

## NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN'S SPATIAL EXPERIENCES: A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF THE CRONOS IN SELECTED NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION

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### ABSTRACT

Time and space possess an inherent interconnectedness in the formulation of a chronotope. This research presents a rigorous analysis of the temporal dimensions employed in *Tracks*, *The Reason for Crows*, and *No Turning Back*, aimed at elucidating the spatial experiences of Native American women within their specific temporal contexts. In his theoretical framework of the chronotope, Bakhtin identifies two distinct yet parallel spatio-temporal entities: adventure time-space and biographical time-space. The selected works demonstrate an organic amalgamation of both refined adventure and biographical time, as well as highly developed adventure and biographical space. Within this spatio-temporal framework, the characters are depicted not as active participants in expeditions, but rather as individuals leading lives of inaction. This paper develops a temporal axis in the selected Native American works and explores how these temporal sequences align with Bakhtin's concept of time in the Adventure Novel of Ordeal (ANO) chronotope.

**Keywords:** Native American, women's writing, chronotope, time, space, spatio-temporal

### INTRODUCTION

Space and place studies have been approached from multiple perspectives, often leading to the discarding of conventional critical modes of interpretation. The phenomenological approach, focusing on the "subjective experience" of place, is rooted in the revolutionary works of Bachelard and Poulet. These scholars developed their phenomenological understanding of the politics of place and space from impressionistic endeavors. Consequently, the "modified phenomenological approach" (Prieto 15) becomes useful in assessing our scientific understanding of the world and mind. Phenomenological analysis of place emphasizes the "embodied, environmentally constrained nature of human consciousness" (Prieto 15), deconstructing the mind-body dualism. However, because the phenomenological method is limited to the subjective experience of space and place, it lacks the ability to evaluate the socio-political dimensions of place and space.

Time and space possess an inherent interconnectedness in the formulation of a chronotope. This research presents a rigorous analysis of the temporal dimensions employed in *Tracks*, *The Reason for Crows*, and *No Turning Back*, aimed at elucidating the spatial experiences of Native American women within their specific temporal contexts. In his theoretical framework of the chronotope, Bakhtin identifies two distinct yet parallel spatio-temporal entities: adventure time-space and biographical time-space. The selected works demonstrate an organic amalgamation of both refined adventure and biographical time, as well as highly developed adventure and biographical space. The quintessential idiosyncrasies of the two spatio-temporal patterns intricately overlap in the selected works.

Adventure time-space is the spatio-temporal design where "the adventure happens," while biographical time-space is the design in which "the

characters are at home" (Beaton 64). Although Bakhtin does not explicitly distinguish between these two sets of spatio-temporalities, he offers an implicit distinction through contrasting schemes of action. Adventure time-space encompasses all activities occurring during the adventure, where the protagonist is "tested" in multifaceted ways before accomplishing the heroic mission (Beaton 67). In contrast, biographical time-space is marked by events that occur when "the characters are at home" (Beaton 64), depicting a life of inaction rather than active expeditions.

In the following section, I develop a temporal axis in the selected Native American works and explore how these temporal sequences align with Bakhtin's concept of time in the Adventure Novel of Ordeal (ANO) chronotope.

### **Literature Review**

In his seminal work *Spatiality*, Robert Tally describes multiple approaches to deciphering literary maps. According to Tally, the mapping of text involves "extracting bits of information, transferring such bits onto a spatial diagram, and then interpreting the resulting diagram" (108). Therefore, any effort to identify a map in a literary work must be undertaken systematically, utilizing one of the approaches he outlines.

In my present study, I employ Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope to decipher the literary maps in selected Native American fictions. Additionally, reading a literary text to identify specific geographical maps requires a systematic approach that targets elements helping to visualize the literary map more explicitly. Furthermore, such a reading "does not involve interpreting the literary text as a freestanding formal entity in itself" (Tally 108); rather, the map is constituted through the juxtaposition of the different constitutive elements of a narrative. It must also be noted that a literary map does not "explain the phenomenon, rather, it helps to identify a phenomenon that then needs to be explained" (Tally 109).

For instance, Franco Moretti's portrayal of the early nineteenth-century village, through the mapping of village stories, exemplifies how the mapping of literary texts is conducted. Moretti illustrates this through his analysis of Mary Mitford's *Our Village* (1824), where he discards the geospaces of the stories and develops his own map, marking significant events and characters. The village serves

as a centrifugal point, with all other elements and characters revolving around it. Moretti identifies a unique pattern in these stories during a country walk, where the narrator leaves the village to reach a destination and then returns home. The narrator undertakes these walks in different directions, revealing a concentric design. These circles eventually represent the essential "chronotope ... of village story" (Tally 109).

In contrast, Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope offers a different methodological framework to identify geographical maps in literary works. In this study, I employ Bakhtin's framework to identify textual spaces as presented by selected female fiction writers. I use chronotopic analysis to understand and identify the locations of Native American female characters in selected Native American fiction and to develop their generic division.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bakhtin's notion of chronotope has garnered significant scholarly attention since its introduction in "Buildingsroman" and later in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." The term's origin is notably ambiguous. In both essays, Bakhtin employs the term chronotope without providing a clear definition. Neil Bemong and Borghart argue that the absence of a "definitive definition" (5) has attracted substantial criticism. Bakhtin refrains from offering a precise working definition, allowing the concept to acquire "ever new related meanings" (Bemong & Borghart 5). However, this lack of a concrete definition does not diminish its importance. Bakhtin himself outlines four levels of significance for the term. Firstly, chronotopes are essential because they generate plots and narrative structures. Secondly, they serve as representational tools. Thirdly, they form the foundation for distinguishing generic forms. Lastly, chronotopes hold semantic significance (Bemong & Borghart 6). Bemong and Borghart assert that, despite its multilayered significance, the chronotope was primarily "designed as a contribution to genre theory" (8), a fact frequently acknowledged by Bakhtin in his essay.

In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin states that he borrows the term from Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity (84). Bakhtin clarifies that the "special" (84) meaning chronotope holds in the theory of relativity is not "important" (84) for his purposes; rather, he employs the term

metaphorically for literary critique (84). In this context, a chronotope is a metaphor that demonstrates the interconnectedness of space and time. This spatio-temporal framework artistically infuses into a literary work, providing it with a generic distinction from other works. Bakhtin asserts that the notion of chronotope is crucial for generic classification, but it is even more important for the delineation of the “image of man” (85) in a literary work.

In the present study, I aim to employ the notion of chronotope to identify the literary chronos of the selected works and to delineate the image of man as portrayed therein. Specifically, I have narrowed down the definition of ‘Man’ to the portrayal of Native American female characters in the selected literary works. Thus, I use the notion of chronotope to examine the temporal situatedness of Native American female characters as depicted in the selected works of contemporary Native American female fiction writers. Consequently, the term ‘image of man’ is replaced with the ‘image of Native American woman.’ According to Bakhtin, the image of man is intrinsically “chronotopic” (86). Here, Bakhtin borrows the notion of the chronotopic image of man from Kant. In the footnotes of “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin reveals that his usage of the concept of man as fundamentally chronotopic is borrowed from Kant. Nonetheless, Bakhtin’s application of the notion of chronotopicity differs from Kant’s.

Before delving into the differences between Kant’s and Bakhtin’s approaches to the chronotopicity of man in a literary work, it is pertinent to mention that both agree that chronotopicity contributes to the process of “artistic cognition” (85). The difference arises in their use for different forms of cognition. In Kant’s philosophical formulation, man’s location in space-time is a “transcendental” (86) form of cognition, whereas Bakhtin uses the notion to constitute “the most immediate reality” (85). Bakhtin’s usage of the chronotopic image of man aims to create a realistic portrayal of man within the textual world, a portrayal that is incomplete if sketched beyond the coordinates of space and time. According to Bakhtin, chronotope defines “a literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality” (243). In other words, the represented world and the real world establish a mutual relationship within a text. This interaction is developed, firstly, through the

distinctive configuration of time and space that serves as the constitutive ingredients of reality within the textual world, which is “conceptualized within the world itself” (62). Secondly, the chronotope also constitutes the relationship between “the imagined world and the real historical world” (62) through the intersection of the spatio-temporal axis. Such a relationship can only be established when the work under consideration is written or read.

In the additional notes to his essay in the 1973 edition, Bakhtin clarifies the previously ambiguous nature of the term chronotope. Here, Bakhtin offers a more concrete and functional definition, asserting that the chronotope is crucial to the “meaning” (250) of the narrative. In other words, the chronotope renders a narrative meaningful by acting as the pivotal point of its primary action. In this study, I utilize the chronotope as the “organizing center” (Bakhtin 250) to examine how the authors of selected Native American narratives construct and deconstruct their plots by identifying the spaces depicted in these works. My goal is to decipher the “meaning” (Bakhtin 250) of the spaces and places portrayed in the selected narratives. The chronotope possesses unique “representational importance” as it enables “the representability of events” (Bakhtin 250). This portrayal of reality is achieved through the “concreteness of time” within a “well-delineated spatial area” (Bakhtin 250). In this study, I employ chronotopic analysis to investigate how the selected female fiction writers depict time as “visible” (Bakhtin 251) and space as “charged” (Bakhtin 85).

Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope explores the relationship between “historical time and geographical space in literature” (Tally 56). It is important to note that the historical time Bakhtin references in his definition of the chronotope “is not the historical past in the sense of past centuries and historical remnants as such; it is the past of ‘creative historical time’, time as the dimension of man’s historical activity that shapes the natural and human world” (Steinby 114). Steinby suggests that Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope does not delineate the history of time but rather documents the historical development of the creative process. Similarly, the geographical space that Bakhtin mentions is the space where a particular event occurs; however, this space is not a passive entity but actively engages in the process of plot development. This dynamic role of space is a primary focus of my study.

Bakhtin was dissatisfied with the conventional assimilation of historical time and space in literature. Thus, he embarked on the chronotope project, which not only fuses space and time but also develops the historical poetics of literary works. Roderick Beaton asserts that the chronotope “provides a valid basis for a new historical poetics” (59). In other words, Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope is instrumental in developing the historical poetics of any novelistic tradition, as it offers the “possibility of tracing the history, not of individual novels or novelists, nor even of a genre, but of the poetics underlying all of these” (Beaton 59).

Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope addresses issues related to the representation of human experiences in language through the development of the history of the narrative. In my study, however, I do not focus on the historical development of Native American fiction; rather, I investigate the portrayal of space and place, illuminating the spatio-temporal experiences of the female characters. This approach aims to enhance readers’ understanding of how spatial and temporal sequences affect Native American women’s lived experiences.

Bakhtin’s dissatisfaction with the representation of historical time and space in literature motivated him to devise a generic classification technique “for reflecting and artistically processing such appropriated aspects of reality” (84). Given that dramatic activity in a plot requires specific places and times, it was necessary to develop a strategy to map such activities within the time-space praxis. To address this, Bakhtin coined the term chronotope, which refers to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Borrowing the term from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, Bakhtin employed it as a theoretical tool for literary criticism, designating it as a “constitutive category of literature” (84). In chronotopic analysis, Bakhtin emphasizes the interconnectedness of time and space in any literary text, arguing that in the “literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (84). These spatial and temporal indicators function similarly to markers on a map, though they are multidimensional and serve a range of purposes beyond mere location identification.

Bakhtin also asserts that individual time and space sequences form a larger spatio-temporal axis, which bestows uniqueness upon a literary work. These spatio-temporal coordinates not only shape the literary work but also enhance its metaphorical and symbolic meanings through the intersection and synthesis of time and space indicators. According to Bakhtin, a chronotope defines a literary text’s artistic coherence in relation to reality. In his work, *The Dialogic Imagination*, he theorizes the chronotope as a tool for mapping the spatio-temporal sequences of a literary text. Bakhtin illustrates his stance by delineating the chronotopes of road narratives in historical novels, castle narratives of the Gothic era, and parlor and salon narratives in Balzacian novels. He attributes a novelistic compositional status to these spatio-temporal sequences, as they are not randomly organized but are consciously crafted and emphasized indicators that influence the overall story by revealing the character, notions, and emotional status of the protagonist. In these multidimensional chronotopes:

The graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical and everyday time are concentrated and condensed; at the same time they are intertwined with each other in the tightest possible fashion, fused into unitary markers of the epoch. The epoch becomes not only graphically visible [space], but narratively visible [time] (Bakhtin 247).

In other words, a chronotope is the locus of a narrative, functioning as the intersection of time and space sequences to shape an epoch in its spatio-temporal edifice. The constitution of a chronotope is not limited to roads, castles, and salons; rather, individual writers create their own chronotopes to present a “materialized history” (Bakhtin 247) of the contemporary era. Bakhtin also highlights the chronotopes in Dostoevsky’s and Tolstoy’s works. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s narratives are filled with explicit threshold chronotopes, where time and space intertwine to evoke the spirit of ancient public squares. However, Dostoevsky’s chronotopes are not confined to thresholds; he constructs an array of complex and multifaceted chronotopes. On the other hand, Tolstoy’s chronotopes are based on “biographical time” (Bakhtin 249), where crises, disappointments,

encounters, and renewals occur within the framework of biographical time. In addition to biographical time chronotopes, Tolstoy experiments with the chronotopes of nature and family (Bakhtin 250).

### **The Cronos of the Selected Literary Works**

To develop the chronos of the selected literary works, this study examines the parallels and distinctions in the use of adventure-time in the ANO and the selected texts. Before embarking on a comparative analysis of these distinct adventure-times, it is pertinent to note that while ANO and the selected works share structural similarities, they differ thematically. As previously mentioned, ANO depicts the perilous journeys of two lovers, whereas the selected literary works focus on the protagonist's struggle to achieve a personal quest.

ANO begins with the "sudden flareup" of passion between the hero and heroine and concludes with their "successful union in marriage" (Bakhtin 89). The plot structure of these novels is framed by two "poles of plot movement," the beginning and the denouement, with the action unfolding between these two points (Bakhtin 89). These events are crucial in establishing the plot structure and bear "biographical significance" (Bakhtin 89). However, Bakhtin argues that while these two points are significant, the plot is not structured around them per se. Instead, the plot is constructed around what lies "between" (Bakhtin 89) these points. According to Bakhtin, removing "that which takes place between them" would make it appear "as if absolutely nothing had happened between these two moments" (Bakhtin 89). In ANO, the two adjacent moments—one of biographical life and one of biographical time—are separated by "the gap, the pause, the hiatus" (Bakhtin 89). This hiatus, which occurs between contiguous biographical instants, constitutes "the entire novel" (Bakhtin 89). In ANO, this hiatus "lies outside biographical time" (Bakhtin 89) and does not affect the protagonist's life, being termed "extratemporal" because it does not alter the "biographical time-sequence" (Bakhtin 89).

Conversely, the plot of the selected literary works begins with the protagonist's unexpected realization that she exists at the intersection of two worlds and must protect her own from encroaching Euro-American spatio-cultural advances. The narrative concludes with the protagonist's failure to safeguard her people and land. Although the action in these works also unfolds between two

biographical moments, the hiatus, which constitutes the adventure-time, is not extratemporal. Instead, it is intricately woven into the biographical time sequence. This hiatus affects the protagonist's life and reveals the reasons for her ultimate failure. In other words, the two biographical moments are influenced by the events occurring between them. The actions that fill the hiatus in the selected literary works are not mere "digressions from the normal course of life" (Bakhtin 90) as in ANO; rather, they constitute the real duration of time and add significant depth to the biographical time sequence. The selected literary works are structured around "elementary biological or maturational duration" (Bakhtin 90). Unlike the protagonist of ANO, characters such as Fleur, Polingaysi, and Kateri age throughout their narratives. For instance, Fleur begins as a young unmarried girl "about seventeen years old" (Erdrich 3) and ends at twenty-nine with a ten-year-old daughter. Polingaysi, initially portrayed in early childhood, returns to her Hopi village as a retired schoolteacher by the novel's end. The Reason for Crows documents Kateri's life over twenty-four years. The authors of these novels utilize real time to document the individual quests of these characters, integrating "natural, everyday cyclicality" (Bakhtin 91). This cyclicality is based on the "temporal order and indices on a human scale, tying it to the repetitive aspects of natural and human life" (Bakhtin 91). Consequently, the adventure-time in the selected literary works is marked by indications of "historical time" (Bakhtin 91). For instance, Tracks details Fleur's journey to Argus in the summer of 1913, and The Reason for Crows traces Kateri's life from her baptism in 1676 to her death in 1680. These examples illustrate that, unlike ANO, the actions in the selected literary works are integrated into the framework of "historical," "biographical," "biological," and "maturational" time sequences (Bakhtin 91). Furthermore, while actions in ANO "lie outside these sequences" (Bakhtin 91), the selected works' actions are interwoven into these temporal patterns, functioning within the rules and conventions of these time sequences. The inherent forces within these temporal cycles alter everything within their sphere, including the spatial patterns of the characters' environments. In ANO, the hiatus, or "empty time" (Bakhtin 91), "leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing" (Bakhtin 91). In contrast, the selected literary works provide detailed temporal successions, and the

extratemporality of the hiatus is diminished. The plot structure of *Tracks* revolves around temporal sequences and Fleur's actions during her adventure, while *The Reason for Crows* documents Kateri's quest for religious enlightenment, and *No Turning Back* details Polingaysi's educational and professional career.

Furthermore, the type of adventure time depicted in ANO is "composed of a series of short segments that correspond to separate adventures" (Bakhtin 91). In these segmented time sequences, time is organized from "without" (Bakhtin 91), whereas in the selected novels, time is organized from within and presented as a continuous and uninterrupted flow that aligns with its natural and historical context. The authors of the selected works portray temporal sequences either by indicating them at the beginning of each chapter, as seen in *Tracks*, or by providing a chronological inventory at the beginning or end of the novel, as demonstrated in *The Reason for Crows*. This synchronization of time during both biographical moments and adventure time results in an overarching temporal pattern that unifies the plot structure. As there are no distinct time segments and time is unified, the plots of these selected novels lack the temporal intersections that are integral to ANO.

In ANO, temporal transitions are introduced through specific linking words such as "suddenly" and "at just that moment" (Bakhtin 92), which represent "random contingency" (Bakhtin 92). Bakhtin explains that random contingency includes "chance simultaneity [meetings] and chance rupture [non-meetings], that is, a logic of random disjunctions in time as well" (Bakhtin 92). Thus, in ANO, the role of chance is crucial and decisive for plot development. Bakhtin asserts that "should something happen a minute earlier or a minute later, that is, should there be no chance simultaneity or chance disjunctions in time, there would be no plot at all, and nothing to write a novel about" (Bakhtin 92).

Conversely, chance encounters and non-encounters do not overshadow the plot development in the selected works. Adventure time in these novels encompasses a broader scope where it is not as decisive or fatal as portrayed in ANO. This section presents instances from the selected works to illustrate how chance becomes subordinate to the role of place and space. For example, Fleur's and Nanapush's meeting does not occur by chance;

rather, Pukwan and Nanapush are officially tasked with finding families "swept down" (Erdrich 2) by illness. Fleur's journey to Argus is purposeful, aimed at earning money to reclaim her ancestral lands. Her arrival in Argus is a deliberate choice, knowing she would find employment in the city. Additionally, Fleur's consistent winnings of exactly one dollar each night at Kozka's Meats are not the result of fate but of her skill in the card game (Erdrich 21). The three men who lose to Fleur subsequently plan an attack on her, culminating in her assault at Kozka's Meat (Erdrich 24). Similarly, the storm that hits Argus after the fatal incident is described as "a fair-minded disaster, no one could be said to have suffered much more than the next, except for Kozka's Meat" (Erdrich 29). Pauline, one of the narrators, argues that the disaster is not a mere accident but the result of Fleur's magical powers (Erdrich 12). Following this, Fleur returns to her family cabin near Matchimanito Lake, where she meets her future husband Eli Kashpaw. This meeting is not a matter of chance; Eli is guided by Fleur's magical powers into the trees "which speak a cold language that overfills (...) brain" (Erdrich 42). Fleur's revenge against Clarence Morrissey and Boy Lazarre for their cruelty is also not a matter of luck but a consequence of her physical strength and magical abilities. The betrayal at the end of the novel occurs not out of sheer chance but because Fleur intentionally declines to visit the Agent to deposit the money, feeling "newly cheerful, trusting, drained from the work" (Erdrich 191). Nector and Margaret's visit to the Agent ends with a dispute, and Margaret, a shrewd woman, ultimately ensures that the money is placed on the Kashpaw parcel (Erdrich 191).

Kateri's aspirations for Christianity are not the result of a chance encounter with Father Lamberville but are inherited from her mother. Her baptism and subsequent journey are the results of carefully considered plans. Glancy allows the plot to evolve according to its own temporal patterns rather than through random occurrences. Similarly, the episodes depicting Kateri's life in Sault Ste. Marie are not driven by chance but reflect the normal course of an individual caught between her Mohawk religion and Christianity.

Similarly, *No Turning Back* chronicles Polingaysi's life from childhood to her retirement in a chronological manner. Polingaysi's decisions to join Bahana's school, visit the Sherman Institute, and

study religion are significant to the plot but are not governed by chance.

Bakhtin contends that “chance is but one form of the principle of necessity and as such has a place in any novel, as it has its place in life itself” (Bakhtin 97). Therefore, an outright rejection of the element of chance or fate in the selected fiction would be a critical oversight. Nevertheless, even if chance plays a role in these works, its influence is minimal compared to its role in ANO.

The examples from Erdrich’s *Tracks*, Glancy’s *The Reason for Crows*, and Polingaysi’s *No Turning Back* demonstrate that adventure time and biographical time in these novels are interconnected and intricately woven into the plot structure. The protagonists’ adventure and biographical lives are presented within a limited series of temporal sequences. In contrast, ANO features an infinite series of adventures that “can be extended as long as one likes; in itself it has no necessary internal limits” (Bakhtin 94). Thus, while the plots in ANO are longer due to their boundless adventures, the selected works adhere to a strict temporal pattern with a limited number of adventures. The days, hours, and moments of biographical and adventure time are juxtaposed in a “real time series,” reflecting both natural and historical life (Bakhtin 94).

### **Conclusion**

In ANO, 'chance' governs all moments of adventure-time and assumes a “specific initiative” (Bakhtin 97). The protagonist is rendered powerless, lacking control over the plot's development. In contrast, the protagonists of the selected works merely act as physical entities; the ‘initiative’ resides within the space and place themselves. Although the protagonists in these works experience both adventure and biographical time, they are not characterized as “adventuristic persons” (Bakhtin 95). Instead, the spaces and places they inhabit possess the power to instigate temporal sequences or plot movements, positioning the characters as mere instruments within the overarching spatial framework.

Bakhtin contends that ANO features numerous adventures, each structured around “individual motifs that are included as constituent elements in novelistic plots” (Bakhtin 97). While the selected literary works also present multiple motifs, these motifs are not centered around any single

adventure. Instead, they are intricately integrated into the spatial unity of the novels. The selected authors depict motifs such as loss/recovery, union/separation, construction/destruction, and victory/defeat. However, these motifs function not as central elements of the plot but as background features within the spatial patterns that subsequently influence the protagonists' actions.

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