NARRATIVE MODELLING OF HISTORICAL TIME AND THE ARTISTIC CHRONOTOPE IN NOAH GORDON'S «THE PHYSICIAN»

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Abstract. The article examines, from a narratological perspective, how the American writer Noah Gordon's novel «The Physician» (1986) models eleventh-century historical time and fuses it with fictional space into a chronotope. Drawing on M.M.Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, G.Genette's categories of narrative time and Yu.M.Lotman's concept of artistic space, the study distinguishes historical, biographical and cyclical layers of time in the novel. The chronotopes of London, the English roads, the caravan route, the Isfahan maristan and the Scottish hills are modelled as a chain of loss, road, threshold, initiation and return. Through the figure of Ibn Sina, the article reveals how Eastern and Western scholarly traditions meet in narrative time and how historical fact is subordinated to the fictional design.

Keywords: historical novel, chronotope, narrative time, road chronotope, threshold, initiation, Ibn Sina, Isfahan, Noah Gordon, narrative model.

In world literary scholarship, the historical novel is studied not only as a means of reconstructing the past but also as a form of artistic modelling of historical time. G.Lukács saw the defining feature of the historical novel in its ability to derive the thoughts and feelings of people of the past from the historical specificity of their age [9], while later scholars stress that the relation between historical fact and fiction in this genre is determined by the techniques of narration [6; 8]. Accordingly, the questions of how time is organised in the text of a historical novel, how it merges with space and how it is subordinated to the hero's destiny, that is, the problem of the chronotope, remain a relevant scholarly task.

«The Physician» by the American writer Noah Gordon (1926–2021) was published in 1986 by Simon & Schuster in New York [1] and later formed, together with «Shaman» and «Matters of Choice», the trilogy about the Cole family.

Although the novel did not achieve wide success in the United States, in translation it sold millions of copies in continental Europe, especially in Spain and Germany, and in 2013 it was adapted for the screen by director Philipp Stölzl under the title «Der Medicus» [15]. The novel is of particular significance for the Uzbek reader, since at the centre of its plot stands the figure of the great Bukharan scholar Abu Ali ibn Sina.

In Uzbek literary studies, the poetics of the chronotope has been treated theoretically by B.To'rayeva [5] and D.Quronov [4], while B.Bilir has analysed political chronotopes in Soviet Uzbek novels [12]. As regards Gordon's novel, an article by A.Khasanov and N.Abdullayeva examines the artistic interpretation of Ibn Sina's philosophical and medical-ethical views [3]. However, the narrative structure of the unity of historical time and artistic space in the novel has not yet been the subject of a dedicated study. The aim of this article is to identify the layers of historical time in «The Physician» and to describe its main chronotopes as an integrated narrative model.

The theoretical basis of the study is M.M.Bakhtin's essay «Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel». Bakhtin defined the chronotope as the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships artistically expressed in literature and distinguished such chronotopic types as the road, the encounter, the threshold, the castle, the provincial town and the idyll [11]. As Bakhtin observes, in the chronotope of the road the destinies of people from different social strata unexpectedly intersect, whereas the chronotope of the threshold is connected with crisis and the turning point of a life, where time seems to contract into an instant. This typology served as the principal analytical tool for the study of Gordon's novel.

To measure narrative time, G.Genette's categories of order, duration and frequency were applied [7]. These categories make it possible to determine the ratio between the chronology of events (story time) and the order in which they are presented in the text (discourse time). The semantic boundaries of artistic space and the hero's movement from one space to another were interpreted on the basis of

Yu.M.Lotman's theory of plot, according to which a plot event is the hero's crossing of the boundary of a semantic field [10]. P.Ricoeur's views on the relation between time and narrative [14] and L.Hutcheon's observations on the reworking of historical fact in literary texts [8] were used to explain the artistic configuration of historical time.

In Uzbek scholarship, D.Quronov defines the chronotope as a structural component of the literary work [4], while B.To'rayeva shows that the chronotope determines the depth of the hero's experience, the author's ideological purpose and the genre and plot features of a work [5]. The study employs comparative-historical, structural-semantic and narratological methods of analysis. The historical information in the novel was checked against sources on the life of Ibn Sina [2; 13].

A three-layer model of historical time

The analysis showed that time in the novel is not a uniform flow but consists of three intersecting layers. The first layer is **macro-historical time**, which covers the political and religious landscape of England, Byzantium and the Persian world in the first half of the eleventh century. In this layer, the backwardness of medicine in Christian Europe is contrasted with the scientific flourishing of the Islamic world. By introducing historical figures such as Ibn Sina and Ala ad-Daula, the ruler of Isfahan, into the plot, the writer anchors the story to real historical dates and events. Historically, Ibn Sina was born in 980 in the village of Afshona near Bukhara, spent roughly the last thirteen years of his life at the court of Ala ad-Daula in Isfahan and died in Hamadan in 1037 [2; 13]. The Isfahan period of the novel is placed precisely within this historical interval.

The second layer is **biographical time**, which spans more than twenty years of Rob J. Cole's life, from his becoming an orphan to his emergence as an experienced physician. This temporal layer follows the tradition of the Bildungsroman. The hero's growth runs parallel to historical change, so that personal maturation becomes a symbol of the movement of learning from East to West. The third layer is **cyclical-ritual time**, connected with the change of seasons, the stages

of the caravan route, religious rituals, the plague and the hero's ability to sense the approach of death. Rob's capacity to feel a patient's impending death by holding the patient's hands performs a special function of a «sense of time» in the novel. Within linear historical time, this gift constantly recalls the inevitable cycle of death.

In our view, the points where the three layers intersect form the most important plot nodes of the novel. For example, the capture of Isfahan by an enemy belongs to macro-historical time, the hero's flight from the city with his family belongs to biographical time, and the death of his teacher Ibn Sina marks the completion of a cycle, yet all three converge at a single point of the plot. This confirms the principle of «configuration» described by Ricoeur, according to which narrative gathers scattered events into a meaningful temporal whole [14].

The main chronotopes of the novel and their narrative function

The spaces of the novel are not mere background but chronotopes that carry a particular type of time. Their typological description is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Typology of the main chronotopes in «The Physician»

Chronotope	Character of time	Narrative function	Place in Bakhtin's typology
London, the carpenter's family home	Domestic family time, broken off by the parents' death	Initial loss, the impulse that sets the hero on the road	Broken idyll
The English roads (travels with Barber)	Adventure-everyday time, years given in summary	Apprenticeship, accumulation of professional and social experience	Road chronotope
Malmesbury, meeting with the Jewish physician	Short scenic time, a decisive moment	Birth of the goal, the way to Eastern learning opens	Encounter and threshold
Europe, Constantinople, the caravan route	Adventure time, danger and chance	Assumed identity, change of self, love encounter	Road chronotope, adventure time

Isfahan and the maristan	Rhythmic academic time, contact with historical figures	Initiation, scholarly maturation	City and space of learning
Military campaign, plague, secret dissection	Crisis time, face to face with death	Path to forbidden knowledge, the hero's trial	Threshold chronotope
The Scottish hills	Cyclical natural time, family and community life	Return, knowledge serving a new space	Restored idyll

Table 1 shows that the spatial structure of the novel follows the chain of loss, road, threshold, initiation and return. Although this chain is typologically similar to the monomyth of the hero's journey, Gordon fills it with historical concreteness. In each link, a change of space is accompanied by a change in the quality of time. In the London chronotope, time appears closed and stable, but the parents' death breaks it off abruptly. On the English roads, time is measured in years and is mostly given in summary, while on the caravan route danger and chance turn it into adventure time.

The meeting in Malmesbury is the novel's first threshold chronotope. The Jewish physician's account of the medical schools of the East determines the hero's entire later life. From the standpoint of Lotman's theory, this episode is the inner boundary the hero must cross to pass from the semantic field of the «barber-surgeon» to that of the «scholar-physician» [10]. The hero's concealment of his Christian identity and his assumption of the guise of a young Jew become the social and religious condition for crossing the spatial boundary. The motif of disguise therefore performs a chronotopic function in the novel, since entry into the Eastern space of learning is achieved at the cost of a temporary change of identity.

The Isfahan chronotope is the central and most extensive space of the novel. Here time is subordinated to the rhythmic order of learning, that is, to lectures, disputations, rounds of patients and examinations. The maristan, the hospital and medical school, becomes the space of the hero's initiation. The figure of Ibn Sina in

this space embodies historical time, uniting in his person the scholarly traditions of Bukhara, Khwarazm and Persia. In our view, Gordon depicts Isfahan as a future time that has not yet reached Europe. For the Western hero, the Eastern city is not the past but a stage of scientific progress that lies ahead. This approach differs from the exoticising orientalism of the nineteenth century and presents the East as a source of knowledge.

The episodes of the military campaign, the plague and the secret dissection of a body form the crisis chronotope. The dissection scene in particular is built as a threshold of forbidden knowledge. Bakhtin noted that in the threshold chronotope time leaves biographical continuity and is concentrated in an instant [11]. In Gordon's novel, too, these scenes are marked by a sharp slowing of narrative speed, so that the length of the text far exceeds the story time. In this way, the author impresses upon the reader the moral conflict inherent in the hero's scientific decision.

The final chronotope of the novel, the Scottish hills, represents a restored idyll. The hero finds medicine in London unchanged, which means that Western time has hardly moved during his absence. This contrast shows that the hero's inner time has run ahead of external historical time over the course of the journey. As a result, the knowledge acquired in the East begins to serve a remote corner of the West, and cyclical natural time sets the closing rhythm of the novel.

The organisation of narrative time

The results of the analysis based on Genette's categories are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Organisation of narrative time in the novel (based on G.Genette's categories)

Category	Manifestation in the novel	Artistic effect
Order	Mainly chronological narration beginning with the hero's childhood; retrospection appears as brief memories	Coherence and credibility of historical time

Duration	Years of travel and apprenticeship are rendered through summary and ellipsis; encounters, operations and moments of death are expanded into detailed scenes	Turning points stand out; the rhythms of adventure and psychological analysis alternate
Frequency	Episodes of sensing death, illness and treatment recur	Repetition creates a sense of cyclical time and works as a leitmotif
Focalisation	Mainly internal focalisation through Rob Cole	The historical period is perceived through personal experience

As Table 2 shows, chronological coherence prevails in the novel, which corresponds to the classical tradition of the historical novel. At the level of duration, however, the author creates a complex rhythm. Years of travel are summarised within a few chapters, while a single operation or encounter becomes a detailed scene. This unevenness is the artistic form of human time described by Ricoeur, in which calendar time is re-measured according to moments of vital significance [14].

As for the treatment of historical fact, it should be noted that Gordon at times subordinates historical time to artistic purpose. Critics have pointed out that eleventh-century life is depicted in the novel with varying degrees of historical accuracy and, in particular, that the diagnosis of appendicitis is an anachronism [16]. In our view, such departures can be assessed not as errors but as a deliberate technique of narrative modelling. The writer builds historical time not with documentary precision but on the logic of scientific progress intelligible to the modern reader. Hutcheon emphasised that historical fact always acquires meaning in a literary text through narrative [8], and Gordon's novel is an example of this principle within the popular historical novel.

The proposed narrative model

On the basis of these results, the narrative model of historical time and artistic chronotope in the novel can be described as follows. The model consists of three axes, the first representing macro-historical time, the second the hero's biographical

time and the third cyclical-ritual time. These axes intersect in five chronotopic links, namely loss, road, threshold, initiation and return. In each link, space determines the quality of time, and time determines the meaning of space. Isfahan, for instance, is the summit of Islamic learning on the macro-historical axis, the hero's scholarly maturation on the biographical axis, and on the cyclical axis a period that ends with the teacher's death and the fall of the city.

The scholarly significance of this model lies in the fact that it makes it possible to evaluate the popular historical novel not only in terms of plot or fidelity to historical truth but also in terms of how its layers of time are organised. The model can also be applied to the comparative study of other historical novels, including Uzbek historical novels devoted to the lives of such scholars as Ibn Sina, Beruni and Ulugh Beg.

First, historical time in Noah Gordon's «The Physician» consists of macro-historical, biographical and cyclical-ritual layers, and the points where they intersect form the main plot nodes of the work.

Second, the spaces of the novel correspond to Bakhtin's chronotopes of the broken idyll, the road, the encounter, the threshold and the restored idyll, and together they form a coherent narrative system in the chain of loss, road, threshold, initiation and return.

Third, the chronotope of Isfahan and the maristan is the ideological centre of the work, in which, through the figure of Ibn Sina, the Eastern scholarly tradition is interpreted as future time for the Western hero. This approach differs from the traditional orientalist interpretation.

Fourth, at the level of narrative time, chronological coherence is combined with an uneven rhythm of duration, and certain departures from historical fact serve as a deliberate means of artistic modelling.

The proposed model of three axes and five links can serve as a methodological basis for the comparative study of the artistic interpretation of historical time in world and Uzbek historical novels.

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