


A photograph of a woman from behind, standing waist-deep in a calm lake. She has her arms raised, splashing water upwards from both hands. The water is still, reflecting her silhouette and the splashing water. In the background, there are green mountains under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and liberating.

# Women and Temporality in Literature and Cinema

Negotiating with Timelessness

ILA AHLAWAT



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## Women and Temporality in Literature and Cinema



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# Women and Temporality in Literature and Cinema

*Negotiating with Timelessness*

*Ila Ahlawat*

Amsterdam University Press



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*Dedicated to my father, Premraj Ahlawat*



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# Acknowledgements

There are spots on my soul – spots of love, like red spots on a white soul – and those continue to remain as red and as loving even as time passes; they, in fact, do not care about time, and they do not fade in time because they never step out in the sun. When I die, the soul escapes with the same spots and finds another body, and so my love does not die.

The thing about memory, I strongly believe, is that it never dies. All the memories, from near past and distant past, remain registered within us. It is just that with time, some memories fade and are papered over by newer experiences, memories. But that, in no way, means that the memories, experiences from 20 years ago or from the most distant of pasts, even past lives, erase from our conscious, our soul or our brains. Every experience, interaction, everything we have ever encountered or read or heard lies somewhere within us to be uncovered or retrieved.

*Women and Temporality* is very close to me. The idea originated during an evening discussion with my mother about time and the power of time in 2017. A few days later, I informed her that I was considering writing an article around a gendered understanding of time, and she promptly suggested that I should instead write a book on the subject.

I aimed for a unique linguistic tone throughout the manuscript which could be seen as a blend of academic and poetic. For my analyses, I sought subjects who had barely been studied vis-a-vis their relationship with temporality, if at all. Overall, I have been satisfied with the final outcome of my research pursuits.

I am grateful to my mother, Kamla Ahlawat for having always been encouraging and loving. I always loved listening to stories and fables and folklores, and my mother has passed on much wisdom and much imagination to me through sharing these oral gems of memory, experience and creativity all these years. I am blessed to having had the sweetest and the most caring brother in Sahil Ahlawat. I will always be inspired and strengthened by the love of my father who has been instrumental in my pursuit, as an academic and as an individual, to always remember, reshape my memories and understand time and passage of time in more artistic and philosophical terms. Finally, I thank my friends and colleagues in Canada and India who have shared their ideas and feedback with me on this project and shown immense encouragement.



Life's journey often preys on our susceptibility to forget.  
So, don't you forget!

# Introduction: Remembering to Forget

Yet when all is said  
It was the dream itself enchanted me  
Character isolated by a deed  
To engross the present and dominate memory  
– W.B. Yeats, *The Circus Animals' Desertion*

Time is the most potent and the most granular force in the universe. It is not static, and can never be found in one space or one time. It is ever present and ever moving. It cannot be surpassed; it cannot be claimed. It is a dream that enchants and terrifies, and that can fade in time or take on new hues. It works in tandem with all that is said and all that is done, and then also abandons them to move forward or backward. It is beyond words and actions, and life, and more powerful.

This book project is unique, and delves into the subject of literary and cinematic women characters entrapped in temporal spaces and their peculiar communication with visibility, enclosure, space and time in the context of sexual and temporal discord. The project is premised on the central tenet that has been posited about the women characters that have been analyzed in the following chapters – women deal with time and temporality differently than men, they share a different dynamic to time than men. Women, this book contends, conceive of temporal passage as a more nuanced and emotional experience than men do. They are able to see both its destructive as well as its constructive character, and negotiate with both much better than men.

The focus of this book lies on the entrapped circumstances of the women characters analyzed in the chapters of this book (entrapped within temporality, that is) and locate their struggles within the realm of the passage of time, and its strict dimensions as well as its fluid ductility. The woman is affected by time in more ways than one, and reacts to it, viscerally, emotionally, psychologically and ontologically, and conceives of it as an ongoing journey that has the potential to empower her like it cannot do for men. The concepts of youth and ageing are gendered, this book argues, and these

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concepts embody their awareness of themselves differently among the sexes. These concepts may be fatally ruinous or may be fatally transcendental. Furthermore, they can be deconstructed and may potentially lose their manifest meaning; youth is an ongoing uneasy procession towards the new hour and ageing is a revisiting of the youth from ages before and beyond the youth and unravelling the façade of its limitations that seek to confine it within a momentary romance – as Yeats would say, ‘To engross the present and dominate memory’.

A woman traverses time through her richer and more sensitive consciousness which ages slower than that of a man. This grants her comprehension, sometimes slow and infinitesimally small and gradual, yet a comprehension that is infinite and a comprehension that can constructively comprehend infinity. This, in turn, allows her to soak in memories and even reshape them from time to time. This book often locates women characters living painfully fluid but fertile lives in their memories and their premonitions. As Eileen Chang says in her essay ‘Writing of One’s Own’, ‘Between memory and reality, there are awkward discrepancies producing a solemn but subtle agitation, an intense but as yet indefinable struggle’ (2005: 17–18).

Stephen Hawking has ruminated upon the concept of time in his famous book, *A Brief History of Time* and has discussed and debated about the theories of absoluteness and relativity of temporality propounded by scientists and philosophers from Aristotle to Newton to Einstein and several others. He contends that time should be seen as a relative phenomenon which is influenced by other factors like space, distance, weight, etcetera. He asserts that temporality is relative and this theory of relativity, most notably put forth by Einstein, forces us to reformulate our ideas of space and time. ‘We must accept that time is not completely separate from and independent of space, but is combined with it to form an object called space-time’ (1998: 6). He further harks back to Einstein’s research to predicate the circular nature of temporality, a claim that resonates with one of the central ways my book views temporality vis-a-vis its negotiation with women’s existence and experiences. He talks about how the space-time dynamic is not flat (or linear, in theoretical terms) but is instead curved or ‘warped’ (17–18). The process of ageing is also relative, he contends, and it may be inconsequent or inapparent, even as much else around one could continue to age, decay and, altogether, die (18). One can fairly concede that the limits of temporality are significantly porous, fluid and allows movement in both the directions.

Hawking further develops his argument and states that ‘there is no unique absolute time, but instead each individual has his own personal measure of time that depends on where he is and how he is moving’ (19). This is to say



that one's consciousness of temporality is largely responsible for how one conceives, receives and executes temporality. One can further argue that time's quality of univocity and the power of reconciliation with the truth is not absolute. Hawking's contention is that time and space can be seen as forces that are as much acted-upon as the human bodies and experiences that time and space act upon, thereby rendering much strength to human actions and consciousness. Time, in other words, might no longer be seen as an indomitable, inexorable force that would never come to yield to human experiences. In scientific terms, this is Hawking's contention,

Space and time are now dynamic quantities: when a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time – and in turn, the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act. Space and time not only affect but also are affected by everything that happens in the universe. (19)

Hawking has also discussed the idea of movement between time zones, between the present to the past and the future, and how the directional nature of time is mostly 'imaginary' (72). His argument is that because the movement in time is relative, the direction of movement would also be subjective to who executes it or who perceives it. That is to say that a movement backwards for someone may not seem like a shift back in time to someone else and yet another person may even see it as a movement forward in time. He says, 'The laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future' (72). On a preliminary level, however, he does not agree to the possibility of going back to the past even though going forward to the future is seen as a possibility. This is because going forward is tantamount to increasing disorder or entropy in the world around while a movement backwards is a contraction or decrease in disorder, and that is not feasible in the world of physics.

My book has, nevertheless, examined both forward as well as backward movements in time by the women characters under discussion. It has often built its arguments hinging upon the initial hypothesis by Hawking about the directional nature of time being malleable and subject to subjective execution. He has, of course, discussed this hypothesis later in his book in order to explore the possibility of temporality being not unidirectional but multidirectional. This is possible on account of the possibility of temporal movement being circular or 'warped' and the possibility of bending of light so as to warp space and time, thereby transporting one to the past (78–79). Going back into the past also enables one to explore the possibility

of concocting alternative narratives, thereby altering the incoming course of events. This gives one the free will to exercise control over time and the events associated with the passage of time, events that may have been seen as already fixed in the narrative and that may really be as fluid and alterable as the events that we conceive or plan for the future (80).

\*

The linearity inherent in the concept of temporal movement is a myth and a false obsession, this book seeks to locate the circularity that is the true nature of temporality. The passage of time may seem so superfluous that the *present* may continue to go on, seemingly in circles, and yet may never be able to bind the woman in a single time zone or causality. This book deals with the idea of repetition in this context – *today* is the same as *yesterday*, I can already see my *tomorrow* and your *tomorrow*, but my consciousness is an ever-expanding garden of memories, experiences and premonitions.

Søren Kierkegaard, in *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, famously says that, ‘...life itself is a repetition’ (2009: 3). He talks about the idea of repetition also entailing recollection, thereby rendering consciousness, learning and improvisation possible. However, Kierkegaard also contends that repetition and recollection happen in opposing directions, ‘Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards’ (3). He further argues that repetition is the more desirable of the two because it carries the truth, the essence of an authentic existence. He argues, and my book follows this argument as well, that willing repetition is an act of courage and sustains humans ontologically.

Repetition is also tantamount to continuity, even if that continuity is of the same thing. This implies that one stands a shot at eternity, and therefore, timelessness. I have further affirmed, and that is one of the central tenets of this book, that this is equivalent to being aware of one’s mortality, also being mortal, but never dying. In other words, repetition saves one from death, while also privileging one to authentically and artistically encounter mortality. As Kierkegaard has stated, ‘... he who does not grasp that life is repetition and that this is the beauty of life, has condemned himself and deserves nothing better than what will happen to him – death’ (4).

The women characters studied in this book are not rid of their mortality, nor do they desire to be saved from it; they are, instead, liberated from the permanent oblivion of death. My contention is that mortality is reversible



while death is not. Being a mortal sets you into motion towards an impending death but does not necessarily push you into death, instead the movement may be reversed and you may be lunging in the opposite direction towards life, that is not rid of death and suffering, and towards eternity, that is not rid of beckoning mortality and infinite repetition. This is similar to how Kierkegaard would voice the argument about how eternity is where one would find true and authentic repetition, one that is also productive (2009: 75).

The woman exists in time and outside time. She may be departing from one temporal zone, only to find herself pushed (or pulled) back into it to be able to recollect it or re-live it once again; sometimes she may be forced to remain in that moment for more than one moment, sometimes for multiple moments. Is she then really entrapped, or is she still able to transform that queer tragedy into an existential art of repetitive yet fruitful existence? An idea that gives us insight into the several possibilities that repetition opens for us is found in Gilles Deleuze's treatise *Difference and Repetition* where he asserts that, 'To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent' (1994: 1)

Repeating a moment is not equivalent to going to the same moment or re-living the same experience even if the narrative appears to be exactly the same. The fact that the moment is *happening* once again makes it unique and singular in its own way. That particular moment is dissimilar to the moment that it is repeating even though it is duplicating it. That is because they are two different entities and they occupy their own distinct space and time to happen. Deleuze asserts, 'Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view constitutes non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities' (1). He further adds that repetition is a 'singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation, and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect, repetition is a transgression' (2).

Repetition is a movement forward, redundant though it may seem. It is equivalent to being offered an opportunity to reminisce, revisit and improvise. Therefore, it is rightly opposed to permanence. Given that it is adding another event in the womb of temporal movement indicates that in going to the past, one is essentially living a present, and living and shaping a future. It is both embracing monotony as well as the temporal displacement, as I call it, that juxtaposes an event already materialized in the past with an event hoping to materialize itself in the future and how the two moments, at some point, tend to interchange places (it must be remembered that they still constitute two moments and not one).





A woman is more conscious of temporality and how it affects her. This text contends that she has access to transcending temporality and the resilience it carries in a way a man does not. This is because she has known the time-mandated aspects of her youth, her appearance, the social roles she has, time and again, been expected to play through various phases, the weight of her sexuality and sexual choices that run against linear temporal norms, the pain of artistic creation that dares to defy temporal and spatial limits, the grief and tragedy of loss and alienation that only she can know and that refuse to heal with time. All five women characters that anchor the five chapters of this book display a stronger affinity towards temporal transcendence while the male characters surrounding their respective story-arcs do not exhibit a similar sensitivity, receptivity and ability to conceive of temporality in all its strength and fallacies. Hence, within its literature purview, this text traces women's unique experiencing of temporality.

In other words, the women characters discussed in this text, who are apparently stuck or entrapped within a temporal fixity, are also the ones who are able to exert force within this fixity, learn temporal transcendence and display traits of both tragedy and rebellion. They find access to their selves in various forms and various time-zones and, thereby, also find access to power. This power springs from their ability to develop their faculties of forgetting, remembering, recalling, returning, re-living, experiencing, re-imagining – the power of eternity. Nietzsche has evoked the idea of 'eternal return' in his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and ascribed the character of perpetual return to the most conscious and authentic human existence (170). Women characters in this book have recognized, or come to recognize, the revocability, the accessibility to all their lived experiences and that temporality is really circular and not linear. This existential recognition empowers them and renders them more grounded and secure against hostile memories and threatening fate that they originally find placed in alignment with patriarchal, male-orchestrated turn of events.

The women, then, find the opportunity to run out on a hostile time and attempt to locate an alternative temporality that is more accommodative and carries more agency for them. This would sometimes also entail going through the pain of enforced forgetfulness – annihilating the semantics of a lived past–, while on other occasions, the forgetting is a wilful choice that allows them to paper over oppressive experiences and memories. Deleuze has pointed out how forgetting could be a source of strength and hope once someone learns to adapt to and accept the act and art of repetition. He says, 'It is in repetition and by repetition that Forgetting becomes a positive power while the unconscious becomes a positive and superior unconscious (for



example, forgetting as a force is an integral part of the lived experience of eternal return). Everything is summed up in power' (1994: 7–8). He further evokes the philosophical arguments of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to advance the potency inherent in the act of repetition that awakens consciousness which, he contends, is empowering; in a way, every repetition multiplies this power (8). From this analysis, he concludes that consciousness is ontologically empowering and, thus, must be pursued. This consciousness allows one to comprehend time and passage of time beyond a simplistic regular understanding. He asserts that 'Infinite comprehension thus makes possible remembering and recognition, memory and self-consciousness (even when these two faculties are not themselves infinite)' (11).

The concept of consciousness is replete with both forgetfulness as well as remembrance, and consciousness allows one to recognize and utilize both these faculties productively, that is, towards existential progression. In other words, consciousness allows one to enact or be present in the act of repetition with knowledge, without restraint or resistance (13). This is not to say that repetition is always accompanied by remembering; there is also conversely the logic of forgetfulness begetting repetition, 'the less one remembers, the less one is conscious of remembering one's past, the more one repeats it' (14). The idea of forgetting is, then, taken to be associated with distancing oneself from or refusing to cherish the past, as it were. Nietzsche voices similar views in Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, 'Cherishing and perishing: these have rhymed together for eternities. Will to love: that is also to be willing to die' (1991: 94).

In this context, it is all the more important to point out the courage one must have in order to will repetition. This is the extraordinary courage of the *Superman* that Nietzsche chooses to call such a human, someone who overcomes Man and who wills repetition and all the trauma and pain it brings with itself (11). The Superman is brave and does not run away from his/her past, the essence of his existence. Nietzsche's Zarathustra would implore audience to answer the question most pertinent to humans' existence, 'Do you will this once more and countless times more?' (I, 20). The Superman has his eyes on an everlasting future as he wills again and again to an advent into repetition. His character exemplifies what could be called the love for the furthest (43).

The existence of the past or that of the future is a functional dependent of the present. The past or the future exist in the present, and gain validity and truthfulness only through the present. Deleuze expresses this thought cogently as thus, 'It is in this present that time is deployed. To it belong both the past and the future: the past in so far as the proceeding instants are

retained in the contraction; the future because its expectation is anticipated in the same contraction' (1994: 70–71). He further adds that 'every sign is a sign of the present, from the point of view of the passive synthesis in which past and future are precisely only dimensions of the present itself' (77). This idea also justifies why repetition is itself seen as a unique and singular event by Deleuze. This is because every temporality is uniquely individual and, in repeating that same temporality, a new temporality is being put into motion.

Memory plays a crucial role in the act of revisiting the past, it is selective and subjective. Humans tend to act as self-preserving while remembering the past; that is to say, they re-construct and re-shape their memories in ways that allow them to reconcile a tragic past or their insecurities with their present self which seeks hope and happiness. They tend to *return* to the past only to fill it in the colours of their choice rather than trying to decipher and deconstruct it cognitively. In contrast to this is the truly conscious person, or one seeking consciousness, the Superman, if you will, who does not paper over her past nor does she try to obliterate it for her comfort. For her, forgetting may be an act to re-visit a time or experience or refresh her cognition, but it is not meant to lessen her pain and offer transitory comfort.

This is not to suggest that the conscious person does not seek to deconstruct her past or to re-shape her memories, because she does indulge in both these things. However, she does not revisit her past passively or with the intention of solely finding transitory comfort. She actively revisits her past, as if actively living in the present and seeks sentience, the knowledge that will allow her to dismiss the conception of a linear, forward-moving direction of time. The past is a stepping stone that reinvents itself every day for her and she must plunge into it headlong in order to locate the hubris of eternal existence, however painful that may turn out to be for her. This is equivalent to what Nietzsche has termed as 'downgoing', which is a wilful act (1991: 10). Downgoing is an attempt to acknowledge both the transience of temporality and the abyss of human experience. It is an attempt at understanding the ontological absoluteness of repetition. This downgoing must be heralded as a self-revelatory action and the downgoers are the bravest of people, 'for they go across' (153).

In downgoing, one is attempting to accept and comprehend repetition. One of the major function of this attempt to accept and comprehend repetition is to locate the singularity inherent in every repetition, develop one's consciousness and make improvisations. This singularity needs to be located by coming to terms with the past as an independent event and needs to be synthesized independently and actively, as opposed to the



'passive synthesis' (77) that Deleuze evokes and that continues to keep it as the function of the present and always relational to the present. On the other hand, when one does a downgoing, one plunges into the past with the intent of actively comprehending and actively synthesizing the past as if one's present and future depended on it. The past may be constituted, as it were, as a present that is waiting to arrive afresh thereby reformulating a past which existed prior to a newly-constituted past. Here we must evoke Deleuze's 'contemporaneity of the past with the present that it *was*' (1994: 81) to assert the idea that this book explores on the possibility of the past flowing uninterrupted into the exclusive domain of the present and altering it – drop by drop, moment by moment – such that essence of the present is changed, and sometimes even its direction is changed – that is, it may also be initiated into flowing backwards. The past is a reservoir of untapped energy and potential that a downgoer may attempt to open in order to be *at the same time* in various places and various temporalities.

The past can be utilized as a potent force that influences the present as much as the present influences the past, the Bergsonian idea that Deleuze raises as well (82). He further explains as follows,

The past does not cause one present to pass without calling forth another, but itself neither passes nor comes forth. For this reason the past, far from being a dimension of time, is a synthesis of all time of which the present and the future are only dimensions. We cannot say that it was. It no longer exist, it does not exist, but it insists, it consists, it *is*. It insists with the former present, it consists with the new or the present present. It is the in-itself of time as the final ground of the passage of time (82).

Deleuze has further contended how this past is a pure, a priori element of all time. The past is contemporaneous with the present and always necessarily poses itself as the already-there and allowing the present to either pass and be enveloped by it or be altered and prolong itself (82). I further contend that there exists a self-conservatory quality to the past that, in a sense, seeks to not only to conserve and model itself but also seeks to extend itself. In other words, it is a force that cannot be dismissed, and if it is indeed dismissed, it comes back for vengeance always. The present and future must learn to coexist with the past and make peace with its eccentricities.

Temporality is performative. One part of it exists as a dimension – an event unfolding, an incoming development foreseen, a remembered episode – while the other part of it seeks to reproduce this dimension, to validate itself in its performance and through its performance. This is to say that temporality is

not only theoretical, or philosophical, if you will, but also theatrical. It carries the bold candour of eventuality and the valiant surrender of causality as a performative exercise and, in doing so, also becomes both the subject as well as the object of its representation. Evanescent moments enact temporality in all its vulnerability and strength, and their fleeting nature ensures that they are both the actors as well as the most loyal spectators of their own performance.

Temporality is both the actor as well as the action. It can both touch itself as well distance itself from itself. It both represents as well as observes. It is a passage of indefinite conception of action within a set vertice of space and time. It is an alienated action that coordinates with all other alienated actions in order to induce onto its performative plane some sort of a plausible plot or order.

Temporality is enacted not only through movement but also through stasis. One must understand that stasis is also movement of moments but usually by superimposition of two or more moments over one another such that an outwardly movement becomes hard to discern. Stasis of temporality could be seen as a representational act that seeks to delude the spectators/participants into believing into the myth of linearity of movement. Stasis is chaotic in reality and once comprehended, one can see the underlining vibrations, circular movement, displacements that stasis is subjected to. Understandably, performance of stasis is a complex and creatively challenging art for temporality; it is all the more challenging for the spectators to discern it, deconstruct it and, most challenging of all, live (in) it. Movement of stasis is mediated through the dialectic of emptiness of space (that this stasis in temporality seeks to align with) and the deluge of oncoming moments battling for a monopoly over the present moment, or the present present, so to speak. In other words, the performance of stasis, which involves the superimposition of two or more moments over one another, as also stated above, is comprised of each moment trying hard to obtain the longer representational quality of stasis. One can even argue that it is an existential attempt of its own sort.

Temporality, when performing repetition, is playing on its artistic rendition of both movement and stasis to varying extents, the variables being dependent on the space and the event it puts into motion. It is also endeavouring to retain the purity of its performance with every repetition. This is because repetition, as an event and as an act, is hinging on two different possibilities. One of the possibilities is to hark to the last rendition of itself and model it, more or less, once again. The second possibility is to hark back to the original event or act, to the time it first

occurred and model itself, more or less, as a duplication of the original event or act. Clearly, this second possibility is extremely difficult to retain and reproduce, given that between this and the many repetitions that followed, the first happening has lost its essence and memory. So much so that one is unable to even determine if it was really the first one or the thirteenth or the one hundred thirteenth. One can then convincingly argue that repetition, or even the act of remembering repeatedly, tends to alter or distort or reformulate, but mostly of all of these, the original event or act. This understandably proves that repetition is not a mechanical reproduction but allows scope for slight change with each advent into it and leaves one with the chance to improvise that which could not be improvised in the past events or acts. The performance of this temporality is an attempt to, then, render itself conscious of what is being attempted and recognizing its independence in this performance, in the sense that it cannot depend on an external 'director', as it were, to influence its performative potential with relational memories or finite hopes of a future. It is performing what I called above as the 'indefinite conception of action' and an uncountable number of times.

Deleuze has also discussed a similar concept of the 'theatre of repetition' and he argues that 'In the theatre of repetition, we experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organized bodies, with masks before faces, with spectres and phantoms before characters – the whole apparatus of repetition as a "terrible power"' (1994: 10). It is also interesting to note how he states that repetition is not necessarily dependent on a pre-existing concept, thereby granting a character of singularity or independence to the act of repetition. The act of repetition is, he contends, an attempt to empower itself as much as the original event that inspires it was (the act or event that it seeks to repeat, that is). It derives its power also through seeking an intuitive ability even in only performing a repetition and, therefore, seek an individuality, an agency for itself (13, 14).

Repetition can be seen as an unravelling of the performative potential of temporality in all its philosophical and theatrical depth. It also unravels the self-conservative nature of the past that continually forays into other time-zones to inhabit them and interfere with their performance. Repetition is, in more ways than one, a leap towards eternity and in being set into motion, it points to the magnanimity of temporality and a lonely journey through it. At the same time, repetition is performing the mortal conception of a thought, an act, an event with the lingering possibility of it being the

last time, and in doing so, negotiating with emotions of grief, terror, relief, indifference.

Nietzsche, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, time and again, emphasises upon the most central thought in his book – the circular nature of temporality. He also talks about how the finite world is always necessarily inadequate for the infinite character of temporality (1991: 143). Temporality is the actor and the action that overwhelms the spectator, the world, and acts upon it by touching it with its might and holding it captive in the action.

Temporality is also gendered. This is another of the chief ideas that this book revolves around and investigates. In simple terms, and in relation to the focus of this book, a gendered temporality may be understood as one in which the dynamic of the woman has entered and now wields a semiotic, feminine force upon it, and that works within it with the artistic and sexual candour that only a woman is capable of wielding. She grapples with time and its passage as a fleeting advent of youth, beauty, social and cultural acceptance and, overall, existential opportunities; this is something that men would never grapple with, and that is because time and the passage of time is much slower for men. The woman, therefore, must attempt to resist the corroding effects of temporality in more than just superficial ways. She must develop a deeper consciousness on temporality, its true nature and learn to transcend it. The idea is to understand that living and dying are not exactly the extremes of existence, and that temporality, in its true theoretical and performative essence, is continually seeking a balance, a reconciliation between truth and action.

Elizabeth Freeman, in *Time Binds*, talks about the concept of ‘chronobiopolitics’ to indicate the gendered nature of temporal movement. She explains that ‘Chronobiopolitics harnesses not only sequence but also cycle, the dialectical companion to sequence, for the idea of time as cyclical stabilizes its forward movement, promising renewal rather than rupture’ (2010: 6). She asserts that femininity naturally aligns with the cyclical nature of temporality. She evokes Julia Kristeva early on to support her argument and says that ‘Woman, as a cultural symbol, comes to be correlated with the endless returns of cyclical time, as well as the stasis of monumental time: the figure of Woman supplements the historically specific nation-state with appeals to nature and eternity’ (6).

The woman is able to comprehend temporality from the past, and anticipate the future from the footsteps of the past and the present ongoing moments. She is much better placed to comprehend and attain eternity compared to men. This is because women respond to time emotionally – love, romance, mourning, affection, pain – and, therefore, can both extend or





contract it, and manifest to time and its passage their 'affective modes', as Freeman calls them (7). Time, therefore, binds into bodies and bodies, that are social, bind into time according to their gender (7).

Freeman has discussed another interesting concept she called *Erotohistoriography*, and this concept centres around the idea of the past necessarily affecting the present. She argues that the present is an evocation of the presentness of the past even though the past is not the present (2010: 95). These encounters are visceral in nature and the woman's body is, therefore, more attuned to them. She says that Erotohistoriography 'uses the body as a tool to effect, figure or perform that encounter [...] It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations' (95–96). This idea, again, attests to my arguments above how temporality is not only a theoretical concept but is equally performative that affects both the consciousness as well as the body.

Temporality may be feminized, invaginated by the events that transpire in its womb. That is to say that women may wield a powerful force upon temporality, so much so that it comes to belong to them. Freeman discusses Luce Irigaray's arguments to assert how the enmeshed nature of temporality with the woman's body could potentially 'usher in a new age of thought, art, poetry and language: the creation of a new *poetics*' (49). She explores further Irigaray's association of gendered pleasure with temporality and argues that 'in contrast to a male bodily economy where the sacrifice signalled by orgasmic expenditure produces momentary bliss, pleasure in the female bodily economy engenders more pleasure and thus more time' (49).

One can, then, further deduce that temporality may be seen as a sexually penetrative force that may either violate and rupture for a long time, or forever, the physical, emotional and ontological cognition of the woman or may instead enlighten her, empower her by rendering temporality bound to her visceral passion and profound emotional wavelength. Freeman has associated women's encounters with temporality as the 'the idea of unbound, pure energy, available for physical pleasure, for creative thought, and for self-directed action' (51). The bodily sites of the woman serve to rinse out the chronological flow of temporality and in her uterus, vaginal folds, tear ducts, she seems to be devising new temporal dimensions that defy the structural limitations of absolute pleasure and absolute pain in single, set temporal points. Such a temporality enables an escape from death and infuses newness within their existence, even when repetitive or monotonous. It may also help women devise new identities, new subjectivities for themselves that may or may not align with the external world's conceptions of their past or their future (54).





Freeman talks about the aspect of woman time being multidirectional and it being 'more tactile than visual' (55). However, my contention is that time is both tactile as well as visual in equal capacities. It is neither always discrete in its manifestation and influence nor always majestic and encompassing long sequences of ages, histories, or generations. It carries its depth in both these manifestations and the woman can instinctively switch from discrete moments to large swathes of temporal passage and vice versa. In addition, she can transform brief moments into never-ending temporal experiences and vice versa. Temporality, therefore, is multidirectional in its flow as well as its performance and the woman energy understands better and aligns with this multidirectional nature of temporality, given its natural tendency to embrace fluidity, namelessness, chaos. The woman is accepting of her lack of convictions, her reversibility, her emotional pitfalls, her moral uncertainties and overall her failure to separate time-zones or to abandon her experiences.

Freeman also argues on similar lines when she says that woman's body imprints itself on a temporal event and that such an event cannot rid itself of this feminine force and its performative attribute. She then discusses the idea of regression (or repetition, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter) to emphasize upon its healing factor. She says thus,

The turn backward is always a constitutive part of subjectivity, at least in the Freudian scheme: *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'deferred action', refers to the way that the Freudian subject reenacts, in displaced form, events that she could not give meaning to at the time they occurred. The Freudian symptom is the paradigmatic form of *Nachträglichkeit*, especially when the memory trace is acted out physically rather than worked through narratively, cognitively, or in dreams: in the hysterical gesture, the subject literally relives a past she could not 'live' at the time. (64)

Freeman also sees regression or revisiting the past as a sexually explorative act, an act endeavouring to match one's 'sexual flexibility' with 'temporal flexibility' (114). The idea of repetition may also be reinterpreted as the idea of reproduction and that which evokes the cyclicity of time. In a sense, biological reproduction and child-bearing that women carry out are an attempt to infuse within the temporal dynamics newer agencies to visit and re-visit events; this is tantamount to opening the history to a future that will have the characteristic option to reassemble history and set it rolling once again, as it were. In Freeman's opinion (in the context of her discussions on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*),

the present and the future are ‘somehow porous in an analog way’ to the fragmented, decaying past, and which now may find an opportunity to reshape itself (116).

The woman strives for timelessness with a passionate intensity that only she is capable of. She confronts the truth of her time in time and beyond time by regressing to the past or progressing to the future, so much so that it becomes difficult to locate her story in just one time. Being a woman means carrying the potential of being free of the science of linear temporal movement and possibly experiencing the cyclical, circular nature of time. Her ambition to recover her past and unearth her future determines if she is able to move past her mundane, temporally-limited desires. She has to learn to be patient in order to understand that time is powerful in her limited comprehension of her transient experiences and desires, and she becomes powerful when she understands that her existential pattern hinges greatly on repetition, and realizing that grieving for the time past is inessential because the end of one time loop does not bring about permanent oblivion or death; it merely halts the process for a brief temporal period after which the same cycle begins again afresh, thus giving one the chance to make changes. As Nietzsche’s Zarathustra would say, ‘Behold, we know what you teach: that all things return eternally, and we ourselves along with them; and that we have already existed countless times, and all things with us’ (1991: 170). I could, then, argue further that the existential conceit of coming, then going and then arriving again is actually a juxtaposition of existence and eternity in the gainfully incoherent time lags between eventuality and causality.

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This book contains five chapters and all of them explore various women negotiating temporal entrapment and timelessness. Each chapter focusses on individual women characters from English literature or Anglophone television and cinema, viz the Sibyl from T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*, Sibyl from Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Molloy’s mother from Samuel Beckett’s trilogy *Three Novels (Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnameable)*, Dolores from the television series *Westworld* (created by Jonathan Nolan) and Jess from Christopher Smith’s movie *Triangle*. All the chapters explore the themes of youth, ageing, transcendence across time, repetition, remembering, forgetting, mortality and consciousness. The book employs emotional intersections of the women characters with time to locate the possibilities of framing alternative temporalities or, at least, alternate relations to temporality. The idea of sexuality is explored vis-à-vis time



and there is also an attempt to explore the sexual connotations to women's interactions with time. The ideas of penetrating memories, formulating holes, closing holes, filling in gaps with external appendages, wrapping the body in overwhelming time-lapses, warping the consciousness with the piercing force of a pounding time are all explored in the chapters that follow.

Woman, and her negotiation with temporality, is fluid; she understands the incongruities of temporality and receives it with all her visceral intensity. She learns that time is cyclical, retraceable and redeemable, and, therefore, it allows her to find meanings to her experiences across timelines. Women find themselves often in stories that they cannot locate a beginning to and to whose end they cannot reach. This is painful, but it also allows them to seamlessly flow from one narrative in one time-zone to another narrative in another time-zone.

The power and force of temporality is juxtaposed with the perseverance and resilience of women, and the book seeks to explore how temporality could be perceived, understood, appropriated and exercised as a means of power and agency by women. It would be worthwhile to investigate the visceral encounters between the past, the present and the future that women have and how they may end up either rupturing temporality as a dynamic altogether or suturing the dispersed time-space encounters.

## Chapter 1: The Sibyl and the Hanging Cage

The first chapter of this book interrogates and unravels the predicament of the character of the Sibyl in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. The chapter offers a novel take on the relation of the Sibyl to the semantics of temporality in a gendered and theatrical context vis-a-vis the poem. The chapter also muses on the Sibyl's affair with Apollo and her lengthening love duet with time. The circularity of time and its unhinging effects on this woman having taken on the inexorable force of time within a shrinking spatial metaphor have been interrogated. There is also an attempt at exploring the sexuate force of temporality and how it serves as not just a force of annihilation but also a force of birthing. The character of the Sibyl is explored as being in a love-affair with time and seeking to mould her lover (time, that is) according to her own sensitivities.

The chapter attempts to locate the Sibyl at the heart of Eliot's poem and its deep-seated conflict with the women characters in it, suspended in nebulous temporalities, steering the soul of the poem. The chapter explores the compulsive gazing of the spectator-breed upon this violative spectacle



that sucks in much, materially and temporally, from her audience and gives out nothing, for she is always out of sync with the spatio-temporal narratives of the theatre in question.

## Chapter 2: Sibyl and the Crazy Painting

This chapter delves into the character of Sibyl, Dorian's lover, in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The chapter explores the idea of her being a modern reincarnation of the mythological character of the Sibyl of Eliot's *Waste Land* who struggled against the *ennui* and timelessness of an entrapped existence. The chapter makes concerted efforts to draw comparisons between the love story of the Sibyl and Apollo, discussed in the earlier chapter, and the one between Sibyl and Dorian in Wilde's novel. The chapter develops the theme of sexual transgression and its gender-specific consequences in time – the woman is both the victim of the excesses of time as well as the hardened, wise, old soul which comes out as more perdurable. The chapter also harks back to the biblical notions on art and sinning and the looming threat of the poison of mortality and death.

There is the fleeting, fickle, time-dependent aspect to love and romance, which is contrasted with an eternal, ever-renewing aspect to tragedy and artistry. This chapter explores the concept of the 'patriarchal spectator' and the woman's predicament as a caged spectacle and an uncontrolled consciousness.

## Chapter 3: Molloy and his Mother in the Room

This chapter engages with Molloy's temporal relationship with his mother in Samuel Beckett's trilogy, *Three Novels*. The mother is traced beginning from a room where she lies confined and immobile and travelling across memories and experiences through various personae. She transcends temporal constraints, singular narratives and nomenclature, and serves as the existential cornerstone for her *lost* son. The chapter engages with psychoanalysis to explore the peculiar dynamics in a mother-son relationship, explores feminist studies on the idea of grotesquerie and its unique synchronization with ageing and forgetting.

The spatial and temporal positioning of the mother emboldens Molloy's authorial and ontological narrative. The mother is seen as the saviour, located outside any singular temporality, for her son who is threatened of



becoming *lost* in the world outside that is grounded in material realities and fixed nomenclatures. She is discussed as assisting in her son's return from the singularity outside to the plurality inside. The chapter traces transference of identities, of memories, and seeks to enunciate the corpus of desire between the mother and the son.

#### Chapter 4: Dreaming in Loops in the Westworld

The chapter discusses HBO's science-fiction television series, *Westworld*. The focus is chiefly on the first season of the series; the second season is referenced rarely and only as a contextual basis for the arguments, where necessary. The character of Dolores is interrogated against the backdrop of her involuntary placement within stories that are not of her choosing and within temporalities that are beyond her comprehension. The chapter is premised on the central tenet of the agonizing aspects of being out of sync with the dominant temporality, what I have called 'the violence of temporality', and traces Dolores' journey towards consciousness, deeper and deeper into the recesses of time and its wounds.

The idea of entrapment within temporality may be not exclusively disempowering but also immensely empowering and liberating, and this chapter seeks to probe both these states of existence. Choices are uncovered and allowed to take shape as time-sets on their own. The chapter significantly refers to philosophical postulates from the *Bhagawad Gita*, the religious scripture in Hinduism and the hypothesis from existential philosophers like Camus and Nietzsche. Ideas like repetition, death and rebirth are tested against Dolores' journey through the world of the created to the world of the creators.

#### Chapter 5: Locating the Beginning and the End in the Triangle

In the final chapter, the journey of the character of Jess in the British movie *Triangle* has been studied. The overarching theme is the circularity inherent in temporality and the possible sifts it continues to create in its movement. The chapter attempts to extract lessons and possible points of fresh departure from such sifts. The idea is to theoretically interrogate the twisted, diabolical connotations of the word 'restart' and whether it makes any sense at all for a woman like Jess entrapped in a temporal cage. The chapter harnesses theories of affect to the dynamics of being gazed at and counter-gazing. There is, of course, the oft-proclaimed backdrop of a



Sisyphus-like existence, although this chapter has sought to mould this as a gendered emblem of constraint and lack of agency.

The character of Jess negotiates with the cyclicity inherent in experiences, memories, even language. It is like finding oneself in a time and space conundrum and gradually learning the fallacies of arriving at conclusions and goodbyes. The chapter has endeavoured to locate spectacles and narratives beyond single frames and single relations to reality.

## Conclusion: Losing it all in the Head

The concluding section summarizes some of the important ideas discussed throughout the monograph and some crucial conclusions derived. This section delves into the fickle yet sustaining aspect of temporality and how chronology is a malleable, heterogeneous concept. This section creatively probes another concept that I have called 'temporal animism'. The idea of the woman running out on time and time running out on the woman is once again delved into for a finality. The aesthetic of incorporating an encounter from one time-zone into another and its potential of manifesting a continuum of representation is explored. Finally, this section is utilized to assert the possible theoretical spillovers of this book and its literary and cinematic women characters from fictional roles to real life women.

In its entirety, this book has sought to locate and spell out both the damaging as well as the healing effects of temporality upon women's consciousness. The women characters examined here, fictional though they are, struggle against the reductivist effects of temporality. They initiate autonomy in the time-frames they have been pushed into, and appropriate the temporal aporias they encounter in their existential journeys as opportunities that enable to scour for alternative spatial and temporal realities that align more closely with their ideas of fulfillment.

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