



## An Investigation of Temporal Figures in the Novels of Marguerite Duras: Ontological Status Analyzed by Durandian Approach\*

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**T**IME has always been a source of panic for human beings, since the flow of time leads them to death and nullity. Time never stops flowing: the further it goes, the more it ages the man and the closer he gets to death. So, this aging time appears as the greatest occupation for man; he invades and usurps his dynamics and active faculty, which is the imagination. According to Gaston Bachelard, imagination is not the power of construction of images of reality, but rather the power of formation of images that are beyond the reality and superior to it. As Thomas puts it, the real world can only be perceived through images and symbols; the imaginary is then defined as "a system, a relationship, a dynamic logic of image composition [...]. The imagination as a world of images in self-organization is the unique space of freedom that defines the human adventure: It is through which that man gives himself the power to see the world, and gets in touch with the world". Saying so, Thomas considers imagination as «the map with which we read the cosmos, since we now know that the reality is an elusive notion and that we know only representations, through systems that are always symbolic».

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Taking into account that these observations and imagination explain all the "fiction" and all the "philosophy" of man, this study starts by this assumption that the feeling of agony of time appears as a constant haunting in the world literature. Behind this imagination which is the true source of creation, one can always detect anguish in front of time and temporality. In other words, time and its flow will exert a powerful influence on the imagination of human beings, whence all writing is more or less colored by the sinister imprints of the temporal flow. Durassian writings, which are rich in developing the great obsessional themes such as the ambivalence of the passionate swinging between life and death, the renewed wonder of discovering the desire for the strange "other" and the intolerable existence of the human condition, is in no way excluded.

In this paper, the main question is to point out **how** the ontological status and the philosophical positioning of the novelist are projected in temporal figurations; these being indicative of the anxiety of the human being before the passage of time.

By using imaginary method proposed by Gilbert Durand which has been developed in his seminal work *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, this paper tends to discover how and by which class of images and figurative structures the obsession with time is reflected in the writings of the French woman novelist Marguerite Duras. To answer the question, a corpus of six novels of the author published within 30 years (from 1954 to 1984) has been analyzed according to Durand's anthropological approach to imagination, which is based upon the isotopic classification of images and subtended with the figurative structures of the human imagination.

The analysis of temporal figures of Duras fictional works by Durandian approach revealed that despite the neutral, non-figurative and superficial platitude of Durassian writings, the imagination of the novelist is drastically tinted by negative figurations of the flowing time, and the images relating to the fear of time are projected by the symbols of bestiality (theriomorphic), darkness (nyctomorphs) and fall (catamorphe); projecting all over the disturbed ontological status of the author and her desperate vision of the world. In fact, a continuous isomorphism of the ontological figurations establishes a clear and constant relation between the seemingly disparate images, where, in fact, these images bind diagonally and nourish each other in the deep structures of the text.

As for the different representations of temporal figurations that are reflected in the novels of Duras, we have retained that the theriomorphic symbols have passed through the chaotic images represented by elements

like noise, sun, wind, and so on. The Nyctomorphic symbols are manifested particularly through the images of the dark night and the black and heavy water. The catamorphic symbols are clearly emanating from the images of the imaginary fall.

The Durassian universe being submerged with temporal figurations that projects the author's existential anxiety, is very paradoxically condensed in a writing allegedly flattened and without depth; it is our own despite its superficial conciseness and its technique reduced to the minimum rich of imaginary details; that is enough to be attentive to the details even if they seem insignificant at first sight.

Meantime, it is true that the imagination of Duras, as it is studied in the context of the present study, has been disrupted \_ even fragmented \_ but following her literary career, this does not prevent that the tragic existential positioning of the novelist would not be or could not be regulated by the projection of the second category of daytime images, those which announce the (re)conquest over time, namely the ascensional images, spectacular images or diuretic symbols.

The path of research on the dynamics of the Durassian imagination remains open for future researchers, and it is highly desirable to investigate the possibility for the novelist to get rid of existential anxiety and / or to consolidate ontological positioning *via* the nocturnal system of temporal images. It is truly encouraging that we study how the author has managed either by the appropriate use of positive-valued diurnal images, or by utilizing symbols and structures of the nocturnal system to overcome the time, and in order to announce, by these imaginary representations, her conquest over the time.

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