



Chronotopes of Time and Space in Brooklyn

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ABSTRACT

Space and moving from one place to another play an important role in Brooklyn since it concerns the Irish diaspora in America and England. Different places are compared to show how Irish diaspora differs in America and England. Moreover, Irish and American cultures are taken into consideration in analyzing Eilis' displacement. In doing so, in three sections, multi levels of immigration and living in foreign countries, with the help of chronotope of space whether geographical, physical, or mental are offered. First, the portrayal of Ireland and Irish and American society and culture in the novel is discussed. Then, Irish diaspora in England and America and their differences as spaces of immigration are argued. Finally, Eilis' dangling between places is

investigated and it is shown how she until the end of the novel chooses to finally live in Brooklyn and overcomes her sense of displacement.

Keywords: Chronotopes, Time and Space in Brooklyn.



Introduction

Brooklyn is a diasporic novel in which setting is focused upon. Besides, the feeling of displacement arisen from the living in diaspora is of great importance in the novel. This study shows how the elements of time and place interweave and convey the sense of displacement formulated in the female protagonist of the novel. With the help of Bakhtin's theory on chronotopes of time and space and their subcategories such as road, encounter, threshold, and transformation which are relevant to this study, Eilis' displacement is analyzed

1- Irish Diaspora in England (Eilis' brothers) and America (Eilis)

To Eilis' family and Irish people in general in those days immigration was not an irrelevant matter. Eilis' brothers have moved to England for years and once in a while they send money for the family in Ireland (Toibin, 2009, p. 11). England was near to Ireland and due to better prospects and life opportunities thousands of Irish immigrated to England. She remembers her youngest brother's immigration to England when she was set for moving to Brooklyn,

It reminded her of the weeks before Jack had left for Birmingham, when they would try to do anything to distract themselves from the thought of losing him. (Toibin, 2009, p. 30)

The distanced relation between Irish and English and yet good working opportunities could be concluded from the Eilis' conversation with her brother. Daly (2003) argued that better working conditions in England kept the Irish satisfied enough to ignore the ancient hostile relations between the two countries (p. 24). Thus, when Eilis discusses her brother's working condition he is happy with his job although outside work he is insulted.

1-2 Irish diaspora in America

However, the Irish diaspora in America differs from England on many levels. Firstly, America is a land consisting of diverse immigrants from different parts of the world. Such diversity helps both settlers and Americans to get along with each other more easily (Cullingford, 2014, p. 64). The owner of the store in which Eilis works for is an Italian who attempts to offer good services to all Americans.

When people come and they may even be Jewish or Irish or Polish or even colored. Our old customers migrate out to Long Island and we can't peruse them, so every week we need new customers. We treat everyone the same. We welcome every single



person who comes into this store. They all have money to spend. We keep our prices low and our manners high. If people like it here, they'll come back. You treat the customer like a new friend. Is that a deal?" (Toibin, 2009, p. 62).

1-3 Difference Between Irish diaspora in America and England

Another difference between Irish diaspora in America and England is that the Irish have settled more easily in America. Having more connections in American society, the Irish diaspora in America can help their new immigrants to settle in the United States. Father Flood persuades Eilis and her mother to live in America pursuing a comfortable lifestyle. He helps Eilis in getting an approval of her documents for migration. Her accommodation in Brooklyn at Mrs. Kehoe is also provided by Father Flood. She is given a good job opportunity with a bright future with the help of Father Flood's connections at Mr. Bartiucci's store (Toibin, 2009, p. 26).

When Miss Bartocci went to fetch the supervisor, Father Flood advised Eilis to take a look at the people working in the office. "Many of them started out like you, on the shop floor. And they did night classes and studied and now they're in the office. Some of them are actual accountants, fully qualified." (Toibin, 2009, p. 62)

Moreover, when the overwhelming feeling of homesickness distracted Eilis from her job, he financially supported her and enrolled her on accounting courses at college and suggested that keeping busy through studying is the solution to her problem (Toibin, 2009, p. 78). All in all, Americans welcomed Irish immigrants in the mid 20th century (Dolan, 2008, pp. 231-233). Irish immigrants also support each other through the communities that they had established.

2-Chronotope of Time in *Brooklyn*

In Bakhtin's term, chronotope of space and time are correlated with each other; such association can be evident in Eilis' letters. As discussed in previous section space plays an important role in the diasporic novel of *Brooklyn*. One aspect of analysis was the impact of having two worlds, spaces, created for the female protagonist due to her life in diaspora. The concept cannot be formulated unless Eilis travels through time.

Thus, chronotope of time is also of significance in literature of diaspora, as this case of study. Past plays an influential role in the novel and can function a chronotopic temporal role; a past that is always hunting the present. Chronotope of time investigates how Eilis lives in the mingling of past and present by remembering her past memories. Besides remembering past events, progression of time and its effects on Eilis' life is understandably a part of narrative in *Brooklyn*. Similar to space,



time is a crucial factor in everyday life of the people in diaspora. In diasporic fictions the role of time and space is significantly crucial since the protagonist's lives are changed physically, geographically, and mentally after migration. Hence, this study tries to show how Eilis is characterized during migration and settlement in the host country by analyzing progression of time from the beginning of the novel, part one, until the ending lines of part four.

2-1 The Past Remembering in *Brooklyn*

The special usage of time in the novel concretizes the action and events of the story. Such cases can be traced in the memories of Eilis from her past shown in her letter and thoughts. By analyzing the chronotope of time in the novel, the significant points in the life of the protagonist are highlighted. One of these issues worth consideration is Eilis' memories from Ireland and later from Brooklyn which hamper her to continue her life where she is (Young, 2014, p. 135).

Eilis travels back to the past during her initial stay in Brooklyn through her memories by imagining what her "Mammy" or "Rose" will do in a certain situation that she is encountering. She is attached to her past and has nostalgic feelings toward her hometown when thinking about her past (Stoddard, 2012, p. 160). It can be due to her lack of socialization in American society at the beginning of the novel. Although she works at Bartiucci's store, she tries to be isolated from having friends, attending dance balls or even having fun at Irish communities in Brooklyn. So, Eilis feels homesick despite her voluntary move to the United States. Memories from the past are mentioned several times throughout the novel. In different parts of *Brooklyn*, Eilis remembers her hometown, her sister, Rose, and her mother (Ladron, 2013, p. 280). From the beginning of her journey to America, Eilis revives memories of her family and tries to picture them clearly:

She had no idea how far she was under the sea except that her cabin was deep in the ship's belly. She knew that she would never be able to tell anyone how bad she felt when her stomach began dry heaves. She captured her mother standing at the door waving as the car took her and Rose to the railway station, the expression on her mother's face strained and worried, managing a final smile when the car turned down Friary Hill. (Toibin, 2009, p. 46)

Several factors trigger the memories of the past for Eilis. One of them is the letters which are sent and received between Eilis and her family. Eilis feels nostalgic when writing and reading the letters since they contain information reminding of the past. Through letters two geographical spaces are connected while time differs and they also refer to the Eilis memories, house, and family that she has left.



Eilis lives at Mrs. Kehoe's residence in Brooklyn where Irish cultural values are cherished. The place where someone lives affects his/her thoughts. It is as if she continues living in Ireland with different people while outside the house in Brooklyn. Such discrepancy paves the way for her lack of intimacy with the American society that welcomes diversity and tries to include all cultures and colors into the mainstream (Toibin, 2009, p. 55). The different qualities of living in Ireland and Brooklyn rekindle memories of the past. Climatic changes and cultural differences are among these subjects. Weather condition one of the matters that brings back her memories.

The morning was full of frenzy; she did not have peace to look around her for a moment. Everyone's voice was loud, and there were moments when in an early evening flash in October she felt she was walking down the prom in Enniscorthy with her mother, the glassy and full Slaney River, and the smell of leaves burning from somewhere nearby, and the sunlight went slowly and gently. (Toibin, 2009, p. 66)

Moreover, attending Irish ball dances and singing Irish songs on Christmas Eve are the instances in which past memories are flooded back to her life (Toibin, 2009, p. 87). Such memories do not refer to her family specifically but it indicates the communal feeling of being Irish in general. However, it is worth considering that the flashes of memories in Eilis' life do not stop while she returns home, Ireland. When Eilis visits Ireland in part four of the novel, she has become a modern American woman who is married to Tony in America. During her visit, she longs for Brooklyn, Tony, and her life in America (Toibin, 2009, p. 227).

She had so longed for the familiarity of these rooms that she had presumed she would be happy and relieved to step back into them, but, all she could do on this first morning, was count the days before she returned. It made her feel odd and guilty; in the bed she curled up and closed her eyes in the hope of sleeping. (Toibin, 2009, p. 213)

2-2 Progression of Time in *Brooklyn*

Progression of time and its significance throughout the novel can be another element which highlight the significance of the study of the chronotope of time in this novel. According to Bakhtin (1981), the impact of time in the progression of narration in the novel is of great influence in analyzing a literary text (p. 255). Such progression



is traced in four parts of the novel. Despite a few incidents changing the pattern of Eilis' attitude toward living in Brooklyn, her general tendency is that she prefers to live in Brooklyn as the novel advances further to the ending part.

Thus, through chronotope of time, Eilis' character and her struggling issues in the diaspora are shed light upon. Before Eilis' migration to the United States, her brother who has lived long in England mentions that there will be homesickness living away from home but the progression of time will heal her (Toibin, 2009, p. 40). Thus, it is anticipated from the beginning of the novel that as time advances towards the end of the novel she will overcome the homesickness and will settle in the host country despite hardships.

There is a trend of character development evident in *Brooklyn* as the narration progresses from chapter one until four. Part one of the novel focuses on Eilis and her family. It is mentioned that she is planning to move to Brooklyn since there are no proper job opportunities in Ireland (Young, 2014, p. 127). As soon as she boards on the ship, she misses home. She does not feel the sense of belonging in the United States yet working as a salesclerk, a job with good prospects and the future. Her nostalgic feeling in this part as discussed in the previous section can be a proof of her lack of settlement in the United States. However, as time goes by and things started to go more promising, with the help of Father Flood she attends college and tries to assimilate with American society:

She had never felt like this before in Brooklyn. The letter had lifted her spirits, given her a new freedom, she realized, and it was something she had not expected. She looked forward to showing it to Father Flood if he were at home and then, when she saw him the following night as arranged, to Tony, and then to writing home with the news. (Toibin, 2009, p. 162)

In part three, she realizes that in her initial stay in the United States, she was unaware of her surroundings and now she is living in the present while in parts one and two past memories were haunting her life (Young, 2014, p. 130). For instance, she understands that the same event, baseball games, did not attract her attention while she is cognizant of this year's games (Toibin, 2009, p. 169). Eilis' attachment to Brooklyn as her home and a place where her husband lives culminates in part four of the novel in which she leaves Ireland and a prospect of good husband and job and chooses to live in Brooklyn instead. Four parts of the novel can be interpreted as four stages of Eilis' life in which she assimilates more as she engages more in the mainstream and she starts living in the present with less and less memories haunting her life. Thus, as the narrative goes forward, with the progression of time, her attitude



toward her life in diaspora is changed. Needless to mention, Eilis' change from a timid girl to a modern woman does not happen suddenly and she has overcome difficulties throughout the years she lived in the diaspora. In the ending lines of the novel, Eilis mentions that she tries to imagine nothing more of her past memories.

3- *The Reflection of Real World*

The artist creates a world which connects the real/actual world and the complicated relations of the characters in the work of art (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 243). The close association between artistic creation and the actual world is reflected in *Brooklyn*. Bakhtin's chronotope (1981) is a proper vehicle for interpreting unites of time/ space as he believed that the world and the historical event outside and the text itself are in continuous interaction and dialogue (p. 253). The text is influenced by the truth represented in the actual world.

The author of the novel has created a fictional world and yet, there is an actual, direct, relation between the actual world and the world that the author creates. The context is embodied in an example which is Eilis' account can be associated with all her contemporaries going through the same situation. Given the cultural and social context of both countries from historical records, there are thousands of Irish people like Eilis who could not find appropriate job apt for their skills and have no choice but to leave their country. Moreover, as shown in the book, Irish diaspora in America are among the lucky immigrants in comparison to their peers in England due to several reasons which were mentioned in previous sections.

Conclusion

Brooklyn is a novel that offers an account of a female Irish protagonist in Brooklyn facing and tackling homesickness. With the help of chronotopes of space, geographical and cultural aspects of Eilis' home country and settled land and England as the host of her brothers' diaspora is compared and discussed in great details. Usage of time is presented as a significant factor in the novel which deals with flooding memories of Eilis' past creating displacement. Healing through the progression of time is also argued in this part. Although the basic categories of chronotopes (space and time) cover most of the novel's analysis, some details need to be investigated with the help of subcategories of road, encounter, threshold, and transformation which can reveal the diasporic features of the novel as adventure novel of everyday life. Many aspects are taken into consideration in this part of the discussion but mainly it is manifested how Eilis' journey on the ship can be considered a road chronotope which



is a result of different encounters such as Father Flood and it finally leads to Eilis' transformation from a timid Irish girl to a modern American woman. Finally, Eilis and her struggling condition are introduced as an emblem of the era and the social and cultural context that she was living in

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