationships into units of meaning.

The conceptual richness of “Folhas Esparsas” (“Scattered Leaves”) is exemplified in the naming and exploration of a series of specific chronotopes, serving as a comprehensive inventory of the theory’s applicability. Far from being mere labels, these chronotopes illustrate how time and space condense into concrete images that organize human experience and literary representation, encompassing spheres from the public to the intimate, and from the transitory to the existential.

The inventory, primarily located on pages 6 and 10, can be organized into six categories:

- Chronotopes of encounter and transition;
- Chronotopes of crisis and revelation;
- Chronotopes of everyday life and intimacy;
- Dynamic and relational chronotopes;
- Temporal and axiological chronotopes;
- Structural and border chronotopes.

These categories can also be divided into subcategories, resulting the following idàctic possibility:

I. Chronotopes of Crisis and Revelation

This category focuses on points of peak tension, temporal compression, and critical decisions.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>Decision Points and Thresholds</b>	Places and moments characterized by sealed fate, and compressed time.	Threshold chronotope; crisis chronotope; instant chronotope; filled instant chronotope (representing maximally compressed time), as seen in Dostoevsky and Virginia Woolf.
<b>Terminal Revelation</b>	The final space, usually associated with the end of life, where the truth is pronounced.	The Deathbed as chronotope (of confession).
<b>Biographical Chronotopes</b>	Spaces related to the duration of life and its documentation.	The biographical chronotope; The chronotope of the duration of life.

## II. Chronotopes of Encounter and Transition

This category explores the intersection of lives and the movements that enables them.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>Mobile Meeting Places</b>	Spaces for travel and passage, where time and space are indivisible, facilitating chance encounters.	The chronotope of the highway; encounters on the road; the chronotope of the deck and third-class train car (linked to the road and the street); the chronotope of the street.
<b>Institutional Spheres of Encounter</b>	Ritual, social, or philosophical contexts in which the encounter acquires specific meaning.	Encounters in everyday customs; in the religious sphere (sacred scriptures, rites); in social and official ceremonies.
<b>Encounter Complex</b>	Thematic elements revolve around the central encounter, generating a plot.	The universalism of the motif of encounter; The complex of the motif of encounter (including separation, escape, acquisition, and marriage).

## III. Chronotopes of Everyday Life and Intimacy

These spaces encourage introspection, meaningful dialogue, and a sense of intimacy with the reader.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>Spaces for Interiority and Reflection</b>	Places that inspire reflection and inner experiences.	The chronotope of reflections and inner experiences – the couch, the armchair, the walk (in Rousseau).
<b>Spaces for Dialogue and Confession</b>	Reserved spaces where subjectivity is revealed through speech.	The chronotope of intimate conversations, confessions, and acknowledgments.
<b>Function of Everyday Life</b>	The representation of the “low” or mundane, which connects the fictional, everyday world to the worlds of both the author and the reader.	Everyday life (the low) brings the represented world closer to us, to the everyday experiences of our world (author and readers).

## IV. Temporal and Axiological Chronotopes

Here, abstract time acquires substance and value (axiological), shaping the emotional tone of the narrative.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>Daily Temporal</b>	The 24-hour cycles, used to distinguish between different atmospheres and actions.	The chronotopes of day and night; the nocturnal chronotope.
<b>Cyclical and Emotional Time Frames</b>	The major divisions of the year, laden with lyrical and sentimental meaning.	The chronotope of spring and fall; the chronotopes of the seasons.
<b>The Axiological Factor</b>	The attribution of an axiological-emotional color to temporal chronotopes and their spatial complementarity.	

## V. Dynamic and Relational Chronotopes

This category describes the *compositional operations* that the author performs using chronotopes, emphasizing their interconnection and movement.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>Mechanisms of Movement</b>	The movement of characters between different space-time realities.	The transition from one chronotope to another (such as escaping from the city to the countryside, to nature, etc.).
<b>Contrast Mechanisms</b>	The juxtaposition of chronotopes to generate meaning, as seen in social or lyrical criticism.	The contrast between chronotopes (exemplified by Nekrasov and his urban chronotopes).
<b>Narrative Mechanisms</b>	The compositional “play” with time, without disrupting the reality of the represented universe.	The play of time (and chronotopes) within the representable universe (beginning at the end or middle, anticipation, return).

## VI. Structural and Boundary Chronotopes

The “Scattered Leaves”, in particular, as well as the “Final Observations”, suggest that the focus of Bakhtin’s final essays is the complex *interrelation of three chronotopes* found in his work but not merge in a whole. Therefore, this category is fundamental to understanding Bakhtin’s concluding perspective.

Subcategory	Description	Specific Chronotopes
<b>The Essential Trio</b>	The three essentially distinct yet interconnected chronotopes that make up the literary work.	The chronotope of the represented universe (events and characters); the chronotope representing the author (or narrator); the chronotope of the listener or reader.
<b>The Author’s Position</b>	The boundless space from which the author-creator contemplates the represented world, situating himself on a border.	The author’s position lies at the border between the universe of the represented and the universe of the representing. Metaphorically, the author exists in a fourth dimension that encompasses three measures.
<b>Temporal Distinctions</b>	The difference between the internal time of the story and the time of the narration.	Architectural time (the chronotope) and the compositional time of narration or representation.
<b>Reception Chronotope</b>	The space and time in which the work is materially experienced (read, heard, staged).	The chronotope of the stage; the real space-time in which a given verbalized work exists; the intermediate chronotope of written narration (beginning and end).

This vast repertoire raises a fundamental question: do the “Scattered Leaves” represent a mere addition to the Bakhtinian canon, or a profound reconfiguration of his chronotopic theory?

The analysis of the fragments known as “Scattered Leaves” reveals a significant expansion of Mikhail Bakhtin’s thought. Rather than merely refining his theory, he transforms it

from a tool of textual analysis into a comprehensive theory of the aesthetic event. By positing the dialogical interaction among the chronotope of the work, the author, and the reader, Bakhtin offers a dynamic model for understanding literature not as a static object but as a living event situated at the intersection of multiple realities.

The remarkable relevance of this model demonstrates impressive predictive power, offering precise vocabulary to analyze narrative forms that were either nascent or did nonexistent in his time:

- *Interactive literature and digital games*, whereby the chronotope of the reader (now player) actively invades and reconfigures the represented chronotope, becoming a co-creator of the narrative through an act of radical dialogism.
- *Transmedia narratives*, unfold across several platforms (books, films, social networks), creating a complex chronotopic network composed of multiple represented universes and reception chronotopes that complement and dialogue with each other.
- *Autofiction and social media writing* are genres that deliberately challenge the boundary between the author's chronotope and the represented chronotope, breaking down the exotopic distance that traditionally underpins the creative act and questioning the very limits between fact and fiction.

Within this landscape of increasingly permeable boundaries, the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the field of literary creation seems to push this crisis of exotopy to its paroxysm. While in auto-fiction the author still negotiates their position of exteriority with their own subjectivity, AI-assisted production introduces an algorithmic alterity that lacks a

‘true outside’ – that is, it does not occupy a genuine exotopic position, as it lacks a body, a historical time, and a biography. The algorithm operates within a purely procedural chronotope that emulates human consciousness, forcing us to question whether the aesthetic act can still be grounded in the Bakhtinian premise of an external gaze that provides the ‘consummation’ of the whole.

This radical ‘algorithmic co-authorship’ intensifies the porosity between the world that represents and the world represented, insofar as the authority of the creative ‘I’ is ceded to a data processing system that inhabits the very hiatus between author and work. By delegating part of the narrative texture to the machine, meaning is no longer exclusively ‘embodied’ by a consciousness situated in concrete spatio-temporal coordinates, resulting in a hybrid writing that challenges the autonomy of the aesthetic act. AI thus represents the final stage of this collapse of traditional distances, demanding that the *theory of the chronotope* be revisited once more to account for a narrative where the ‘gaze from without’ has been replaced by the speed of digital processing.

In this way, the “Scattered Leaves” demonstrate the enduring relevance of Bakhtin’s thought. Even in their fragmentary state, these texts reveal the capacity of his theory to transcend the historical analysis of the novel. This work provides conceptual tools not only to understand the narrative forms of the past but also to decipher and dialogue with the complex communicative configurations of the present and future.

### *Considerations*

By revisiting the theory of chronotope, undertaken during a period of profound intellectual maturation, represents far more than a mere addendum or afterword to earlier work; it constitutes a radical reconfiguration of its scope and purpose.

Detailed analysis reveals that later reflections on the subject shift the concept from a taxonomy of large genre structures to a dynamic and dialogical model of aesthetic communication itself. By redirecting the focus from “grand chronotopes” to their interrelationships, by expanding chronotopic levels beyond the represented world – including the material realities of the author and reader – and by positing that every entry into the field of meaning occurs “through the door of chronotopes”, the theory transcends literary criticism to become a concept of the aesthetic event itself. This theoretical move not only enriches the analysis of the novel also demonstrates a remarkable capacity to anticipate and provide conceptual tools to deciphering the complex narrative forms that define contemporaneity, thereby confirming the vitality of a theory that refuses to be a closed system.

The conceptual journey begins with a fundamental shift in scale and focus. The emphasis moves away from the chronotopic matrices that define long historical periods or entire genres toward smaller, more flexible, and thematically rich units. The presentation of a veritable “inventory” of chronotopes – the road, the castle, the drawing room, the provincial town, and, emblematic of all, the threshold – does not serve as a mere catalog. On the contrary, it functions as a practical demonstration of the analytical method’s plasticity and power. Each of these chronotopes acts as a “center of figurative realization”, a node where time thickens in space and events take on “flesh and blood”. The road becomes the stage for chance social encounters; the castle, a repository of historical memory; and the threshold, the instantaneous space-time of existential crisis. More importantly, these chronotopes do not exist in isolation but maintain dialogical relationships with one another, contrasting and illuminating each other, as exemplified by the powerful comparison between the time of crisis in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.



The second and most profound theoretical innovation lies in expanding the concept itself beyond the confines of the text. The distinction among the chronotope of the represented universe, the representing chronotope (of the author), and the chronotope of the listener-reader dismantles any remnants of formalism, anchoring the work of art in the concrete reality of the acts of creation and reception. Literature ceases to be a self-sufficient object and becomes a dialogical event unfolding at the intersection of these three worlds. This “permanent exchange”, analogous to the metabolism between an organism and its environment, underpins the author’s position of exteriority, who, situated in his own time-space, can orchestrate the dialogue with the work and with his anticipated reader. This formulation transforms the chronotope from a category of textual analysis into a theory of communication, whose fundamental premise is that total meaning is not contained within the text but is generated in the encounter among these multiple space-time realities.

A critical assessment of this theoretical evolution reveals its extraordinary relevance to the analysis of 21st-century cultural production. The tripartite model of chronotopes provides a precise vocabulary to describe phenomena that were unimaginable in the 1970s. Narratives in digital games, for example, radically materialize this configuration: the chronotope of the reader – now a player – not only receives the work but actively invades and modifies the represented chronotope, becoming a co-creator of the story in an act of radical dialogism that dissolves boundaries between levels. Similarly, transmedia narratives, which span books, films, series, and social networks, create a complex chronotopic ecosystem in which meaning is constructed through the audience’s navigation through multiple represented worlds, each governed by its own rules of time and space.

Additionally, the emergence of AI and genres such as autofiction and performative writing on social media can be seen as a deliberate challenge to the exotopic distance that, according to the classical model, underpins the creative act. In these forms, the author's chronotope and the represented chronotope are intentionally subverted or placed in an irresolvable tension, questioning the very boundaries between life and fiction, as well as between creator and creature. The theory, in its later formulation, not only enables us to analyze these new forms, but also to diagnose the transformations in the very conception of authorship and reality that they embody. The "inventory" of chronotopes, in turn, remains an exceptionally insightful tool: the "threshold chronotope" has become central to understanding contemporary fiction, obsessed with moments of trauma and identity transformation, while the "road chronotope", in a globalized world, reemerges in narratives about migration, exile, and the search for belonging in a fragmented space.

Ultimately, belated reflections on the chronotope solidify its status as a lasting contribution to the humanities. By stating that "...any entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope..." (2018, p. 236), the theory attains an epistemological dimension: time-space is not merely a theme or structure, but the condition of possibility for any idea or value to become humanly apprehensible. The refusal to offer a closed system, along with the emphasis on its prospective character, has transformed the theory into a permanent invitation to investigation. The task left behind was not to apply a fixed model, but to continue a dialogue, using the key of the chronotope to open the doors of meaning for each new era. Its resonance today demonstrates that, even in its final fragments, the thinking in question was not concluding a theory but ensuring its perpetual contemporaneity.

Ultimately, Bakhtin's late reflections reveal a fundamental shift in paradigm: the theory moves away from a strictly geno-

logical perspective to assume a purely ontological dimension. It is evident that, in this stage, the author is no longer primarily concerned with the taxonomic effort of classifying literary genres or cataloging historical structures. The focus shifts from the 'form of the genre' to the 'embodiment of meaning,' where the chronotope is understood as the indispensable portal through which every idea or value must pass to become a sign. If the chronotope previously served to distinguish the romance of chivalry from the Greek romance, it now serves to explain how life enters the work and how the work invades life, establishing a dialogic bridge between the world that represents and the real world. By transcending the barriers of technical classification, Bakhtin delivers a tool for the analysis of meaning itself – a category that not only concludes his historical poetics but projects itself with vigor upon the narrative architectures of our own digital age.



P

ART II – THE EDUCATIONAL NOVEL AND ITS  
IMPORTANCE IN THE HISTORY OF REALISM





## Chapter VI THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* ACCORDING TO BAKHTIN

### 1. *The Novels of Travel, Ordeal, and Biography*

The text “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Importance in the History of Realism” was written by Mikhail Bakhtin between 1936 and 1938 and represents a significant study of the *Bildungsroman*. It aims to understand the novel genre not through formalist classification but through its historical evolution in representing human beings. This is the only Bakhtinian text, except for “Forms of Time and the Chronotope”, in which the Russian author uses the chronotope lexicon. As far as we know, the manuscripts of “Forms of Time...” date from 1937 to 1939, indicating that both texts, FTC and REHR, were written during the same period.

The objective of this chapter is to analyze Bakhtin’s typological proposal by addressing the central question: what was Bakhtin’s purpose in establishing this initial tripartite typology – travel, trial, and biographical novels – and what are the distinctive characteristics of each type concerning the construction of the hero and the chronotope?

Bakhtin's classification is not merely formal but represents a fundamental investigation into the evolving relationship between the individual and the world. He traces a trajectory that begins with a static hero in an equally static world and progress gradually, establishing the preconditions for the emergence of the hero in formation (*becoming*), a figure that, according to Bakhtin's project, is fully realized in the *Bildungsroman*. This genealogy demonstrates how the novel, over the centuries, has learned to represent not only the vicissitudes of fate but also the very shaping of human character through time and experience.

Bakhtin selects the "travel novel" as a strategic starting point precisely because of its reduction to a single dimension: the spatial. By isolating this pure form, he establishes a baseline against which subsequent developments in the genre can be measured. This type of novel, present since antiquity in works such as those by Petronius and Apuleius, and extending to the picaresque novels of Defoe and Smollett, is based on a "purely spatial and static conception of the diversity of the world". The hero, defined by Bakhtin as a mere "moving point in space" and "lacking distinctive traits", functions as a narrative device and its primary role is "to develop and show the spatial and socio-static diversity of the world" (2011, p. 206). His passivity is the condition for the world to reveal itself as a mosaic of exoticism, customs, and living conditions. The absence of "consubstantial links" between the parts of this world results in a "raw" perception of the "exotic", giving this novel a "naturalistic" character, in which reality "breaks down into isolated things". The logical implication of this structure is that, in a world conceived as a spatial juxtaposition, time cannot have depth. Indeed, Bakhtin states that "The categories of time are elaborated in an extremely weak manner" (2011, p. 206), and what is elaborated is a "time of adventure", a mechanical succession of moments – "at the same instant", "the next day" – that serves only to organize the adventures. The absence of



“historical time” makes any genuine transformation impossible; the hero “remains unchanged”, as his experiences accumulate without ever becoming formative learning, a limitation that defines the very premise of the genre.

If the travel novel exhausts its possibilities in the exploration of exteriority, the second type proposed by Bakhtin operates a movement of internalization, concentrating the narrative focus on the integrity of a singular hero, whose identity, however, remains equally static.

The “romance of trials” represents a significant evolution in the history of the genre, marking a shift in narrative focus from the exploration of space to the verification of the identity of an already established hero. In this structure, which Bakhtin considers the “most widespread variant in European literature” (2011, p. 207), the world becomes a “theater of struggles and trials”. The central premise is that the novel is constructed as “a series of trials to which the protagonist is subjected”, (*idem*) with events serving as a “touchstone” for his virtues. The hero is a “finished image” whose qualities are only “verified and put to the test”, excluding any possibility of “becoming, any evolution”. The challenge for him is “to preserve, precisely, an unchanging firmness”, rendering the world and its events mere obstacles that test a predetermined identity.

This logic is grounded in a fundamental concept that Bakhtin calls the “rhetorical-legal conception of man”. Although it is more evident in Greek novels, this perspective permeates the entire genre: the world becomes a courtroom, events become “investigations”, and things become “evidence”. The image of the hero is imbued with categories of guilt and innocence, positioning him as either the defense or the prosecution. Time, in turn, operates within a “chronotope of exception”. Bakhtin demonstrates that the plot is based on a “deviation from the normal course of life”, occurring during hiatuses that “lack real biographical duration”, such as the

interval “between betrothal and wedding” in the Greek novel. The introduction of “fabulous time” and “psychological time” complicates temporality, yet it still lacks “historical location”, remaining unconnected to a specific era.

Bakhtin identifies several historical manifestations of the trial novel, each adapting the logic of the trial to a distinct ideological content:

- *Greek Romance*: Test of fidelity and purity, incorporating the aforementioned “rhetorical-legal conception of man”.
- *Christian Hagiography*: Trial of faith through suffering and doubt, deepening the hero’s “inner life”.
- *Chivalric Romance*: Variations of the trial based on ideological content (courtly and ecclesiastical-Christian).
- *Baroque Romance*: The “purest” and “most consistent” variant, as it heroizes the grandiose and masterfully conveys the “rhetorical-legal pathos” (2011, p. 210).

Crucially, Bakhtin argues that this archaic structure is not merely a historical curiosity. Enriched by later developments, the logic of the trial constitutes the fundamental basis for the great realist novels of the 19th century. According to him, the novels written by Stendhal, Balzac, and even Dostoevsky are, in essence, novels of proof, demonstrating the enduring organizing power of this model. While the novel of proof focuses on exceptional events outside ordinary life, the third type identified by Bakhtin turns precisely to the constitutive moments of that same life, representing a crucial step toward realism.

The “biographical novel” represents a decisive step toward the realistic representation of man in the world. Its significance lies in structuring the plot not around deviations,

but around the “basic and typical elements of every life trajectory” (2011, p. 203): birth, childhood, education, marriage, and death. Bakhtin identifies historical variants that paved the way for this type, such as the ancient forms of “success-failure”, “confessions”, “hagiography”, and – culminating in the 18th century – the “family biographical novel”. By centering the narrative on the events that define the normal course of an existence to the center of the narrative, this novelistic type introduces a radically new temporality and relationship between the hero and the world.

The most revolutionary innovation is the emergence of “biographical time”. In contrast to “adventure time”, it is a realistic time, “limited, singular, and irreversible” (2011, p. 214). Each event gains biographical weight by being located within a unique life process. More importantly, biographical time embedded within a “broader process of historical time” through the concept of “generations”. The relationship between generations introduces historical duration and interaction between diachronic lives, establishing a foundation for understanding man in his time. Consequently, the world “is no longer merely a backdrop”, but assumes a “functional” relationship with the protagonist’s life, enabling us to overcome the “naturalistic disorder of the travel novel” and the “abstract idealization of the trial novel” (2011, p. 215).

Despite these advances, Bakhtin highlights a fundamental limitation that this type still cannot overcome: “the hero remains unchanged”. It is crucial to distinguish the evolution of the hero’s “destiny” from the absence of development in his “character”. The narrative focuses on the objective outcomes of a life, but the personality that produces them possesses a “stratified, preconceived character”, given from the outset. In Bakhtin’s words, events “do not shape man, but his destiny”. The biographical novel has learned to represent the course of a life in real time, but not yet the process of the formation

of the human being himself through that course. This final barrier – the static nature of character – is precisely what the *Bildungsroman* would break through, and the interrelation of the three types analyzed reveals the historical path that made this breakthrough possible.

The three-part division proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his introductory text is not merely a taxonomy but rather a reconstruction of a profound logic in the history of the novel. These three types represent a dialectical progression in the genre's capacity to depict reality: beginning with the pure space and exteriority of *the travel novel*, moving through the idealized interiority and the test of a fixed identity in *the trial novel*, and culminating in the integration of life within real and historical time in *the biographical novel*. Each type overcomes the limitations of its predecessor, yet they all share a final boundary: the immutability of the hero's character.

Thus, it's possible to answer directly Bakhtin's proposal: this typology serves as the genealogy necessary to understand the emergence of the "novel of education", the genre, which, for him, represents a decisive turning point. The *Bildungsroman* ultimately synthesizes historical-biographical time with a hero whose character *is shaped* by worldly experience, overcoming the fundamental static nature of previous types. The hero not only lives in time but is transformed by it. Thus, Bakhtin was not merely classifying the past but constructing a theoretical framework to understand the advent of the modern hero.

The relevance of this analysis extends beyond the study of pre-nineteenth-century literature, revealing the vigorous persistence of these archetypal models in contemporary culture, proving the transhistorical nature of the chronotopes identified by Bakhtin. The *travel novel* resonates in genres such as *road movies* and exploration narratives; the *trial novel* forms the foundational structure of superhero narratives and moral trial thrillers; and the *biographical novel* persists in family sagas and fictionalized

biographies. These forms are not mere echoes but evidence that Bakhtin unveiled fundamental structures of the narrative imagination.

From this perspective, it is evident that the persistence of the 'hero of ordeal' manifests itself acutely in the contemporary phenomenon of motivational discourse and the figure of the 'coach.' In these contexts, there is a promotion of a return to a subject who must remain identical to themselves, unshakable in the face of crises, treating the world not as a space for historical formation (*Bildung*), but as a mere stage of obstacles to be overcome by 'willpower.' This is a re-edition of the Bakhtinian static hero, now disguised as individual progress, which feeds the archetype of the 'Savior of the Nation' – a messianic figure promising the resolution of conflicts while ignoring historical density and the necessity for collective transformation. While the 'novel of education' points toward a man who is formed with the world, the culture of coaching sells the illusion of a man who conquers the world without being touched by it.

This first part proves to be an extraordinarily powerful analytical tool. Its significance lies in providing a method to see beyond the plot and perceive the underlying architecture that govern the representation of time, space, and being. By tracing this genealogy, Bakhtin not only illuminated the history of the novel but also bequeathed us a grammar for deciphering not only the art of storytelling but the very structure of representing human consciousness in time.

## 2. *The Bildungsroman*

In the chapter dedicated to the *Bildungsroman*, Mikhail Bakhtin undertakes a theoretical investigation whose fundamental theme is the interrelation between "space-time and the image of man in the novel" (2011, p. 217). Confronted with a "too vast" task, Bakhtin executes a decisive methodological maneuver: he

narrows his focus to the more concrete problem of “man in formation (in becoming) in the novel” as the field for analyzing his central criterion, namely, the “degree of assimilation between real historical time and man in this temporality” (2011, p. 220). This analysis proposes to examine the construction of Bakhtin’s argument along three axes: first, its theoretical delimitation of “man in the process of becoming” as an overcoming of the static hero who dominated the history of the genre; second, his taxonomy of Bildungsroman, which reveals varying degrees of complexity in the representation of temporality; and finally, the decisive role of the historical chronotope in constituting the type of novel he identifies as the most evolved and significant. The investigation thus begins with the foundational distinction that underpins Bakhtin’s entire theoretical framework.

Bakhtin’s analysis begins with a movement of theoretical purification: the establishment of a dichotomy that runs throughout the history of the novel and serves as a premise for all its subsequent development. This move is strategic because, by defining the “predominant type of novel” as theoretically limited, Bakhtin creates the intellectual space and justification for his true object of study. In this dominant model, the hero is conceived as a “constant greatness”, an “immovable and unchanging point” around which events unfold. The protagonist’s identity remains unchanged, and the narrative dynamics are limited to modifying his external circumstances – his “destiny, situation in life, and society”. The plot and composition assume the immutability of character; the internal transformation of the individual, which represents the assimilation of time, does not become material for the plot, thereby creating a theoretical impasse for Bakhtin’s project.

In direct contrast, Bakhtin identifies a second type of novel, considered “much rarer”, whose distinctive feature is the presentation of the “image of man in becoming”. In this formulation, the fundamental premise is reversed: the hero

himself “becomes a variable greatness”. Transformation is no longer a peripheral or absent event but the nerve center of the narrative. The consequence of this change is profound and structural, for, as the theorist states, “time enters into man, permeating his entire image” (1997, p. 237). The evolution of character thus acquires “importance for the novelistic plot”, forcing a complete restructuring of the novel’s form. This break with the pre-established hero inaugurates a new conception of fiction, in which the formation of the human being becomes the true driving force of the diegesis, requiring a classification of the different modalities through which this process can be represented.

Once the centrality of the “man in becoming” is established, Bakhtin proceeds to elaborate a typology of the *Bildungsroman*. This classification, which encompasses five types, is not merely descriptive; it organizes the variants of the genre according to the criterion that governs all his research: the “degree of assimilation of real historical time” (2011, p. 220). Each type represents a particular way of conceiving the relationship between the transformation of the individual and the temporality in which he or she is situated.

In this first type, the cyclical-idyllic, the formation of man is intrinsically linked to the cyclical temporality of the stages of life, unfolding “from childhood to old age”. Evolution is conceived as a natural and repetitive process. Although the pure form is rare, Bakhtin notes that its elements are abundant, that ingredient being “very pronounced in Tolstoy, who, in this respect, is directly linked to the traditions of the 18th century” (2011, p. 220).

The second type, cyclical type of experience, also relies on cyclical temporality but with a different focus. Development is represented as a repetitive journey that transforms the idealistic youth into a resigned adult. The world is assimilated into “an experience, a school”, through which everyone must pass to reach a predetermined outcome. The primary representatives of this modality are the novelists Wieland and Wetzel.

In the biographical and autobiographical type Here, the novel departs from the cyclical element to insert itself into “biographical time”, which is unique and cannot be generalized. The transformation results from a chain of events that shape the hero’s particular destiny and, simultaneously, his character. According to Bakhtin’s precise formulation, “the elaboration of life-destiny is confused with the formation of man himself” (2011, p. 221). He points to Fielding’s *Tom Jones* as a paradigmatic example.

The Didactic-Pedagogical Type is explicitly based on a “specific pedagogical idea”. The narrative is organized around the educational process of in its strictest sense, illustrating a particular method or philosophy. As pure examples, Bakhtin cites Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and Rousseau’s *Emile*.

The Realistic and Historical Type, introduced as “the most important” in Bakhtin’s analysis, represents the pinnacle of the assimilation of time. In it, “the formation of man is presented in an indissoluble relationship with historical formation” (2011, p. 221). The protagonist is no longer formed in a static world but exists “on the borderline between two epochs”, at the point of transition from one to the other. His individual transformation both reflects and embodies the transformation of the world itself.

The analysis of these five types reveals a theoretical progression that reflects an increasingly sophisticated and successful assimilation of historical time, logically culminating in the fifth type, which serves as the central object of Bakhtin’s investigation.

The superiority that Bakhtin attributes to the fifth type of *Bildungsroman* is not merely an aesthetic preference but the logical *telos* of his classification scheme, made possible by the key concept of the chronotope. It is here that his theory reaches its full realization. In the previous four types, the formation of the individual took place “against the immovable backdrop of



a ready-made world” (2011, p. 221). Time and space functioned as a static container, a “school” whose laws the hero had to learn. Evolution was, in the final analysis, a private matter, whose fruits were restricted to his biography without altering the fundamentals of the surrounding reality.

The fifth type introduces a radical shift in this dynamic. In this type, the formation of man takes place “in real historical time with its necessity, its fullness, its future, its profoundly chronotopic character” (2011, p. 221). The world ceases to be merely a *stage* for the hero’s formation and instead becomes a *co-protagonist*, itself undergoing a process of becoming. The chronotope no longer serves as a mere backdrop but transforms into an active and transformative force that influences both the world and the individual. The implication of this new dynamic is that man and the world begin to shape each other. The hero is no longer confined to a single era; he is situated “on the border between two eras”, and historical change takes place *through* him, compelling him to become a new type of human being.

The fundamental consequence of this reconfiguration is that the image of man in formation “begins to overcome its private character (...) and leads to another vast sphere that is entirely different from historical existence” (2011, p. 222). The scope of the novel broadens, addressing issues such as “the problems of reality and the possibilities of man, of freedom and necessity, the problems of creative initiative” (2011, p. 221). It is in this fusion that the realistic novel, according to Bakhtin, reaches its highest expression, legitimizing it as the focus of his study.

In his analysis of the *Bildungsroman*, Mikhail Bakhtin presents a theoretical framework of significant explanatory power. Beginning with the fundamental distinction between the static hero and the hero in development, he constructs a sophisticated typology that culminates in selecting the realistic-historical type as his primary object of study. The primacy

of the latter lies in its ability to embody a dynamic historical chronotope, where the formation of the individual is inseparable from the transformation of the world itself.

This conception of the individual – whose identity is forged not in a stable world but “on the frontier of two eras” (2011, p. 222) resonates with particular intensity in the 21st century. In an era defined by the fractured identities in the digital sphere, existential reassessments imposed by the Anthropocene, and the instability of truth in post-factual landscapes, the notion of a completed world has become untenable. The contemporary subject is, par excellence, a being in the making, compelled to reinvent themselves in the face of ruptures that redefine the foundations of existence. Bakhtin’s analysis, therefore, transcends literary criticism to offer a valuable conceptual tool. It provides a *syntax* for narrating and understanding how fiction continues to represent the complex and reciprocal formation between human beings and their constantly changing historical world.

### 3. *Goethe*

Mikhail Bakhtin’s chapter “Time and Space in Goethe’s Works” presents an investigation into how reality is perceived and represented in literary creation. Rather treating time and space as passive categories or mere settings for action, Bakhtin proposes an intrinsic, meaning-generating interconnection between them.

Bakhtin selects the work and thought of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as the paradigmatic example of the full artistic realization of the chronotope. Through Goethe, Bakhtin illustrates how this vision embodies a profound epistemological transformation in the perception of the world, enabling

literature to represent a historical reality that is both concrete and continuously in a process of formation. The Goethean vision is not merely a style but a method of knowledge that materializes time within space and humanizes space through history.

To develop this argument, we will first analyze the historical context of the Enlightenment, which, according to Bakhtin, paved the way for this new sensibility. Next, we will examine the specificity of Goethe's "vision", decoding his ability to read the traces of time in the landscape. From there, the analysis will focus on defining the chronotope in action, observing its logic in the notion of *Lokalität* (locality) and its supreme manifestation in Rome. Finally, we will discuss the epistemological position of the Goethian chronotope in contrast to other worldviews, concluding with its relevance to the evolution of the novel and contemporary literary criticism.

Contrary to the traditional characterization of the period as "anti-historical", Bakhtin argues that the 18th century "reveals itself as a time of powerful awakening of the sense of time, above all the sense of time in nature and human life" (2011, p. 226). The literature of the era, with its recurring themes of "the seasons", "agricultural cycles", and "the ages of man", was not limited to a superficial approach. These "cyclical times", although not yet fully historical, were essential to "revolve with the plow of time the immobile world of previous eras" (2011, p. 226). By emphasizing the repetition and cyclical nature of life, the Enlightenment began to undermine the conception of a static world, making time a visible and relevant dimension of human experience.

It is from this "turned soil" that the "signs of historical time" begin to emerge. The perception that the contradictions of an era are not eternal leads to the recognition of a "historical pluritemporality" within the same present, in which "the remnants and embryos of the past, the trends of the future"

coexist. (2011, p. 227). The theme of the ages of man, in turn, expands to the theme of generations, paving the way for a genuinely historical perspective. According to Bakhtin, this process was more profound in literary creation than in the philosophical speculations of the time.

It was, therefore, on the basis of a new temporal consciousness – carefully cultivated by the Enlightenment – that Goethe’s artistic vision reached an unparalleled peak in its representation of historical time.

The core of Bakhtin’s analysis lies in decoding Goethe’s unique perception, which he defines as “the ability to see time, to read time in the spatial whole of the world” (2011, p. 225). For Goethe, time is not an abstract category but a material force whose traces, processes, and potentialities are visibly inscribed in the concrete world. This capacity for visualization transforms literature, allowing it to represent not only events, but historical becoming itself.

Bakhtin elucidates the “exceptional importance of the visible for Goethe”, for whom knowledge and meaning should ultimately be accessible to the eye. Goethe harbored a deep aversion to abstractions, describing himself as “the mortal enemy of mere sounds of words”. His need to translate ideas into visual forms, such as the sketch of the “symbolic flower” for Schiller, reveals an epistemology in which the visible is both the first and final instance of knowledge.

This primacy of the visible informs what Bakhtin identifies as Goethe’s “method of development”, which he contrasts with a method that organizes knowledge through static oppositions. Goethe was incapable of perceiving a “simple spatial contiguity”, immediately filling it with time, seeing in everything a “process of formation”. For Bakhtin, this method is not merely a stylistic preference; it constitutes the cognitive apparatus that enables the perception of the chronotope, replacing static categorization with temporal and dynamic

relations. His analysis of mountains illustrates this view: what appears to be a “solid and immutable background” reveals itself, for Goethe, as an active force whose “calm and secret inner action” generates the weather. The static becomes dynamic; the background becomes the initiator of movement.

Goethe’s view of historical time is characterized by a hostility toward the past when it is disconnected from the present. Bakhtin notes that Goethe described ruins and disconnected historical memories as “ghosts” – traces that become embedded in the present like a “foreign body”. The anecdote of Hannibal’s battle in Sicily is emblematic: while a guide recounted the military exploits, Goethe collected pebbles. For him, the memory of the battle was a “mixture of the past and the present” lacking a creative connection, while the stones revealed a necessary, geological past that allowed an understanding of the landscape’s formation.

In contrast to the ghostly past, Goethe sought the “creative past”, one whose action remain alive and productive in the present. The example of the village of Einbeck, where the age of the trees allowed Goethe to infer the existence of an excellent burgomaster decades earlier, illustrates this perception. The actions of that former administrator “continue to live in the present” in a visible and beneficial way. This past is not a specter but a force that creatively shapes the present and points toward the future.

This Goethean imperative to perceive a productive past materialized in the present is not a mere perceptual whim; it is the very engine of the chronotope. Bakhtin demonstrates that this perspective has an internal logic, rooted in the principle of *Lokalität* and the inescapable necessity of human action within a specific place.

Drawing on elements of Goethe’s vision, Bakhtin consolidates his theory of the chronotope as a fusion in which history acquires material density and space is imbued with

human meaning. The Goethean concept of “necessity” emerges as the visible manifestation of a “creative past” that has been successfully integrated into the present, contrasting with the arbitrary logic of “ghosts” or abstract morality.

The importance of *Lokalität* (locality) is central to Goethean thought. Bakhtin explains that Goethe could not bear a landscape that did not provide “a place for man and his creative activity”. Goethe’s method of understanding a region by tracing the course of its waters reveals this perspective. In following the paths of rivers, Goethe did not perceive a mere abstract map; rather, he unveiled “the stage of a historical event, it is the solidly drawn boundary of the spatial course through which the flow of historical time will run” (2011, p. 239).

This approach reveals Goethe’s concept of “necessity” as a historical and concrete force. This necessity manifests itself in the adequacy between human actions and the conditions of a place. For example, the architecture of the ancients is described as “a second nature that acts for civil purposes”. Works such as Roman aqueducts are not arbitrary; they possess a “true inner existence” because they respond to an authentic necessity, integrating with the landscape in an organic and productive manner.

Bakhtin presents Rome as the “great chronotope of human history” (2011, p. 243), where the fusion between time and space reaches its highest intensity. For Bakhtin’s Goethe, Rome serves as the ultimate refutation of an abstract worldview, compelling a confrontation with “historical pluritemporality” not merely as a concept but as a lived and visible reality. In Rome, Goethe realizes that “the whole of universal history is linked to this place”. The coexistence of different eras allows the observer to “take part in the great decisions of destiny”.

This experience evokes in Goethe the perception of the “fullness of time”. In Rome, destruction and reconstruction do not inspire sadness but rather a “feeling of joy” for the continuity

of human creative activity. However, it is here that Bakhtin applies his own critical method. After extensively quoting Goethe on this point, Bakhtin cautions: “Unfortunately, in this summary of his Roman impressions, Goethe did not repeat the motif of necessity, which for him was the effective link between the times. Therefore, the concluding paragraph of the quotation (...) somewhat simplifies and reduces (...) Goethe’s historical vision” (2011, p. 244). This crucial caveat demonstrates that even in his paradigmatic example, Bakhtin identifies moments of simplification, elevating his analysis beyond mere exposition.

The uniqueness of Goethe’s chronotope, characterized by its emphasis on creative necessity and temporal fullness, becomes even more apparent when contrasted with other sensibilities of the time.

Bakhtin’s contribution is deepened by positioning the Goethean chronotope within a field of distinct worldviews. The differences he establishes in relation to Rousseau and Walter Scott are not merely thematic but fundamentally epistemological: they represent distinct ways of knowing and representing the relationship between man, time, and nature.

Bakhtin recognizes that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s imagination is also chronotopic but contrasts it with Goethe’s. Rousseau’s landscape is inhabited not by the “man who builds”, but by the man given over to “enchanted idleness” and “voluptuousness”. The epistemological difference lies in the opposition between Goethe’s “necessity” and Rousseau’s “desire”. In Rousseau, nature gives rise to a utopian “golden age”, an ideal separated from real time and its demands. It is a space for desire and subjective fantasy, not for the fulfillment of an objective and creative need. For Goethe, nature is the stage for real history; in Rousseau, for is a refuge from history.

The analysis of Walter Scott further refines the specificity of Goethe’s vision. Scott was a master at “saturating the space of time” through local folklore. However, Bakhtin highlights a

crucial distinction, especially in Scott's early works. There, time tends to have the "character of a closed past" that evokes memory but lacks the "creative activity in the present" that defines Goethe's perception. The present in Scott becomes a receptacle for memories, whereas in Goethe, the past is alive and active within the present, shaping it. This contrast highlights the unique temporal fullness achieved by Goethe, in which the past is not only remembered but also productive.

This chronotopic vision, realized by Goethe, integrating historical necessity and creative activity, allowed for a fundamental transformation in the novel genre.

In his analysis of Goethe, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the development of a concrete and historical chronotopic perception was essential for the evolution of the modern novel. This new way of perceiving the world enabled the genre to reflect a "real, rounded, complete, and total world", overcoming the fragmented or abstract representations characteristic of earlier eras. Goethe's vision provided the novel a model for grasping reality as a cohesive, material whole in constant flux.

The essential characteristics of this view of time, as systematized by Bakhtin, include the fusion of past and present, the visible mark of time in space, historical necessity as a driving force, and a temporal fullness that, by integrating the creative past and the active present, organically incorporates the dimension of the future. This perception of time, inseparable from concrete space, enables the novel to represent the complexity of human life not as a drama of abstract passions but as a historical process materialized in a place.

The concept of the chronotope, far from being a theoretical artifact confined to the 18th century, remains a vital tool for analyzing how contemporary literature represents complex realities. It enables us to question how today's novels shape multitemporal urban spaces, where different eras visibly coexist; landscapes marked by ecological crises, serving as spatial



records of human actions over time; and traumatic historical memories that erupt in the present, reconfiguring places and identities. The search for a “necessity” that connects *place, time, and human action* – an internal logic that organizes experience and imparts meaning – continues to be a central challenge for novelists striving to shape our world, underscoring the enduring relevance of the chronotopic legacy articulated by Bakhtin through Goethe.

### *Considerations*

The analysis of the typology of the *Bildungsroman*, as outlined in this chapter, goes beyond a mere classification of literary subgenres to serve as a profound investigation into the evolution of human consciousness and its representation in art. The theoretical journey, which begins with the static hero and culminates in the “man in becoming”, constitutes a true genealogy of the modern subject, demonstrating how the novel, in its quest for realism, has learned to capture not only the actions of an individual in the world but also the very formation of that individual by the world. The fundamental distinction between an unchanging character and one who transforms under the influence of historical time is not just a matter of narrative technique; it reflects a radical epistemological shift in understanding the relationship between identity and reality. By choosing the fifth type of *Bildungsroman* – one in which the evolution of man is inseparable from historical evolution – as the most complex and significant, the theory establishes a clear criterion of value: the highest achievement of the novel lies in its ability to materialize a dynamic historical chronotope, in which the world ceases to be a mere backdrop and becomes a co-protagonist in the process of forming subjectivity.

The analytical journey reconstructs the progressive logic that makes possible the emergence of the “man in becoming”. The travel novel, featuring a hero as a “moving point in space”, teaches literature to map the static diversity of the world, albeit at the cost of a merely adventurous time. The trial novel, in turn, operates a movement of internalization, transforming the world into an arena for verifying an already consolidated identity, while introducing the complexity of inner life and moral trial. Finally, the biographical novel represents a qualitative leap by inserting the human trajectory within “real biographical time”, irreversible and connected to generations, giving historical weight to individual destiny. These three types, despite their advances, share a fundamental limitation: the static nature of the hero’s character. The evolution of destiny does not yet correspond to the evolution of being. It is precisely this barrier that the realistic education novel overcomes by merging biographical time with historical time and presenting a protagonist whose identity is not only tested but forged “on the border between two eras”.

A critical assessment of this theoretical construct, projected onto the cultural landscape of the 21st century, reveals its extraordinary and, at times, unsettling relevance. The concept of a subject formed at the intersection of worlds in transition resonates with striking precision in the contemporary era, a time defined by digital acceleration, climate crisis, and the instability of political narratives. The current subject is, *par excellence*, a “man in becoming”, compelled to constantly reconfigure himself in response to ruptures that dissolve chronotopes once considered stable. The world, far from being a “motionless backdrop”, has become a volatile and unpredictable force that invades the individual’s interior, demanding a continuous renegotiation of identity. Formation is no longer a process with a predictable end – maturity or resignation – but a state of permanent crisis.

In this context, the relevance of this analysis transcends as a diagnostic tool for contemporary cultural production, which seems to reactivate and, at the same time, subvert these archetypal models. The “travel novel”, for example, resurfaces not only in road narratives, but also in the fragmented experience of digital space, where the individual becomes a “mobile point” that traverses an infinity array of “places” – social networks, forums, virtual realities – without this accumulation of experiences necessarily resulting in a cohesive character formation. Online identity often remains “unchanged”, a static profile that merely observes the diversity of a virtual world without historical depth.

Even more strikingly, the “trial romance” dominates mass culture. The basic structure of superhero movies, survival thrillers, and *reality shows* revolves around a trial. A hero with predetermined qualities (courage, resilience, purity of heart) is subjected to a series of tests that aim only to confirm their original identity. The world becomes a “theater of struggle”, and time functions as a “chronotope of exception” that suspends normality to test character, but rarely to shape it. The massive success of these narratives suggests a deep cultural demand for moral clarity and heroes whose identities, unlike ours, remain a safe haven in a chaotic world. They offer the comfort of a characters who do not disintegrate under pressure, a fantasy of stability in an era defined by fluidity.

The more complex legacy, however, is that of the “man in becoming” within the historical chronotope. While the 19th-century model viewed this formation as a process of integration into a new, emerging social order, contemporary fiction often represents this becoming as a process of disintegration or resistance to a collapsing world. The protagonist of a novel about the climate crisis, for example, does not develop “at the same time as the world”; he forms *against* the world bequeathed by previous generations. The evolution of his character does not

lead to a harmonious synthesis but instead leads to an awareness of fracture, loss, and the necessity of creating new forms of existence within a damaged chronotope. The frontier is no longer between two progressive historical eras, but between the present and an uncertain future, marked by the possibility of non-continuity.

Therefore, the analysis of the *Bildungsroman* offers more than a key to the past; it provides a compass for deciphering the present. The persistence of static models in mass culture reveals a longing for stability, while more ambitious literary fiction continues to explore the challenge of representing a subject in formation within a world that he no longer recognizes as stable. Theory allows us to see that the fundamental question of literary representation remains the same: how to narrate the complex and mutual formation between human beings and their time-space. What has changed dramatically is the nature of this time-space, which today imposes itself not as a force of historical evolution but often as an experience of vertigo and rupture, challenging literature to find new chronotopes to give meaning to our continuous and unfinished formation.

If the realistic-historical *Bildungsroman* presupposes a man who develops in symbiosis with the evolution of the real world, contemporary life challenges us to rethink this 'becoming' within a world mediated by algorithms. In the digital age, Goethean *Lokalität* – the ability to read time materialized in space – undergoes a radical mutation: the vestiges of history and time are no longer found solely in architecture or the physical landscape, but in the digital footprints and information architectures that shape our perception. Contemporary man is formed not only at the 'frontier of two historical eras,' but at the threshold between material reality and the procedural reality of data, where time is fragmented into moments of consumption and identity formation occurs within informational bubbles that emulate the totality of the world. In this context, the question posed to *Chro-*

*notopanalysis* is: how does the hero's formation take place when his 'world' is an ecosystem of invisible flows and predictive personalizations? If, for Bakhtin, the man in becoming emerges from historical necessity and concrete space, the subject of the algorithmic era runs the risk of a '*static becoming*', where the transformation of character is replaced by the incessant reinforcement of pre-established profiles. Thus, the Goethean necessity for a connection between place, time, and human action must be reclaimed as an act of resistance, seeking to rediscover the meaning of the 'event' within a temporality that, while technologically accelerated, often lacks the historical density essential for the true education of the self (*Bildung*).

In this scenario of increasingly permeable boundaries, the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence and the figure of the robot in science fiction bring this crisis of *exotopy* to its paroxysm. If in autofiction the author still negotiates a position of exteriority with their own subjectivity, AI-assisted production – and the very narrative of artificial beings in search of consciousness – introduces an *alterity* that challenges the human exclusivity of 'becoming.' Within the frontiers of science fiction, the robot often mimics the hero of the *Bildungsroman*: a being born as a constant and programmed magnitude, but who, through interaction with the chronotope of the real world, is molded by experience and suffering, forcing us to rethink whether 'becoming' is a property of the flesh or of consciousness. In this sense, by delegating part of the narrative texture to the machine, or by imagining mechanical subjects that inhabit the hiatus between author and work, meaning ceases to be exclusively 'embodied' by a situated biological consciousness. AI and robotics thus represent the final stage of this collapse of traditional distances, requiring the theory of the chronotope to be revisited to account for a narrative where the 'gaze from without' is replaced by processing, and where the formation of man (*Bildung*) enters into a dialogue with the construction of the machine.





## CONCLUSION

The following synthesis is not merely a summary of the investigative process but a cohesive articulation of results demonstrating the potential of the chronotope as a key to understanding literary history. The centrality of this concept was demonstrated in three interdependent axes that reveal the depth and flexibility of Bakhtin's theory: its robust theoretical foundation as a category of content-form, its application as a guiding thread in the historical trajectory of the novel, and, finally, its development into a sophisticated theory of the aesthetic event.

The strength of the chronotope lies primarily in its sophisticated conceptual architecture. The intellectual genesis of the term reveals a project aimed at grounding literary analysis in materialist and anti-idealist foundations. Bakhtin engages in a critical dialogue with three distinct theories: Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, employed "almost as a metaphor" to express the inseparability of the space-time continuum; the studies of physiologist A. A. Ukhtómski, which provide a biological basis for the concept, suggesting that time-space interdependence is a condition inherent to the perception of living reality; and, decisively, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Bakhtin begins with the Kantian premise that time and space are indispensable

forms of cognition but makes a fundamental break by rejecting their “transcendental” character. For him, they are not a *priori* forms of consciousness but rather “forms of factual reality itself”, which art assimilates. Bakhtin strategically mobilizes Einstein and Ukhtómski to support his anti-idealist project, including the replacement of Kant’s a *priori* forms with “forms of factual reality itself”, with the support of references to physics and biology.

On this basis, the multiple and interdependent functions of the chronotope were systematized, consolidating it as a category of “content-form” that transcends the dichotomy between structure and meaning. It was demonstrated how its facets are inseparable. The *genological* function establishes the coordinates of a world that can only be inhabited by a specific human figure (the *anthropological* function), whose possibilities for action dictate the very logic of the plot (*narratological*), thereby materializing a worldview (*axiological-emotional*) that imbues each event with a specific value and tone. This interdependence solidifies the chronotope as the nexus where form and content become mutually constitutive.

The historical evolution of the chronotope has been demonstrated as a process of progressively complexifying of subjectivity in literature. It began with the chronotope of trial in the Greek novel, where the “adventurous time” operates as an “extratemporal hiatus” within an abstract space, creating the problem of a passive and immutable hero. This impasse finds its first resolution in Apuleius, whose chronotope of metamorphosis, fused with the concrete space of the “royal road”, allows the emergence of a hero who becomes another. The investigation continues by exposing the medieval dialectic between the idealized chronotope of the chivalric novel – with its “marvelous world” and the introduction of a “subjective play with time” – and its critical counterpoint. The chronotope of the “inside out”, operated by figures such as the rogue and the



jester, functions as a necessary corrosive force that, by unmasking “bad conventionalism”, dismantles the chivalric ideal and clears the path for the radical reconstruction of the Rabelaisian chronotope on material, bodily, and productive historical time bases. This vision is contrasted with the matrices of collective time in the folkloric chronotope and the organic fusion between life and place in the idyllic chronotope, both absorbed and transformed by the later novel. Finally, it was demonstrated how the typology of the *Bildungsroman* – unfolding in the variants of travel, trials, and biography – constitutes the genealogy culminating in the definitive overcoming of the static nature of character. This journey reaches its apex in Goethe’s chronotopic vision, in which the image of the “man in becoming” is fully realized, with individual formation inseparable from historical evolution itself, assimilating “real historical time” in its fullest expression.

The synthesis of discoveries culminated in the analysis of the innovations presented by Bakhtin in his late texts, the “Final Remarks” and the “Scattered Leaves”. In these writings, the focus shifts from the analysis of large genre chronotopes to smaller units and their dialogical interrelationships: the road, the castle, the drawing room, the provincial town, and, emblematically, the threshold. The most radical contribution, however, is the distinction among three chronotopic levels: *the represented universe* (the world of the work), *the author* (the real world of the creator), and *the reader* (the real world of the recipient). This multiplication transforms the theory from a tool of textual analysis into a sophisticated concept of the aesthetic event. The philosophical implication of this development is profound: the chronotope ceases to be merely a hermeneutic tool and becomes a theory of communication, in which meaning is not inherent in the text, but is *generated* through the dialogical encounter among these three space-time realities. This conception is based on the author’s position of *exotopy* (exteriority), a necessary condition

that allows him to perceive and give aesthetic form to the whole of the work and its hero. This theoretical maturation elevates the concept to an epistemological condition, as summarized in his late and fundamental statement that “any entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (2018, p. 236).

The series of discoveries – from the theoretical foundation to the historical application and final maturation – unequivocally validates the central hypothesis that guided this research.

The in-depth analysis of the foundations, trajectory, and evolution of chronotopic theory not only describes the concept but also confirms the central hypothesis guiding this work. The research conclusively demonstrates that the chronotope is a fundamental category of historical poetics, capable of explaining the evolution of the novel and, consequently, the representation of human consciousness in literature.

The validation of this hypothesis is supported by the concept’s demonstrated ability to operate consistently and with explanatory power across multiple levels of analysis. Chronotope has proven to be a sufficiently powerful tool for deciphering both the archetypal structures of ancient genres and the complex narrative interactions of modernity. Moreover, the theory itself has proven to be chronotopic. Its evolution – from the analysis of *the extratemporal hiatus* in Greek antiquity to the formulation of a theory of the *aesthetic event* that includes the reader’s real-time encounter with the text – serves as definitive proof of its capacity to assimilate new historical realities, including its own history as a concept. This plasticity, without sacrificing its conceptual core – the indissoluble fusion of time, space, form, and content – demonstrates its centrality. The chronotope is not merely a concept *about* literary history; it is a concept that enables us *to think* about literature *historically*.

This work proposes a systematic articulation and critical projection of the chronotope as a concept. The contributions of this work can be summarized as follows:

- *Comprehensive systematization of chronotopic theory:* This work provides a systematic and integrated organization of the theory, articulating its intellectual genesis (the dialogue with Einstein, Ukhtómski, and Kant), its multiple interdependent functions (genological, anthropological, narratological and axiological), its application in analyzing the historical trajectory of the novel, culminating in its maturation as a theory of the aesthetic event.
- *Elaboration of a genealogy of literary subjectivity:* Likewise, this work demonstrates how the evolution of the chronotope – from antiquity to realism – traces a precise genealogy of the formation of subjectivity in literature. The progression from the passive and immutable hero of the Greek novel to the “man in becoming” forged by history in the Goethean *Bildungsroman*, reveals that the history of the chronotope is, in essence, an archaeology of modern consciousness.
- *Demonstration of the contemporary relevance of the concept:* The task in this case was to prove the vitality and flexibility of Bakhtin’s tool for deciphering the present. It establishes a structural homology between the ancient “chronotope of trial” found in the Greek novel and the modern format of *reality shows*, where participants are isolated within an artificial space-time (“alien universe”) to have a pre-existing quality (“authenticity”) tested, rather than formed, is established. This inference, added to the analyses of the “reticular chronotope” and the challenges of representing the Anthropocene, affirms the ongoing relevance of the concept.

- *Critical integration of Bakhtin's late thought:* This work does not treat the author's late reflections as an appendix but integrates them centrally into the argument, demonstrating how the evolution of the chronotope into a sophisticated theory of the dialogical aesthetic event – including the chronotopes of both the author and the reader – represents the apex and logical culmination of his entire theoretical project.

Having outlined these contributions, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations that circumscribe this investigation.

This work, by closely following the analytical trajectory of Mikhail Bakhtin, consciously inherits some of his limitations.

The analysis primarily focused on the tradition of the European novel, from ancient roots to the emergence of realism in the 19th century. While the work extended the application of this concept to contemporary cultural phenomena in an inferential way, a more thorough and systematic examination of non-Western literary traditions or other genres and media (such as cinema, poetry, or digital games) was beyond the scope of this investigation.

Recognition of these limitations does not invalidate the results obtained from the selected corpus. On the contrary, by clearly defining the boundaries of what has been achieved, it highlights and opens promising avenues for future research that may broaden the application of this powerful analytical tool.

This work does not conclude the topic; however, by demonstrating the vitality of the concept of the chronotope, it inspires new explorations. The contributions and limitations of this study highlight several promising horizons for future research:

- *Intermedia chronotopanalysis*: We propose the systematic application of the Bakhtinian model to various media, including cinema, television series, and digital games. Research focusing on how each medium develops its own chronotopic specificities – for example, the manipulation of time through editing in cinema or the involvement of the player in constructing space-time in RPGs – could significantly enrich both Bakhtinian studies and the theoretical understanding of each medium.
- *Chronotopes of the Anthropocene*: We propose research aimed at identifying and analyzing emerging chronotopes in literature and art that respond to the climate crisis. This study will explore the novel and complex relationships among human time, geological time, and planetary space, investigating how art seeks to shape a historical experience in which humans are no longer the undisputed protagonists.
- *The conception of the reticular chronotope*: An in-depth study of the “reticular” or “digital” chronotope is essential. Research focused on analyzing how simultaneity, deterritorialization, and the performativity of social networks are shaping new images of humanity and new narrative logics would be highly relevant to understanding contemporary subjectivity.
- *Comparative and postcolonial studies*: It would be valuable to rigorously apply chronotopic theory to non-European literary traditions. Investigating how diverse cultures artistically assimilate their unique realities and historical temporalities could not only broaden the scope of the theory but also challenge and enrich its foundational assumptions, providing a critical counterpoint to the Western canon.

These projections demonstrate that the concept of the chronotope remains an inexhaustible source of reflection, leading us to a final consideration of its enduring significance.

It is within this horizon that Chronotopanalysis reveals its urgency by confronting the pathologies of the digital age. As demonstrated throughout this work, the transition from the 'hero of ordeal' to the 'man in becoming' now encounters a new and insidious obstacle: the algorithmization of existence. Where Bakhtin saw the public square as a place of encounter, today we witness the rise of a '*monologism of the masses*' and the proliferation of 'digital buffoons' who, through *fake news*, corrupt liberating laughter into a tool for control and social fragmentation. The contemporary subject, pressured by the discourses of a '*static becoming*' – personified in coaching culture and the quest for messianic heroes – finds themselves alienated from the historical density required for true *Bildung*.

Thus, the formation of the human today occurs not only at the frontier of historical eras, but within the tension between material reality and the procedural flow of data. If artificial intelligence and robotics represent the final stage of the collapse of traditional distances, it is the theory of the chronotope that allows us to revisit narrative to understand a world where the 'gaze from without' is replaced by processing, demanding that the formation of man (*Bildung*) once again engages in a dialogue with the construction of its own instruments.

At the end of this journey, the initial hypothesis is both confirmed and deepened. The analysis of the evolution of temporal forms and the chronotope in the novel has, in fact, become an investigation into the very archaeology of subjectivity. The way a narrative organizes its time-space is not merely a formal choice, but the deepest manifestation of how a culture conceives existence, identity, and history.

The enduring relevance of the concept of chronotope, therefore, lies not in its ability to classify narratives of the past,

but in its power to equip us to decipher the chronotopes of our own time. Bakhtinian theory compels us to ask an incessant and inescapable question: In what time and space do we live, and what kind of human beings does this experience make us, has made us, and will make us? In a world of accelerated temporalities, virtual spaces, and existential crises, the chronotope remains the indispensable “door” through which human experience, in all its complexity and contradiction, enters the field of meaning. For, whether before the stones of Goethe or the interfaces of artificial intelligence, meaning is only produced in the ethical and unavoidable encounter between consciousnesses.





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There are theoretical concepts that, due to their strength and versatility, take the risk of becoming victims of their own success. Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" is undoubtedly one of these concepts. Often reduced to a mere classificatory label or a scholarly synonym for "setting", sometimes loses its original power to reveal how reality is assimilated by art. The book you hold in your hands was born precisely from the need to rediscover that potency.

This work is not merely another contribution to the vast Bakhtinian critical scholarship; it aims to be a rigorous exegesis that seeks to reintegrate what has been fragmented. By articulating Bakhtin's two seminal texts on the subject – *The Forms of Time and Chronotope* and *The Novel of Education* – we seek to offer a unified vision, demonstrating that the chronotope is not simply technical device but the "architectonics of meaning", a category of content-form in which time thickens and space pulsates with the movement of history.

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