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**Bakhtin's Chronotope in Hisham Matar's
Autobiography *The Return* (2016)**

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Dedication

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Abstract

In the analysis of literary works, *Time* and *Space* are two important concepts to remember. These two concepts were studied separately because they were unrelated. To find out the word 'Chronotope', Mikhail Bakhtin believed they were equivalent and related. The aim of this research is to examine and apply the chronotope theory to Hisham Matar's autobiography *The Return (2016)* which is likely to become a classic. Since the concepts of *Time* and *Space* are discussed differently in various works of literature depending on the literary movement and genre to which the work belongs, the perception of these two significant elements has evolved from antiquity to contemporaneity. Understanding the temporal and spatial connections in the memoir requires a chronotopic reading of *The Return*. Thus, the present study emphasizes the value of the chronotope as a medium for depicting experience, memory, history and culture.

Keywords: literary theory, chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Return* (2016), space-time relations

Table of Contents

General Introduction.....	1
Chapter one: Theoretical Background and Socio-historical Context	
1. Space and Time.....	4
1.1.Definitions.....	4
1.2.Space and Time in Literature.....	6
2. Mikhail Bakhtin and the Theory of the Chronotope.....	10
2.1.Bakhtin as a Russian Literary Theorist.....	10
2.2.Chronotope in Literature.....	12
2.3.Key Elements of the Chronotope.....	14
2.4.The Chronotope as an Analytical Tool.....	16
2.5.Types of the Chronotope.....	19
3. Bakhtin’s Chronotope in the Autobiography Novel.....	23
3.1.Ancient Autobiographies and Biographies.....	24
3.2.The Chronotope in the Contemporary (Auto) Biographical Novel.....	29
4. Socio-historical Context.....	30
4.1.The social and historical factors of writing <i>The Return (2016)</i>	30
Chapter Two: Bakhtin’s Chronotope in Hisham Matar’s Autobiography <i>The Return</i>	
1. Introduction to Matar’s Autobiography <i>The Return</i>	34
2. Space and Time in Hisham Matar’s <i>The Return</i>	37
3. The Connection Between the Main Characters and the Chronotope.....	40
3.1. Hisham Matar as an ‘author creator’.....	40
3.2.Jaballah Matar and Spatio-Temporal Markers.....	42

Conclusion.....45

Works Cited.....46

General Introduction

Of all possible, indispensable components that form major parts of our lives, the concept of Space and Time raised and is still raising debate among experts in the field. Testifying *where* things are and *when* things take place is no longer a distinct topic of analysis, but rather a dichotomy that is discussed as a single entity. Hence, the inseparability of Space-Time continuum has been brought about from the ancient convention that the latter should be analyzed one at a time, when in fact, in attempts to reach a thorough understanding of a situation, asking ‘where’ events took place is inevitably accompanied by a question of ‘when’ they may have occurred; this fact emphasizes the absolute interrelatedness of Space and Time. This has been strongly agreed upon by a growing number of scholars, including Milford A. Jeremiah. In his article ‘*The Use of Place in Writing and Literature*’, Pr. Jeremiah explained the concept of *Place* in relation to other elements such as time, events, etc. On this basis, he suggested that, “Place is usually combined with time and events to establish what is known as the social setting or the social context of a literary work” (23).

Apart from its scientific significance basically produced by Einstein, the Space-Time issue has taken a new turn by the course of time, diverting its major principles from Physics to Literature. Specifically speaking, with the emergence of Modernism and Contemporary writing. Mikhail Bakhtin, the well-known Russian literary theorist and philosopher, has equally introduced the spatial-temporal dimension into the *novel* as a special literary genre, which has been since treated ‘chronotopically’ depending on the characters, the type of the novel, and the style of the author. Therefore, *The Chronotope* is a literary term which can have a significant impact on plot structure. Blommaert and De Fina explain this saying, “We will give the name chronotope [literally ‘time space’], to the intrinsic connections of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (4).

Mikhail Bakhtin, in turn, supports the above explanation in his famous essay ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel’, claiming that “Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope” (84). Undoubtedly, the implementation of chronotope in novels, particularly autobiographies, does not only give body to the events of the plot but more importantly, it gives sense to the author’s overall experience. Accordingly, my present research will be on a chronotopic analysis of *The Return*, an autobiographical text by the Libyan author Hisham Matar in quest for his missing father.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the concept of chronotope can be applied to literary works and how it can be used as a determining tool in autobiographies to represent one’s experience, in this case, Hisham Matar’s *The Return*. Simultaneously, this study attempts chiefly to address the following questions: 01) To what extent can we find Bakhtin’s chronotope in Hisham Matar’s novel? 02) How does the author apply time-space in order to express his internal conflict? 03) How do space and time affect the construction of the author’s personality besides the characters and the plot? 04) Can we confirm the fact that the chronotope has a direct impact in shaping the events as well as the experience of the author? In conducting the present study, what can be hypothesized is whether or not the concept of chronotope is fully capable of defining what a character experiences in specific time periods and in certain locations. Thus, serving our main objective of bringing attention to the significance of the chronotope in understanding contemporary writing.

The following are the primary reasons for working on this novel: first, Hisham Matar is an Arab novelist who writes in English and is passionate about discussing the Arab Spring. Second, *The Return* is his latest works depicting his real journey in search of his father, which is the case of most Arab sons who lost their fathers in the midst of hopeless revolutions. As a

result, it is one of those once-in-a-lifetime books that deserves more than a cursory glance in a single sitting. Last but not least, it happens that I am interested in reading and reviewing works of art, mostly bookish ones, which is why I have been given legitimacy to dive into the deepest lines of this novel and explore one of its most comprising elements: Time and Space.

In my investigation of this topic, I shall primarily rely on the original work of Hisham Matar *The Return*, in addition to Bakhtin's essay *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel*, which mainly addresses the concept of Chronotope and its defining elements. Moreover, I will be using other secondary resources such as books, articles, dictionaries, and other online websites. This dissertation will objectively analyze the theory of chronotope and attempt to account for its effectiveness on contemporary works following an analytical methodology.

Accordingly, the present paper will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will serve as a backbone for my research as it contains the historical background of the study. Notably, it will define the nature of *Space*, *Time*, and their significance in various fields including science and literature. It will also demonstrate the Bakhtinian theory of the literary *chronotope*, how it serves as an analytical tool, its basic elements, its major types and how can I apply them on my targeted text, *The Return*, from Bakhtin's own perspective about autobiographies. The second chapter, on the other hand, will introduce the writer, Hisham Matar, alongside his contemporary autobiography-memoir *The Return*, highlighting its events and characters in a chronotopic study. Depending on the research's main questions, the second chapter will show how the link between Matar's space and time and the Bakhtinian chronotope is formed, based on the possible types of chronotope found in the novel.

Chapter one: Theoretical Background and Socio-historical Context

The first chapter focuses on the various approaches used in literature to analyse space and time before Bakhtin's chronotope was implemented, as well as the use of his modern method in studying temporal and spatial references. As a result, it gives meanings for the two concepts (space and time), their significance in literary works and the different approaches to analyse them in this context. It looks at the various meanings a chronotope can have in contemporary writings, with a focus on autobiographical chronotope, specifically Hisham Matar's autobiography *The Return*.

1. Space and Time

1.1 .Definitions

Space and Time are two main characteristics that help people make sense of their surroundings by providing an interpretation of various events and significant phenomena. (Cresswell). Couclelis claims (1999), "Space-Time analysis seeks to answer questions of both "Where" and "When" (as well as why to some extent) things occur, but the meanings of these words can vary greatly" (qtd. in An et al 2). As Peuquet (qtd. in An et al 2) pointed out," Space and Time have twelve and twenty nine separate definitions respectively in Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary." In this respect," When can be defined as relative to another event (Time between earthquakes), the time that it takes an event to occur (Length of an earthquake), the time on the clock at which an earthquake occurs, or cyclicity related to repetition, sequentiality, or pattern over time of aftershocks" (Van Fraasen). Moreover, time is defined in Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary as "What is measured in minutes, hours, days, etc" (Time). In other words, time is what clocks measure, the concept of time is used to place events in sequence, one after the other, to compare the duration of an event and to tell when

an event happens, those are three key features of time (Dowden). Newton (1686) said, "Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without regard to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent and common time, is some sensible and external measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time". (qtd. in Schevchenko and Tokarevsky3).

On the other hand, space is defined in Oxford University Press Dictionary as "amount of an area or a place that is empty and available for use" (Space). When discussing this concept, Britannica Online Encyclopaedia mentions that there are two points of view. The first is that space is a mathematical representation of an infinite number of different special relations, but the opposing viewpoint is that space is an individual entity, and truths about the universe do not always agree with what is measured. That is, Newton (1686) observed that space is always similar and immovable without considering any external factors. Yet, Van Fraassen (1970) believes that space can be defined as the coordinates of an object or the distance between objects (qtd. in An et al 2).

Scholars from various fields have studied space and time because they are two essential substances in understanding everything that happens around us. Consequently, not only each scholar's understanding of space and time differ, but also their opinion about whether they should be examined together separately. In working with spatio-temporal perception, geographical models of the physical environment have historically supposed a two dimensional structure of grid, neglecting both time as a main concern and the integrated space-time conceptualization (Raper and Livingstone). Until the Mid Twentieth century, geographers carried on with the tradition of Darwin, Ritter and others focussing only on places in their conducted researches; they viewed time and space as two different categories within which all activity occurs instead of considering them as two interrelated notions, Their views were based on the ideas of Kant and his fellow philosophers (An et al 3). Hartshorne

also saw that history addresses changes in time while geography addresses differences in space (Cresswell). Scientists in spatial science as Christaller and Thunen neglected time or considered it as a function of spatial variables as distance, transportation costs, etc (An et al 3). On the other hand, Hagerstraand (1970) with the rise of time geography studies noted that:” We need to better understand what it means for a location to have not only space coordinates but also time coordinates “(qtd. in An et al 3). Besides, Einstein emphasized the inseparability between space and time in saying that “when forced to summarize the general theory of relativity in one sentence: Time, space and gravitation have no separate existence from matter” (Albert Enstein Site online, 2012). In this regard, Peuquet stated that Newton confirmed that an absolute framework is constituted by time and space through which objects move and the framework itself does not change (qtd. In An et al 2).

This tension gave birth to wealthy discussions on the perception of space and time, the relationship between them and the different approaches to analyse them in physics, psychology, philosophy, mathematics, cognitive science, geography, linguistics and literature, of course, is not an exception; seeking answers to the different questions about these two notions and clarification to some blurry visions about them.

Obviously, the study’s main emphasis is not on all those perceptions, but rather on the literary one.

1.2. Space and Time in literature

Space and time are two important aspects of life in the universe. They have been a source of perplexity to many thinkers through time due to their elusive meaning. In addition, because of the advancement in technology and various researches within astronomy and geography, the perception of space and time in real life witnessed different changes (Frederiksen 8). When it comes to literature, “literary time can be one-dimensional and poly-

dimensional, dynamic and static, compressed and prolonged in a literary piece” (Panasenko 69). Literary time varies from real time thanks to foreshadowing and flashback; in this respect, Panasenko pointed out that “Literary time is displayed in a specific way in accordance with literary trend, genre, individual author’s style, type of a text” (69). In other words, there is a strong connection between literary time and plot development in different types of literary texts (Panasenko 69). Moreover, Frederiksen stressed the necessity of the presence of time in a novel by creating a timeline for the plot progression; whereas, the spatial references establish a background for the plot. In addition, time and space are regarded as important components that influence the rest of the literary tools of the work such as: plot, theme, etc (5).

On the other side, it is generally agreed on that space and time belong to different fields of study as: philosophy, biology, art and humanities researches. Furthermore, some researchers believe that the novel or the cultural product is a model or exposition of time and space in a wider understanding of language and discourse (Gildersleeve and Mckean). Susan Sontag claims:

There is an old riff I’ve always imagined to have been invented by some graduate student [...] late one night, who had been struggling through Kant’s abstruse account in his *Critique of Pure Reason* of the barely comprehensible categories of time and space, and decided that all of this could be put much more simply. It goes as follows: ‘Time exists in order that everything doesn’t happen all at once... and space exists so that it doesn’t all happen to you.’ By this standard, the novel is an ideal vehicle both of space and time (214-15).

In this regard, Taylor viewed that literature should not be an escapist from responsibility stating that” The space and time in literature are space and time” (qtd. in Gildersleeve and Mckeane).

Literature is the art of written works. Thus, when discussing art; we are talking about perception. Perception begins in space and time; consequently, artists have made space and time their subject in different ways (Cook 1). To illustrate this, the Russian sculptor, Naum Gabo thought that Einstein’s theory of relativity had the power to revitalize his work (Cook 1).Then, Henderson records Naum’s impressions:” Space and time are reborn to us today... The realization of our perceptions of the world in the forms of space and time is the aim of our pictorial and plastic art” (qtd. in Cook 3). Besides, scholars-art critics claim that issues of space and time as they are raised in a literary text, can be summarized in three aspects. The first one is ontological, in which every piece of art gets into a spatial-temporal continuum that everything material exists in reality. The second one is literary-gnoseological which is the reflection by art as a special means of world cognition, its spatial and temporal relations and reflection of these relations in accordance with specific character and literary development of the world; the last one is psychological, when the man meditate the artwork whether it is a film, a play or a text, when during a short period of time the viewer could run through together with a character days, months, years, etc (qtd. in Panasenko 69-70).

Since the word “narrative” appears in literature, it is critical to shed light on it. As White puts it,” far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (64). That is, “narrative is a construct created in a suitable medium (speech, writing, images) that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events” (Staskievics 6). According to Lothe, a narrative presents a chain of events which are situated in time and space (Lothe). In

Wikipedia, a narrative is a story: an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded and by human personality; but in literature, the simplest way to define narrative is “a series of events in specific order with a beginning, middle and an end (Staskievics 7).

In this context, talking about narratives drives us to talk about novels. “A novel offers either a direct or indirect description of places, situating the reader in a kind of imaginary space and provides readers with points of references by which they can orient themselves” (Fredriksen 10). In discussing literary time, Turayeva (1986) singles out its characteristics as follows: monomeasurement, polimeasurement, dynamic nature, diversity of directions and some others; Domashnieve (1989) names such peculiarities as:” time contraction”, which is a technique under which events of several generations are given in their frame of one work, and “time stretching out” in which events are demonstrated during one hour, one day, twenty four hours within the whole epic work; thus, the author should put in mind that one of the most essential properties of a literary text is the temporal orientation of the narrative (Penasenko 70). Many other scholars also contributed in the development of the study of literary time as:V.V.Ivanvo, D.Likhanchov, H.Meyerhoff and many others (Penasenko 70).

There was a major turn in the perception of time and space in literature; this was so radical and noticeable, as scholars claimed, and led to the formation of a basis for a new era in literary culture (Fredriksen 8). Robert.T.Tally introduced a new concept called the “spatial turn”, which refers to a moment of time when literary studies experienced an increase in spatial and geographical vocabulary (Fredriksen 8). According to him, the focus before was only on time, history and teleological development and space was neglected (Tally 12-13). Therefore, the new concept “the spatial turn” refers to the newfound interest exploration of space as well as time and their representation in literary works; thus, new spatial theories were discovered to represent a return to an equal footing between space and time when analysing

fiction (Fredriksen 8). In other words, both space and time are considered to be of equal importance when analysing a literary text; as a result, relations between spatial references and temporal indicators is what serves as a guide for the reader's understanding (Fredriksen 9).

Tally mentioned the work of Mikhail Bakhtin who is the main theoretician within this field of spatio-temporal research, as “the greatest study ever written on space and narrative, and it doesn't even have a single map” (Tally 5). Besides, Panasenko described Bakhtin as the one “ who has not only made a detailed analysis of literary time texts belonging to different genres, but has introduced the term ‘chronotope’, which he understands as a formal substantial category of literature” (Panasenko70).

In order to understand Bakhtin's chronotope, it is necessary to firstly know what are the terms he presented and published; as well as clarifying his definition to the concept of space and time in literature since they provide a new perspective of the chronotope which is the primary focus of this research.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin and the Theory of the Chronotope

2.1. Bakhtin as a Russian literary theorist

Mikhail Bakhtin, in full Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, (born in November 17, 1895, Orel, Russia- died in March 07, 1975, Moscow, U.S.S.R) was a Russian literary theorist and philosopher of language whose wide-ranging ideas significantly influenced western thinking in cultural history, linguistics, literary theory and aesthetics. After graduating from the University of [St. Petersburg](#) (now St. Petersburg State University) in 1918, Bakhtin taught [high school](#) in western [Russia](#) before moving to [Vitebsk](#) (now Vitsyebsk, Belarus), a cultural centre of the region, where he and other [intellectuals](#) organized lectures, debates, and concerts. There, Bakhtin began to write and develop his critical theories.

Because of Stalinist censorship, he often published works under the names of friends such as P.N. Medvedev and V.N. Voloshinov. These early works include *Freydism* (1927; *Freudism*), *FormalnyMetod V literaturovedeni* (1928; *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*). Bakhtin is especially known for his work on the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky which he published under his own name before he was arrested [...] (qtd. in Augystyn).

Having a remarkable impact by introducing several theories on various levels, Bakhtin was considered an influential 20th century critic, whose works inspired scholars in many disciplines including: Linguistics, Political and Social Theory, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, and even Psychology. The fact that he was born in Orel, Russia, made it possible for Bakhtin to join the Russian Formalists; a school of literary criticism that emphasized the functional role of literary devices. Although Western academic circles have become familiar with the intellectual work of Mikhail Bakhtin only a decade after his passing in 1975, his influence is still impossible to overlook in our present times.

Bakhtin witnessed the time when *The Novel* was a relatively emerging form of writing having only been in existence for a couple of centuries where, on the other hand, various forms including the *poem*, the *epic* and the *play* had already existed for thousands of years. As a matter of fact, both novels and the above forms of literature were analysed in the exact same way by many literary scholars. Although that may be true, it was respectively not what Bakhtin had adopted. In fact, he claimed that the novel is a much more complex concept and should therefore be treated differently. For this reason, he subsequently developed his theory in '*Forms of time and the Chronotope in the novel*' which is mostly concerned with the evolution of different variations of the novel in Europe. In the above-mentioned essay, Bakhtin proposed multiple literary devices by which novels can be analysed, those devices are: The Carnival, Heteroglossia, Polyphony, Voice, Dialogism, Monologism, Addressivity,

and the Chronotope. (Bat). Such terms are considered to be his most important works referring to his central theories. On a wider scope, ever since those terms entered the domains of arts, humanities, and social sciences, they have been widely used as a lexicon of field by many scholars as well as literary critics (Ladousa). Similarly, it is important to note that the works of Bakhtin received a systematic scholarly attention; which gave value to his theory of meaning in language and literature. But more specifically, he is accredited for paving the way through the analysis of narrative forms in terms of the work's relationship with spatio-temporal representations; in other words, with *TIME* and *SPACE*.

In his attempts to analyse how time and space can lay an indispensable infrastructure in novel writing, autobiographies in particular; Bakhtin claimed that "Time-space (Zeitraum) or time-place is the basic projection of a world within which specific events unfold." He, thus; alluded to the fact that those two notions are actually inseparable and reality-based (as mentioned in the above section). Consequently, he tried to answer his most thought-provoking question in all this realm: How can the experience of the character be depicted through spatial-temporal configurations and, simultaneously, bringing it to life? This question resulted in a whole new concept known as *THE CHRONOTOPE*.

2.2. Chronotope in literature

One of Bakhtin's most remarkable notions in his theory of language is the "Chronotope", which later was associated with his name as the "Bakhtinian Chronotope". Of all possible meanings of this term, a chronotope can be defined as a concept used in literary theory and philosophy of language to describe how configurations of time and space are represented in language and discourse. Bakhtin used it as a central element in his theory of meaning in language and literature. The term itself, from Greek: χρόνος and τόπος, can be literally translated as "time-space". Bakhtin developed the term in his 1937 essay

“Russian:формывремениихронотопавромане”, published in English as “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel”. Here Bakhtin showed how different Greek literary genres operated with different configurations of time and space, which gave each genre its particular narrative character. For example the time chronotopic frame of the *epic* differed from that of the *hero-adventure* or the *comedy*.

A Further definition of the Chronotope is found in the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms, where Baldick (2001) alluded to this concept as,

A term employed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895- 1975) to refer to the co-ordinates of time and space invoked by a given *NARRATIVE; in other words to the ‘setting’, considered as a spatio temporal whole (Baldick 40).

Within his work with the novel genre and narrative, Bakhtin defined the chronotope as follows: “We will give the name chronotope [literally ‘time space’], to the intrinsic connections of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (qtd. in Blommaert and De Fina 4). Accordingly, Bakhtin coined this term to emphasize the inseparability of time and space in human social action and the results of this inseparability (Blommaert and De Fina 7). The chronotope is, therefore, characterized by intersections of spatial references and temporal indicators that make up the whole novel (Bakhtin). In this respect, Bakhtin proclaims that in order to have a strong narrative in literature, significant markers as: cultural markers, language markers, space and time markers have to create a cohesive understanding of a piece of work (Fredriksen 7). Moreover, Bakhtin notes in his essay *Forms of Time and the Chronotope* that knowing the novel’s chronotope helps in creating the clear image of the character in any literary work. He also points out that “*man*” is the main concern and chronotope determines the image of man in literature with the possibility of defining what a character experiences in certain time periods and certain

locations specified in the literary work (Bakhtin). Bakhtin for one reason describes it like this: “The image of man is always intrinsically Chronotopic” (85). Bakhtin, on the other hand, describes time and space in the chronotope very poetically and comes closest to a form of definition in the following quote:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (84).

A Chronotope, therefore, is not just a mere investigation of time-space and their interrelatedness, but more importantly seeking ways of a thorough analysis of literary texts based on a scientific background. Hence, when referring to science, one may find a plethora of definitions that have been introduced in this sense. As Seifert points out, “The term Chronotope indicates the relationship between space and time as expressed in literature. It is a term borrowed from Einstein’s theory of relativity. Just as it is in physics, in literature, too, time and space are inseparable and one cannot be described independently of the other”.

2.3. Key Elements of the Chronotope

To understand the chronotope, it is essential to firstly comprehend the concept’s main elements which are: Dialogism, heteroglossia, and polyphony.

3.1. Dialogism

First, dialogic or dialogism according to Bakhtin, is the process in which interaction among the author, the characters and readers creates a meaning (Bakhtin). Through this concept, Bakhtin clarifies that determining the meaning of a text or any other linguistic

expression is not by a single subjective intention for understanding, but occurs between the subject using language in some form and his/her interlocutor. The latter refers to his opposite whether a conversational partner or a reader of the written word (Fredriksen 10). With this thought, Robinson (2011) emphasized “a text should not be read with a blinkered view, but through its context” (qtd. in Fredriksen10). In addition, Bakhtin states, “Things do not exist ‘in themselves’, but only in their relations” (Lubcke 63). Bakhtin also claims that human beings are always in dialogue not only with one another, but also with everything in the world (Fredriksen 11). Furthermore, dialogism, to Bakhtin, means that a piece of work is always in relation with other works, and is informed by them and other voices at all times (Fredriksen 11). According to Robinson, a meaning does not change at every moment as each meaning draws on one another to develop separate meanings instead of one common meaning. Accordingly, Bakhtin believed that many interconnected meanings exist in the world, not only one single meaning. He was of the conviction that there is a vast amount of meanings competing in the world, and there exist as many standpoints as there are meanings (Robinson 1).

3.2 Polyphony

This word is originally taken from music and simply means ‘several voices at once’ (Fredriksen 11). Robinson (2011), viewed that this concept of several voices became central to Bakhtin’s theories about literature, because he believed that “a novel should contain several voices to convey a convincing meaning... and not only one single author’s standpoint dictating a meaning” (qtd. in Fredriksen11). With this theory, Bakhtin changed the role of the author completely when studying literature; he claims that a more believable fictional reality is created by interaction between different perspectives and ideologies; thus, the author does not monopolize the text as an all-knowing narrator (Fredriksen 11). Bakhtin also believed that having only the author’s voice in the novel makes it flat and featureless (Robinson 1).

3.3. Heteroglossia

This concept is an extension of what Bakhtin has already analysed: dialogism. Accordingly, working with the field of heteroglossia means that a novel features a multitude of different voices, styles, and perspectives. Consequently, Bakhtin emphasized that the construction of a text is based on the combination of multiple statements (Robinson 1).

Relating this with the social field, Bakhtin believed that “a single mature subject should never fall under an authoritative discourse and only use and internalize those perspectives that fit with his/her values and experiences” (qtd. in Fredriksen12). That is, long-term linguistic and aesthetic changes are the results of heteroglossia, and literature has the power to change and shape the entire worldviews (Fredriksen 12).

2.4. The Chronotope as an Analytical Tool

The term Chronotope, as mentioned previously, covers a fusion of the concepts of time and space, which Bakhtin used to convey the importance of their inseparable connection within a novel. The term is composed of two Greek words, which also illustrate the aforementioned correlation: *cronos*, meaning time; and *topos*, meaning place. Bakhtin’s chronotope, as a tool for both comprehending and producing literary markers, carters the fact that the human being, the surrounding world, and the work of art are to be perceived as a one whole. “A chronotope, therefore, combines time and space into a joint concept, which infuses meaning to significant images within a novel. To Bakhtin, these images of time and space are not just temporal indicators or spatial references, but more predominantly, when they are understood as inseparable, they provide an alternative meaning that can be relevant in fiction as well as in reality, and can thereby create a consistency in world images across spheres.” (Frederiksen5). Bakhtin also notes that the gained knowledge of a novel’s chronotopes creates and determines the image of the character in the work of literature. Through the chronotopes,

it becomes possible to define what the character experiences in a certain time period and certain locations, which are specified in the literary work. From these combined indicators a meaning is given (Frederiksen 16).

Bakhtin described the interrelatedness of time and space as inseparable in any kind of novel, and if regarded as such, the chronotope will contribute to a greater and complete understanding of the meaning of the novel. However, he emphasises time as the primary concept since it determines parts of the meaning of the special references: “It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time” (Bakhtin 85).

In his essay *Forms of Time and the Chronotope*, Bakhtin did not provide a clear protocol or a specific way to apply his concept on literary works. However, he mentioned some concrete statements which can structure a clear method for applying his theory in analysing novels, in this case, *The Return*. Thus, the chronotope can be used not only in determining the symbolic and figurative meaning of the novel, but also the specific spatial and temporal characteristics as well as the significance thereof in the novel (Fredriksen 15).

According to Bakhtin, a narrative does not only consist of events and some kind of discourse, but is also primarily made up of a particular fictional world which is constructed with and by chronotopes (Fredriksen 16). Bakhtin, therefore, accentuates two ways in which space can be presented in a narrative:

01- The first one is the depiction from within the protagonist, through his inner point of observation. Here space is presented as the protagonist’s immediate horizon. He/she observes space as it stands before him/her, and space does not emerge without being essential in relation to the protagonist. The objects do not merely

surround the character in their spatial and most valuable form, they also emerge in opposition to him/her (Vlasov 41).

02- The second one is the space that lies outside the character and is the solid environment of the narrative; place is found to be “in the harmony of colours and line, in symmetry, and in other purely aesthetic combinations that are independent of meaning” (Vlasov 41) and its correlation with spatial formations from the outer real world. Here, space is perceived as integral in the story, as fully completed entities, and as so solid that it can be perceived from different perspectives, or described as if seen from different angles (Fredriksen 16)

When dealing with the concept of the chronotope as an analytical tool, Bakhtin’s essay entitled *‘Form of time and the Chronotope in the novel’* provides the most concise description. The essay shows exactly why the term is considered to be so predominantly figurative in meaning and should be taken as a suitable tool for a thorough use in Novel analysis. To affirm this, Bakhtin (1981) describes the chronotope as taking on flesh and blood,

Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope (Bakhtin 250).

Pursuing this further, Seifert also tackles a major point in this section which is the question of how the experience of the character in a specific literary work can be embodied through the use of the chronotope? He states an example of “The Road” by Cormac McCarthy, in which he analyses the use of space and time in representing personal, social, and historical nature of the setting of the novel. He asserts that various modes of temporality may intersect as well. Personal time, that which corners the biographies and private lives of the characters intermingles with historical time to create the characteristic weaving of the two. He adds that the chronotope is the structure around and upon which events are built, it is within them that the plot is manipulated and meaning is constructed. It is thanks to the chronotope that events become realistic, almost palpable. Time and space are brought out of the dimension of text and into realism, events that happen within the chronotope are vivid. The chronotope gives body to the entire novel. This declaration is clearly supported in the Concluding Remarks to the chronotope study, where Bakhtin states that the chronotopic configuration of a work and its orientation towards the world of the reader ensure that the novel always ‘anticipates possible reactions to itself.’ (Seifert 257).

In a nutshell, Bakhtin has a classification of structures in his work, and, consequently, he could be considered a philosopher with focus on method; according to a Bakhtin-scholar, Michael Holquist, “Bakhtin is a system-builder with a system that consists of Open-ended connections. There exists no closure in his methodology as he believes this is a form of isolation” (Robinson 1).

2.5. Types of the Chronotope

In his essay, Bakhtin mentioned three types of spatial chronotopes. However, the definitions of these types are very vague and broad. Therefore, the Russian scholar Eduard Vlasov has reduced and defined them in a clearer manner. Here, it is important to mention

that Bakhtin, according to Vlasov, states that art, including literature, “cannot exist separately from life; they must make up an organic whole” (Vlasov 38). This means that the inner meaning of the piece of art must be integrated into a unity with life, and therein a socio-cultural context.

According to Vlasov (1995), there are three types of spatial chronotopes:

1. *Chronotopes on an objective level or on that geographical or historical truth to it, and*

here there are two kinds:

-‘Abstract Chronotope’: novelistic space that is related to a concrete geographical real place. It is realistic in nature but it neither exists nor represents one particular country or nationality in its geographical, historical and objective reality. Bakhtin calls it “a place of geographical and spatial indifferences” (Vlasov 43).

-‘Concrete Chronotope’: space that corresponds to an actual, historically existing geographical place. As Bakhtin states, “one that can be identified as true or very near to realistic/naturalistic place” (qtd. in Vlasov 43).

2. *Chronotopes on the level of the relationship between the protagonist/the narrator and the spatial forms in the novel, consisting also of two variations:*

- -‘Alien Chronotope’: which means every spatial form in the novel seems strange, unknown and even dangerous for the protagonist/the narrator. Moreover, there is a certain sense of conflict throughout the novel between the protagonist and the locality. According to Bakhtin, “the two can never be united peacefully. This relationship is often seen as a picture or a symbol of the external reality outside the novel” (Vlasov 43).

-‘Native chronotope’: This means that every spatial form is familiar to the protagonist and he/she knows every place inside out, and in perfect detail since it is his/her world that is described. The protagonist is most likely born and brought up in this locality and is often the author’s/protagonist’s “*own real homeland*” (Vlasov 43).

3. *Chronotopes on the level of self-transformation and further development, meaning from the inside of space and according to its own logic*, there are two variations:

-‘Static Chronotope’: means that the represented space cannot be changed; it is according to Bakhtin, “complete, locked and closed off for any kind of development or change” (qtd. In Vlasov 43).

-‘Dynamic Chronotope’: means that space within the novel can undergo a change, and is open for further development and transformation, as the narrative progress (Vlasov43). Bakhtin did not coin this last chronotope, as he did not oppose anything to the term static. The term ‘dynamic’ is therefore a term Vlasov himself provided, and this to provide the method with a necessary opposite to the ‘static chronotope’. The ‘dynamic’ chronotopes is also needed as Bakhtin himself did not consider what the world/space can undergo and become (Fredriksen 18).

As for specific types of chronotopes, Bakhtin mentioned and specified a few, for instance ‘the road’, ‘the castle’, ‘the parlous’, ‘the provincial town’ as seen on the following pages of Bakhtin’s book-(Bakhtin243-250), these will though not be touched upon further as all chronotopes that will be dealt with in the analysis are only the ones represented in the novel, *The Return*. The chronotopes related to this novel will be analysed in detail in the second chapter of this research.

Turning back to the concept of the chronotope, scholars, including Bakhtin, have after the first development of the concept, also used the word ‘motif ’as a synonym for the term ‘chronotope’, and what is meant here by ‘chronotope’ if the definition of ‘motif’ is applied: ‘anything that stands out from the text in question’; this could be anything from language chronotopes, the syntactical chronotopes or a cultural chronotope (Fredriksen 19). Since motif has such a broad definition, and to make it possible to use Bakhtin’s theory, the definition

should be clear and exact. Accordingly, Nele Bemong, a Belgian Postdoctoral fellow of the research foundation, Flanders, in her PH. D. dissertation also described in her co-authored book *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope-Reflections, Applications, Perspectives and* another Belgian postdoctoral fellow named Pieter Borghart used Bakhtin's descriptions of the chronotopes in former narratives and transformed them into general method.

There are five general definitions of chronotopes according to Bemong and Borghart (2010):

- 1- The 'micro chronotopes' are "charged with chronotopic energy" and the vitality of language "grows, in part, out of the tension between the centrifugal chronotopic implications of individual words and phrases, and the centripetal force (such as syntax) that subordinates these centrifugal energies to coherent overarching meanings" (Bemong 6). These micro chronotopes are often considered as units of language, but smaller than a sentence and, thus, often located in a poetic context (Fredriksen 19).
- 2- The 'minor chronotopes' or 'local chronotopes' or 'chronotopic motifs', which Bakhtin sums up in this quote: "we have been speaking so far only of the major chronotopes, those that are most fundamental and wide-ranging. But each such chronotope can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes; in fact [...] any motif may have a specific chronotope of its own" (qtd. in Bemong 6). Bakhtin mentions several examples of minor-chronotopes in his essay, for example 'the road', 'the meeting', 'the castle', 'the salon', 'the public square', 'the provincial town', and 'the threshold'; this means that a specific kind of time and space can function in a specific way (Fredriksen 19).
- 3- The 'major or dominant chronotope' is the whole image which remains when all chronotopes have been perceived in the narrative. That is, the dominant impression the reader is left with. In this respect, Bemong mentioned, "many Bakhtin scholars do not

posit an intermediary level between major and generic chronotopes, and simply equate the level of the dominant chronotope with the latter” (Bemong 7). This means that the dominant chronotope is primarily considered to be a subjective chronotope. According to some scholars, it should be perceived as an impression that is constructed by the “reader’s ideologically restrained imagination...and it should clearly be distinguished from the text surface” (Bemong 10), but it should in no way be confused with and based on intuition.

- 4- ‘Generic chronotopes’ are the category of chronotopes where in several different texts can fall under. Bakhtin calls the generic chronotope “a formally constitutive category of literature” (Bakhtin 84).
- 5- ‘Plot-space chronotope’ is a framework for dividing generic chronotopes into even more classes. We have first, ‘teleological or monological chronotopes’. What characterizes this class is that it concerns traditional narratives, where the entire plot moves towards the final movement with a traditional curve of suspense.

On the other hand, the remaining class is the ‘dialogical chronotopes’, in which the narrative is focused on multiple conflicting situations that communicate and form the decisive moment in the narrative (Bakhtin 84). This kind of chronotopes is often psychological in nature, and a lot of modern novels, therefore, fall under this class (Fredriksen 20).

3. Bakhtin’s Chronotope in the Autobiography Novel

After discussing Bakhtin’s chronotope, its main elements and various forms, it is time to consider how it works in relation to the autobiographical novel. Accordingly, reviewing the chronotope in biographical and autobiographical novel-that hereafter will be called (auto) biographical chronotope-, its path was traced to the contemporary (auto) biographical novel. This is exactly what will be tackled in *The Return*, an autobiographical novel of a contemporary American-born novelist Hisham Matar.

Bakhtin's essay, which was written between 1937 and 1938, may help us study the fusion among the several classic chronotopes which form the contemporary novel. In his essay, Bakhtin explains how the ancient forms of (auto) biographical novels were based on "a new type of biographical time and a human image constructed to new specifications, that of an individual who passes through the course of a whole life" (Bakhtin130). As a matter of fact, the theorist tries to make a parallel between the forms of social organization in the Greco-Roman society and the autobiographical narrative forms of this period.

According to Luis Alberto Brandão; in *Theories of Literary Space*, Bakhtin's analysis of the different types of Novel chronotope

[...] what is found is the search to recognise, at the level of the plot and the fictional elements represented in fiction situations, absence or presence and the scale of human *transformation*, which is taken as an index of historicity (95).

This means that the historicity of chronotope is "on the plane of the 'content' of works" (Brandao 95). Thus, Bakhtin's search for 'human transformations' makes it possible in the transformation of public and private spaces, to demand for different strategies of representation in the (auto) biographical novel chronotope (Amaral and Rodrigues 125).

3.1 Ancient autobiographies and biographies

According to Bakhtin, in Greek classicism, there are two main (auto) biographical forms: the 'platonic' and the 'rhetorical'. First, the platonic (auto) biography has the chronotope of "the life course of one seeking true knowledge" (130). This form, as the adventure novel of everyday life, is familiar with the "metamorphosis stories". Therefore, "real biographical time is here almost entirely dissolved in the ideal (and even abstract) time of metamorphosis" (Bakhtin 131). That is, through the acquired knowledge, Man is

transformed. Secondly, the rhetorical (auto) biography, which Bakhtin explains, “such forms were completely determined by events: either verbal praise of civic and political acts, or real human beings giving a public account of themselves [...] This real-life chronotope is constituted by the public square (the agora)” (Bakhtin 131). In this regard, Bakhtin also states, “And this concrete and as it were all encompassing chronotope, the laying bare and examination of a citizen’s whole life was accomplished, and received its public and civic stamp of approval” (Bakhtin 132).

What is remarkable in these early biographical and autobiographical manifestations is that there is a difference between the public and private space in man’s life that will appear only a few centuries later (Amaral and Rodrigues 126). Previously, in ancient times, the diffusion of these certain biographical forms is fixed by the blurring spaces (Amaral and Rodrigues 126). In Greek classicism, for instance, “there could not in principle be any difference between the approach one took to another’s life and the one’s own, that is, between the biographical and autobiographical points of view” (Bakhtin 132). This means that both the historical and the biographical discourse refers to a certain place of enunciation. On the other hand, the Roman autobiographies were built on the real chronotope: the Roman family (patrician). Evidently, this family is not bourgeois family, “the symbol for all that can be private and intimate” (Bakhtin 137), but an adjunct family to the Roman state that made the autobiographical practice a “public and historical, national consciousness” (Bakhtin 138).

According to Bakhtin, Isocrates was the first one who made the first autobiography in the form of defence speech in which “the individual’s consciousness of himself [...] relies exclusively upon those aspects of his personality and his life that are turned outward, that exist for others in the same way they exist of the individual himself” (137), which give it “a normative and pedagogical character of this earliest autobiography” (Bakhtin 137).

The biographical practices, in the Hellenistic and Roman period, shows the possibility of self-glorification. In this regard, Bakhtin, clarifies that here

[...] lurks beneath the specific question of the propriety of glorifying oneself a more general question, namely, the legitimacy of taking the same approach to one's own life as to another's life, to one's self as to another's self. The very posing of such question is evidence that *the classical public wholeness* of an individual had broken down, and a differentiation between biographical and autobiographical forms had begun (133).

Before following these changes between the biographical and autobiographical forms, the case of Plutarch should be taken into consideration. Plutarch is a term that can be put under another term which is Hypomnematas. The latter were popular books at the times of Seneca, Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius, in which abstract of multiple information were written, adding various subjects and philosophical reflections, focussing always on 'self-awareness' (Amaral and Rodrigues 126). Accordingly, Bakhtin explains:

Biographical time in Plutarch is specific. It is a time that discloses character, but is not at all the time of man's 'becoming' or growth [...] Historical reality itself, in which disclosure of character takes place, serves merely as a means for the disclosure [...]

Historical reality is deprived of any determining influence on character as such

(Bakhtin141).

Plutarch's biography is an example of the first type of ancient biographical structure, based on Aristotelian concept of energy founded in the idea that "the full existence, the essence of a man is realized not by his condition but by his activity" (Bakhtin in Amaral and Rodrigues 127). The second type is called by Bakhtin; *analytical*, in which "the temporal

progression of the biographical sequence is broken up: one and the same rubric subsumes moments selected from widely separate periods of life” (142).

If in the world of classical and ancient (auto) biographies, the whole life was manifested predominantly at the public space, it is possible to say that the (auto) biographical practice in contemporaneity dialogues with the logic imposed by media society, the private space exhibition can become a performative act; that is, Bakhtin points out that it is still in antiquity we find that “the beginning of the process by which a man and his life become private” (qtd. in Amaral and Rodrigues 128).

In his essay, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, Bakhtin introduces his main ideas about the relationship between the author and the hero. In this respect, he states that “an enunciator can only become aware of a considerable part of [his] own biography from what is said by others” (154); thus, without these stories, “[his] life would not only lack fullness and clarity, but would also remain internally dispersed, divested of any value-related *biographical unit*” (Bakhtin 154).

This means that the author-creator will always see himself as another one possible though the events of the plot are experienced by him. Therefore, the author’s figure has no connection with the character or the narrator, and this concerns both biographies and autobiographies as Bakhtin states, “[T] here is no clear-cut, essentially necessary dividing line between autobiography and biography” (Bakhtin 150).

Bakhtin in his essay *The Bildungsroman* and its significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel), more precisely the third topic, The biographical Novel (Bakhtin 16-19) which can be related to his other essay which this study is based on “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” (Bakhtin, 1981) addresses that genesis of the formation of biography is not different from that of autobiography until the 18th

century, when the 'family autobiography novel' emerges. He also makes comparison between the 'biographical novel' and 'travel ordeal novel'.

The biographical forms of the novel share the following peculiarities:

1. The *plot*, that

Is constructed not on deviations from the normal and typical course of life but precisely on the basic and typical aspects of any life course, birth, childhood, school years, marriage, the fate that life brings, works and deeds, death and so forth (Bakhtin 17).

2. *The representation of the hero's life course does not include changes throughout his life,*

In the biographical novel (especially autobiographical and confessional), the only essential change in the hero himself is his crisis and rebirth (the biographical hagiographies of the crisis type, Augustine's *confessions*, and so on) (Bakhtin 17).

3. *The biographical Time*, is "quite realistic, because all of its moments are included in the total life process" the biographical novel "works with extended periods," and "arranged against the background of this basic time in the biographical novel is, of course, the depiction of individual events and adventures on a large plane" (Bakhtin 18).

4. For Bakhtin, the biographical novel with this historical spirit of generation has no relation with the hero's background (1986); but secondary characters, countries, cities, things and so on "enter into biographical novel in significant ways and acquire a significant relationship to the whole life of the main hero" (18).

5) The last peculiarity of the biographical novel-until the 17th century- is that in this type of romance the hero glorification vanished almost entirely because the “hero is characterized by both positive and negative features”; however, “the events shape not the man, but his destiny (though it may be a creative destiny)” (Bakhtin 19).

Bakhtin states that, “all these principles for the formulation of the hero paved the way for the development of synthetic forms of the novel in the nineteenth century, and above all for realistic novel (Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens, and Thackeray) (19).

Bakhtin points out that, “a genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre”; because of this, “a genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning” (Bakhtin 106). Accordingly, from this play of permanence and innovation, the (auto) biographical novel does not escape. Therefore, “it often changes to blur the boundaries between the linear time and space (chronological) of life in favour of narratives that privilege psychological time and space” (Amaral and Rodrigues 15).

3.2. The Chronotope in the contemporary (Auto) Biographical Novel

The relationship between the world as a source of representation and the represented world-to use the terminology of Bakhtin- transcends the sphere of (auto) biographical novel and concerns the very meaning of artistic creation (Amaral and Rodrigues 133). Bakhtin explains that “however forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are [...] in continual mutual interaction” (254). Bakhtin makes this distinction and he establishes the concept of ‘author-creator’, by means of which we can think about the relationship between man and work in autobiographical novels; besides, the primary mistake of understanding the

‘author-creator’ as a synonym for ‘author as a human being’ should be avoided here (Amaral and Rodrigues 133). This goes with what Bakhtin calls *naïvebiographism*, in which “we find the author *outside* the work as human being living his own biographical life. But we also meet him as the creator of the work itself” (Bakhtin 254).

4. Socio-historical Context of the Novel

4.1. Social and Historical factors of writing *The Return* (2016)

Providing the reader with the time period and current events of a novel helps them form an image of the society at that time, and a combination of social and historical aspects helps them grasp the anatomy of Space and Time in addition to what motivates the author to write. Accordingly, it is necessary to begin by discussing the key events that occurred in the author’s life.

Hisham Matar is an American born British-Libyan writer born in 1970 in New York City, where his father worked for the Libyan delegation to the United Union. Matar-the second of two sons- was three years old when his family returned back to Tripoli, Libya, where he spent his early childhood until political persecution forced his mother to flee with the children first to Kenya and then To Cairo in 1979. The family lived in exile in Cairo, Egypt. At that time, “Jaballah Matar” (Hisham’s father) managed to get out of Libya and joined his family in Cairo, where he started his political work for his voice to be heard, writing against the Gaddafi regime (the Libyan regime) and the various factions of the exiled Libyan resistance were mobilized by him to be unified in order to overthrow the regime. Hisham and his brother Ziad attended the American school in Cairo (the only school they can afford) with 70 pupils per class.

In 1986, Matar moved to London (his brother was already there) to carry on his studies. They attended the schools under a false identity,

I was to pretend that my mother was Egyptian and my father American. It was thought that this would explain to any Arabs in the school, why my Arabic was Egyptian and why my English was American. My first name was Bob. Ziad chose it because both he and I were fans of Bob Marely and Bob Dylan. I was to pretend I was Christian, though not religious. I was to try to forget my name, if someone called Hisham, I was not turn (Matar, 2011).

Later, Matar received an MA in architecture-Design Futures- at Goldsmiths, university of London.

In 1990, while Matar and his brother were still in London, The Egyptian secret police abducted their father “Jaballah Matar” and the family heard nothing about him.

Two years later, they received a smuggled letter in Jaballah’s hand, written a year earlier. Jaballah informed his family through the letter he was imprisoned in the notorious Abu-Salim prison in Tripoli, Libya

In March 1990, Egyptian secret service agents abducted my father from his home in Cairo. For the first two years, they led us to believe that he was being held in Egypt, and told us to keep quiet or else they could not guarantee his safety. In 1992, my father managed to smuggle out a letter. Few months later, my mother held it in her hand. His curled handwriting curled tightly on to itself to fit as many words as possible on the single A4 sheet of paper. Words with hardly a space between, above or beneath them. No margins, they run to the brink (Matar 2011).

Since then, (the received letter), nobody has heard from him.

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In addressing the socio-historical background, it is vital to understand the historical and social variables that surround the period of writing the novel; thus, it is important to know how Matar got started with literature, with a focus on his novel *The Return* (2016), which this thesis examines.

For Matar, writing was from the most essential things everyone keeps doing, he states “I became an architect, and I continued writing. Writing seemed like just the thing you keep doing, like breathing, or walking or eating”. In his works, Matar explored themes of loss and exile. Through his writings, it seems that he is inspired by architecture, painting, and music.

Hisham Matar has written two novels, two memoirs, and a children’s book published in Italian. He has also written several articles, essays, and short stories that have been published on various websites.

Matar’s first novel was published in 2006, entitled *In the Country of Men*. His second novel *An Anatomy of Disappearance* contains a character whose father is taken away by the authorities, but Matar’s acknowledgements in relation to his own father’s disappearance stated that the novel is not autobiographical. The following published work was *The Return* in 2016. It is a memoir that talks about his return to his country Libya in 2012, searching for the truth of his father’s disappearance, Jaballah Matar, who was-as mentioned before- a prominent political dissident of the Gaddafi regime. Accordingly, my research focuses on this novel. After that, in 2017, Matar released a children’s book with the title *Il Libro di Dot*. Last but not least, Matar’s recent book published in 2019 is about his travel to Siena, Italy and the Siense school, from where its title was derived, *A Month in Siena*.

What is striking about all of the preceding is that Matar's focus is far more on his own life and experiences, particularly, his father's disappearance. Through his works, it may be clear that he lives in a journey; a journey seeking the truth of whether or not his father is still alive. This was mostly tackled in his memoir *The Return*.

As a result of the preceding explanation, I have come to a final stop where I will be dealing with Hisham Matar's autobiography *The Return*. I will try to apply the concept of chronotope as a tool of investigation; thinking about how Matar shapes his experience in his 2011 journey using space-time correlation analysis. Hence, I will be concentrating on how the chronotope gives rise to the writer's emotions and social experiences, allowing readers to comprehend the setting's social and historical context. In a nutshell, this is what the second chapter will cover.

Chapter Two: Bakhtin's Chronotope in Hisham Matar's Autobiography

The Return

This chapter will attempt to apply the "Chronotope" concept to the narrative of Hisham Matar *The Return*, more precisely, a chronotopic reading will be applied to the main characters. Additionally, the main events of the novel will be examined under a space-time connection to understand how temporal indicators and spatial references aid in shaping the events and making the reader live the story. Thus, it focuses on how the novel's chronotopes are used to portray the writer's experience, culture as well as his background, and whether the chronotope can be used as a literary tool for that depiction.

1. Introduction to Hisham Matar's Autobiography *The Return*

Libya currently seems to all the world as a mess, as a site of disorder. It is also newsworthy as a place which witnesses no stability in politics and, thus, in all the domains. Nevertheless, there is another Libya. It has people who live like any other person in the world, who enjoy art, literature and poetry, who walk the streets and drink coffee. In Libya, there are people who have values and are mindful of what is going on around them; they have aspirations to achieve and hopes to realise. Living in a stable and prosperous democratic society where equality, law, honesty and justice are the principles by which all people are treated is one of them. Many of those honourable people have died as a result of their opposition to the Gaddafi government which took power in 1969. Perhaps one of those killed is the father of the American born novelist Hisham Matar.

Matar's memoir *The Return* "revolves around the painful void that is at once the source of his literally inspiration and his spiritual burden" (Kramatschek). The image of Libya during Gaddafi regime was ugly, "In any political history of Libya, the 1980s represent a particularly lurid chapter" (Matar 8). *The Return* is a son's account who is living with the un-knowledge

of what happened to his father, a diplomat opposed to the Gaddafi regime as Matar states in the memoir, “My father was one of the opposition’s most prominent figures” (8). Jaballah, Hisham’s father, was abducted from exile by the Egyptian secret police in 1990 and arrested in the notorious Abu Salim prison in Tripoli which “joins an infamous list of places of state violence besides concentration camps, prisons such as Abu Ghraib, Tadmor, Guantanamo, Evin...where inhuman cruelty to human bodies and spirits aim to break and destroy political forces of opposition” (Brant 7).

By 2012, the Arab spring had truly reached Libya, Tripoli had fallen in August 2011 and Gaddafi was already dead. For Matar, it was the opportunity to begin a journey he had been longing to make for 33 years to discover the truth about what happened to his father; at the same time, it is a journey he had always feared: “What do you do when you cannot leave and cannot return?” (Matar 07). Furthermore, the main objective behind Matar’s trip to Libya is just to know whether his father is still alive, and if not, how, where, and when he died, as he mentions, “I have always wondered if it is possible to lose your father without sensing the particular moment of his death” (Matar 131). In this regard, there were reports, stories, sightings and arranged meetings that added some fragments, may be certain, may be uncertain; there was a massacre in the prison in 1996 and one estimate mentioned that more than twelve hundred prisoners were murdered. Was Matar’s father amongst them? Hisham Matar says in his book,

Most likely, father was killed in the massacre at Abu Salim. Several of the prisoner had told me that although they did not see him, they had heard from others that Jaballah Matar was amongst those who were brought into the courtyard that day [...] So, although it has never been confirmed, the most probable day my father’s life ended was June 29, 1996, when he was fifty seven and I was twenty-five (Matar 132).

Accordingly, *The Return* “is a son’s memoir of grief for something which may have happened and resistance to assuming it happened” (Brant 6). Matar’s memoir *The Return* has a remarkable end, “it comes to rest softly, a boat’s prow sliding into sand” (Brant 8). Matar has woken from a troubling dream and went to the kitchen where his aunt was making pastry: “When I woke up, I went and stood with aunt Zaynab in the kitchen” (Matar 201). Then, he helped her kneading the dough; this moment shows that grief does not end. Yet, it is also a gentle reminder of gentleness, also everyday “where working dough symbolizes the labour of love, literally and figuratively knocking back, like kneading dough, so that something sustaining and shareable can be made” (Brant 8).

Matar’s autobiography *The Return* is structured on what Leigh Gilmore terms, “The demands of autobiography (to tell my story) and the demands of biography (to tell your story)” (72). In this respect, Brant emphasises, “...it is a biography of a father, and an autobiography of a son...” (8). Moreover, in life writing terms, “it entails scrupulous honesty if it is to engage readers and persuade them of the value of looking, and the truthfulness of how the personal is political” (Brant 8). Furthermore, Mirdha supports this point by stating: “The author situates his memory in the map of location prefixed to the text to unfold his experiential story in relation to the history, politics, and geography of the two continents across the Mediterranean Sea” (22).

It is important to mention also that the memoir’s subtitle *—fathers, Sons and the Land in Between—* “takes the land as literal, the country of Libya and poetic, the desert which is not a waste land but a place where navigational stars shine clearly” (Brant 7).

Shortlisted for half a dozen international literary prizes, *The Return* won among others the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for biography. Famous writers as Colm Toibin have queued up to praise it

and acclaim it as a classic: “Likely to become a classic”. Brant considered it as a very rich and teachable text,

Calls into question the borders of national literature and which raises all sorts of questions about familial, tribal, national, or linguistic...and most of all, it asks what consolation is possible, if you don't know how your father died? (8).

2. **Space and Time in Hisham Matar's *The Return***

When it comes to the temporal structure of the book, it seems at first glance misleading for the author used a handful of temporal significances including the flashbacks and forwards, “keeping us hungry for new information even when we suspect exactly what has happened”, as mentioned the Wall Street Journal in its review of the novel. However, once the reader focuses on the sequence of the events, it will all make sense. Matar, in fact, represents an adolescent's resistance of a dimmed anger, a son's purchase of his robbed childhood hoping to take “the guilt of having lived a free life” (190), as he confesses, off his shoulders. This is the same reason that made him, in his book, travel between the memories of the past, the struggles of the present, and the hopes of the future.

In the same way, Rachel Cooke, a British journalist and writer, describes the story as, “moving almost rhythmically backwards and forwards in time, a tide that comes in and out, in and out. Matar, like all of us, measures his life in significant moments. But where we have births, marriages and deaths after mostly long lives, his years have been marked by, among other things, an exile (his family left Libya in 1979, when he was eight); a kidnapping (his father, a dissident with a “small army” under his control in Chad, was taken by the Libyan regime from Cairo to Tripoli in 1990); and a massacre (in 1996 some 1,270 prisoners were killed in Abu Salim prison in Tripoli; it seems likely that Jaballa Matar was one of them).And

then there is his return to Libya in March 2012, his mother and his wife by his side, a journey that bookends his story as he tells it here. This, in turn, is punctuated by yet more dates.

Speaking of dates, 1996 was a remarkable one. Hisham Matar believed his father Jaballah Matar was likely to be one of the dissidents who were collectively massacred in Abu Salim's prison in Tripoli. On one occasion, he was left with no hope of seeing his father again, he wrote, "For the first time, the truth became inescapable. It was clear that he had been shot or hanged or starved or tortured to death." (14).

Michiko Kakutani talks about this, in his review of the book, stating, "The younger Mr. Matar did not know whether his father died in a 1996 prison massacre that took the lives of some 1,200 people; whether he was tortured or beaten to death in some grim interrogation room; or whether, miraculously, he had managed to escape or survive." As it happens, this date had a great impact on him; marking all the possibilities, good and bad, in his journey. Hence, the state of not knowing whether his father was out of Abu Salim massacre alive or dead scrambled his thoughts in every sense of the word; and with equal force, resonated with an echo of a past moment affecting his present days. This, in short, gives legitimacy to the wise choice of time-space continuum by the author.

Anne McClintock writes, "Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term nation derives from natio: to be born" (357). In one of the most noticeable comparisons he made, Matar described his father's homeland Ajdabiya, in opposition to the one he spent almost all of his life in, London. He notes how his feeling towards Ajdabiya have changed over thirty three year of estrangement, a wild sentiment of longing for the voices of childhood, aunts, and cousins alike. He states,

The trees sporadically scattered across the floor of the desert, leant in the direction of the wind... I remembered them from my childhood, when father used to drive

us from Tripoli to visit his family in Ajdabiya....how colorless this landscape seemed to me then. And now as much as I resisted disliking a place my father loved, I also enjoyed the familiarity of this old, childish longing for the colors and distractions of the capital and its sea (80).

On the other hand, he regrets not being present with his big family for a long time claiming,

How old to enjoy a longing now superseded by other places and the fragile life I had made for myself some 3,000 kilometers north, in a land where none of the words I grew up hearing are spoken, where my grandfather, had he been alive, would not be able to read a word of what I have written, and where the colors contradict, as tough deliberately, those of the southern Mediterranean.” (80-81).

Indeed, the land had a crucial role in bringing back the old days in Matar’s memory, and this does more than underlining the linkage of a smaller unit, the family, within a bigger one, the nation. But more importantly, it marks the absolute effectiveness of time over space and vice-versa.

Bringing everything up to the surface, Matar’s tactile sense of place and time is bounded by a magnificent chronotopic accuracy. He is, in fact, one of the writers who have the absolute ability not only to stand back and let the past speak for itself, but also with consideration to accompanying the present as a sprinkle of a mighty artistic skillfulness. In each of his words ‘*Fathers, Sons, and the Land in Between*’ (01), he searches for a connection with an always distant father and land, marking the difference between the two generations – his generation and his father’s-, the land he comes from and the land he goes to –England and Libya-, and how the latter would bring fathers and sons back together again. But within a sacred familial and patriotic scope, Hisham Matar succeeded in building a statement for the Arab spirit in its finest human details; showing us, in the meantime, what language is capable of achieving.

As a final statement for '*The Return*', Robyn Creswell writes,

It seems unfair to call Hisham Matar's extraordinary new book a memoir, since it is so many other things besides: a reflection on exile and the consolations of art, an analysis of authoritarianism, a family history, a portrait of a country in the throes of a revolution, and an impassioned work of mourning. . . . For all its terrible human drama . . . the most impressive thing about *The Return* is that it also tells a common story, the story of sons everywhere who have lost their fathers, as all sons eventually must. (The New York Times Book Review)

3. The Connection Between the Main characters and the Chronotope

The Return is an autobiography that vividly depicts the events and encounters that happened in Hisham Matar's life at various points in time and in various locations, all of which are primarily related to form what the author is narrating. As a result, according to what was discussed earlier in the first chapter, the memoir focuses on the life of the 'author creator', in which there is a relationship between the man and his work, meeting him as the creator of the work itself.

Evidently, the main character or the protagonist in this novel is Hisham Matar. Since many readers and experts who evaluated the book listed in their reviews that *The Return* is considered as an autobiography of a son and a biography of a father. Jaballah is obviously the second main character in this novel. Thus, the emphasis will be on these two characters and their psychological analysis of how time is related to the relationship between the outer and inner space. In this regard, the chronotope is a useful tool for demonstrating this connection.

3.1. Hisham Matar as the 'author creator'

Hisham as the 'author-creator' of *The Return*, situates his memory in the map of location prefixed to the text to unfold his experiential story in relation to the history, politics and the geography of two continents (according to Mirdha). This means that Hisham, the American born, went back to Libya with his family where he spent his childhood and then fled to Egypt during the Gaddafi regime; later, he moved to London and finally, returned back to Libya after 33 years to begin a journey he talks about in *The Return*, experienced different events in various locations at various points of time. In this regard, he states, "At times I was experiencing a kind of distance-sickness, a state in which not only the ground was unsteady but also time and space" (Matar 89). Accordingly, he recollected almost all the past data triggered by his interaction with the spaces at hand, which he manages to link by associating stimuli and projecting his memories from childhood, adolescence...

Hisham in his memoir makes use of the flashbacks. His consciousness takes him back and forth in time; the reader, thus, is able to see two different identities: First, Hisham in the present, as a man who searches for the truth and doing his best to discover it by returning back to Libya and asking relations, his father's fellows in the prison and so forth, letting the authorities, in particular, and the world, in general, hear the story of his father's disappearance and the brutality of the Gaddafi regime. Second, Hisham's past, where he did not know what to do, whether to go back to Libya to begin his journey or to never think of that.

Hisham's stream of consciousness travels both in space and time. He recalls memories in various points of time that are related to particular places, for instance, when he visited Ajdabiya, the city his father grew up in; Benghazi, the city that he decided to enter Libya through, though his father was from Ajdabiya and his mother from Derna,

"Benghazi, at least today seemed to belong to me alone. I met Diana at the Café Vitoria

by the water...I secretly began to imagine us shipping our books and pictures and music here. Packing them all on a container headed for this city by the sea..." (Matar 90).

Hisham is simply expressing his internal conflict by narrating his experience in order to establish a link between the private space occupied by his past memories and the social relationships in Libya to discover the facts. Therefore, Hisham connects between the time he lived and the time he is currently living, as well as his space. It is possible to say that a chronotopic technique is used to reveal the events and Hisham's picture.

Returning to Libya, with the aim of sharing his traumatic experience by doing everything he can to find out if his father is still alive, and if he is not; how, where and when he was killed, as well as writing this memoir about his journey, Hisham -from a Bakhtinian perspective- tries to reunite the private and social spaces.

3.2. Jaballah and Spatio-temporal Markers

One of the fundamental elements of the chronotope, as previously said, is that the creator of the work does not monopolize the text as an all-knowing narrator, but rather through interaction between various views, voices and ideas. Thus, Hishem the 'author creator' strives to focus on multiple conflicting situations in his life, as well as his father's life and memory, that communicate and form pivotal moments in the memoir.

"My father was a man of action", this is how Hisham Matar described his father's political engagement. In line with Bakhtin's chronotope theory, spatial and temporal forms are completely determined by events such as civic acts and political events, in this case the Arab Spring and what was going on in Libya during the Gaddafi regime, which explains why Jaballah was such a great politician opposing the regimes's brutality. This indicates that there is a social and political impact that shapes the character of Jaballah in certain locations and at

specific times. In fact, Jaballah Matar was a successful Libyan businessman and diplomat who led a group of partisans against the Gaddafi's dictatorship. This man's social and political impact "made him a dangerous enemy" (Matar 08), the reason why he was kidnapped by the Egyptian secret service agents, and later imprisoned in Libya's infamous Abu Salim prison in March 1990, the last time his son Hisham saw him. Through the integration of socio-cultural background, Hisham aims to show the reader how the father's memory is tied to specific places and historical periods by mentioning the Abu Salim jail. This implies that the spatial marker 'Abu Salim prison' and the time marker '1990' are utilized to depict his father's experience as a strong man and self-committed individual despite the regime's violence towards him, Hisham Matar talks about his father claiming, "My father was a self-committed person", a man who once wrote in one of his letters from the prison, "My forehead does not know how to bow." (12). Moreover, Abu Salim prison has become a symbol of mistreatment and human rights violations with many people associating it with the 1996 prisoner massacres. Therefore, Hisham seeks to convince the reader that his father's image is elementally linked to locations like Libya, which he loves and cherishes despite the awful conditions in the prison at the time. He would often proudly express his devotion for "the land he loved more than anything else" threatening, "Don't put yourselves in competition with Libya. You will always lose" (35). Jaballah Matar, after trying to force him to retreat, stood firm against the constant compromises offered by the Libyan regime, to which he always replied, "I won't negotiate. Not with criminals." (09).

But within all this roughness, Jaballah had a soft heart that "never ran out of poems", verses which he recited at prison nights, when "you could hear a pin drop or a grown man weep softly to himself." In the same way, he preached his sons to have libraries and read books for "knowing a book by heart is like carrying a house inside your chest." (27) He asserts. Furthermore, Jaballah Matar's open-mindedness did not just stop here, he also had an

artistic tendency, which was later expressed in registering his sons in piano lessons, taking place after school. Swimming, on the other hand, was a major sport he made sure to introduce them to as well. Hisham Matar talks about this in his book, recalling, “It was my father who had taught me how to swim: holding me up, one open hand against my belly, saying, “That’s it.” Bringing back the past memories with the tough present, “I never feared the sea until he was gone.”(32) He regrets. These are all cultural markers in which Libya as an Arab Muslim country assisted him in molding his sons’ personalities according to Islamic values, as well as a place where art and literature play an important role in people’s lives. Thus, Hisham succeeds in expressing his father’s image and memory through spatial and temporal connections, achieving what Bakhtin claimed about the image of man in the novel, that is always intrinsically chronotopic.

Hisham also attempts to convey to the reader what his father was feeling despite the fact that he was not with him and was far away from him, and did not know exactly what occurred with him but only speculate. As a result, he tries to reconcile his father’s inner space and self-conflicts with the exterior space where his father remained strong and resisted the regime’s brutality.

Evidently, one may say that these two characters, as different in person as they are, in fact offer a plethora of common personal and social meanings for the reader. Hisham Matar alongside his father Jaballah both share the feeling of appreciation for the home they grew up, in demonstrating an example of how comes the tenacity of all Arabian families in their whole. On a more socialized scale, this feeling goes outside the four walls to meet with a broader term, which is the land-Libya. A country that witnessed a tornado, an upside-down status overnight, should be loved and cherished way beyond each Libyan’s doorstep.

Conclusion

In *The Return*, Hisham Matar has successfully attempted to give account to his father's unheard story. His memoir, unlike any other experience, asserts the limitless boundaries that can join reality and fantasy together, but most notably, those confined by the terms of Time and Space. Hisham Matar, in full mastery of art, has skillfully assumed returning to a place that has always separated fathers and sons forcing one side to live in a concealed internal exile; when in fact, time has become inextricably linked to places that evoke painful memories, especially those of Matar's childhood, just in simple words.

Using Bakhtin's Chronotope, Hisham Matar has succeeded in portraying his journey to Libya, which miraculously gave voice to an internal conflict that he had to live with for more than thirty three years in exile. Characters, on the other hand, were given a definite description by means of space and time, in a way that reveals each one's essence in times of crisis. This, in fact, demonstrates how witty the author was in weaving the plot, which based on the 1996 massacre in Abu Salim's prison. Hisham Matar's life was turned around by the latter, which served as a ligament between the wilderness of places and the unjust violation of dates. Moreover, it explains how the author came to create a statement for a more socially-engaged personality, the one that is capable of standing up for the right things wherever and whenever circumstances permitted.

Despite the many questions it does not answer, *The Return* delineates a faithfully documented biography of a father who devoted his life to his land, and an autobiography of a son who is still yearning for his robbed childhood, a concrete depiction of two distinct generations living in separate spaces. This is what ultimately marks the utter interrelatedness of time and space; therefore, showing the significance of Chronotope in shaping contemporary literature as a whole.

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المخلص

في تحليل الأعمال الأدبية، الزمان والمكان مفهومان مهمان يجب تذكرهما. تم دراسة هذين المفهومين بشكل منفصل لأنهما كانا غير مرتبطين. لمعرفة كلمة "كرونوتوب"، اعتقد ميخائيل باختين أنهما متكافئان ومترابطان. الهدف من هذا البحث هو دراسة وتطبيق نظرية الكرونوتوب على السيرة الذاتية لهشام مطر "العودة"، والتي من المحتمل أن تصبح كلاسيكية. منذ أن تمت مناقشة مفاهيم الزمان والمكان بشكل مختلف في الأعمال الأدبية المختلفة اعتمادًا على الحركة الأدبية والنوع الذي ينتمي إليه العمل، تطور تصور هذين العنصرين المهمين من العصور القديمة إلى المعاصرة. يتطلب فهم الروابط الزمنية والمكانية في المذكرة قراءة زمنية لـ "العودة". وهكذا، تؤكد الدراسة الحالية على قيمة الكرونوتوب كوسيلة لتصوير التجربة والذاكرة والتاريخ والثقافة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظرية الأدبية، الكرونوتوب، ميخائيل باختين، العودة 2016، الروابط الزمانية و المكانية