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**Artistic time in D. Keyes' novel
*Flowers for Algernon***

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Abstract. The problems presented in *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) the novel by American writer Daniel Keyes (1925–2014), fall within the realm of existential questions of the 20th century: the meaning and purpose of human life, family and interpersonal relationships, the place of a deviant personality in society, the ethics of experimental science and medicine, empathy and compassion, and the role of science and knowledge, among others. The novel has been included in lists of the greatest books of our time, has become a modern classic, and the story of the same name from 1959 is mandatory reading for schoolchildren in the USA and Japan. This represents the first study of the category of artistic time in the novel. This consideration is relevant not only due to its significance as one of the main structural elements of the text, but also from the perspective of its importance in constructing an event sequence through the lens of the author's unique vision and the formation of the intra-textual psychomental paradigm of the protagonist. The relevance of the work is further substantiated by the interdisciplinary nature of the study, which combines linguistic and literary criticism approaches, aimed at understanding the functional capabilities of the category of time as a universal tool. This tool plays a key role in works of complex genre, including Keyes's novel. The study identifies the main guidelines for developing the novel's temporal structure design: “zero chronotope”, dichotomy “past vs present”, introduction of reminiscences as temporal catalysts of psycho-emotional outbursts and self-reflection. Time serves as the central construct within the text of the novel, intricately weaving together all plot lines and embodying a conceptual framework.

Keywords: Daniel Keys, *Flowers for Algernon*, artistic time, fiction, chronotope, temporal structure, linguo-stylistic means

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Художественное время в романе Д. Киза «Цветы для Элджернона»

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Аннотация. Проблематика романа американского писателя Д. Киза (1925–2014) «Цветы для Элджернона» (1966) вписана в круг экзистенциальных вопросов XX в.: смысл и цель человеческой жизни, семейные и межличностные взаимоотношения, место девиантной личности в социуме, этичность экспериментальной науки и медицины, эмпатия и сострадание, роль науки и знаний и др. Роман вошел в перечень величайших книг современности, стал новейшей классикой, а одноименный рассказ 1959 г. – обязательным для чтения школьников США и Японии. Впервые выполнено исследование репрезентации категории художественного времени в романе, рассмотрение которой целесообразно не только с позиции ее значимости как одного из структурных текстообразующих элементов произведения, но и с точки зрения ее релевантности для выстраивания событийной последовательности через призму индивидуально-авторского уникального видения и формирования внутритекстовой психоментальной парадигмы главного героя. Актуальность работы обосновывается междисциплинарной природой исследования, объединяющей лингвистический и литературоведческий аспекты, направленной на понимание функциональных возможностей категории времени как универсального инструмента, играющего ключевую роль в произведениях сложной жанровой специфики, к которым и относится роман Д. Киза. Выделены основные принципы оформления темпоральной структуры романа: «нулевой» хронотоп, дихотомия «прошлое vs настоящее», внедрение реминисценций в качестве темпоральных катализаторов психоэмоциональных всплесков и саморефлексии. Время – важнейший конструкт текста, оно объединяет все сюжетные линии и является концептуальным.

Ключевые слова: Дэниел Киз, категория художественного времени, художественный текст, хронотоп, темпоральная структура, принципы репрезентации темпоральной структуры

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Introduction

The novel *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) is classified as a socio-psychological science fiction work, and Daniel Keyes is recognized as a science fiction writer. Indeed, science fiction writers were among the first to appreciate the novel, awarding it the Hugo Award for Best Short Story (1960) and the Nebula Award for Best Novel (1966). Today, the novel is studied by specialists in deviation and developmental disability (Cline, 2012), and the text of the work is considered as “a report of a psychoanalytic session recorded on paper, in which the patient (the main character) shares his own psychological associations with the reader, demonstrating a special type of thinking” (Fomina, Kirsanova, 2022).

In his autobiographical work, “*Algernon, Charlie, and I: A Writer's Journey*” (2000), Daniel Keyes describes the narrative structure of his novel using the term “curve.” He explains, “The original story followed Charlie's psychological curve – intelligence, or I.Q. Then, with the love story, I developed his emotional curve – now sometimes referred to as E.Q., or Emotional Quotient. What was missing was the third curve, which would elevate him to the spiritual peak of his mind. Perhaps in the future, this will be known as S.Q., or Spiritual Quotient – alternatively, Soul Q” (Keyes, 2000). The spiritual dimension of the novel raises profound questions regarding the relationship between God and His creation, as well as the fundamental inquiries into the meaning and purpose of human existence. The temporal setting of the novel plays a crucial role in shaping each narrative arc, while the character of Charlie Gordon serves to unify the various plot lines, creating a cohesive work.

The objective of this study is to explore the principles underlying the implementation of the temporal context, thereby establishing the significance of the universal concept of time within the narrative structure. Additionally, this analysis aims to enhance our understanding of the author's cognitive and discursive implications throughout the text. The study employed a comprehensive methodology to analyze the structural and semantic organization of the text, focusing on the linguistic representation of the time continuum. The inductive-empirical method served as the foundation for this analysis, while the deductive-typological method was utilized to identify the compositional components of the text's temporal framework. We contend that linguostylistic analysis, combined with specific

scientific approaches such as contextual analysis of the linguistic representation of time and the interpretative method for understanding the author's implied intentions, significantly enhances our understanding of the discursive nature of a work of belle letters and its communicative-pragmatic implications.

Results and discussion

Time as a construct in literary texts

The intricate nature of reality, as expressed through the language of literary texts, is manifested in the flexible application of universal existential categories, particularly the concept of time. Language enables the creation of a unique worldview through the author's imaginative reinterpretations of reality (Myaksheva, 2023).

The multifaceted nature of artistic time is evident in several ways. It can serve as an object of representation, functioning as a form of artistic reality. Additionally, it can outline the temporal progression of the plot, acting as a structural element that unifies the text. Furthermore, the concept of time may provide an intangible backdrop for reflecting the temporal aspects of socio-cultural realities. Conversely, it can also narrow its focus to convey the author's perspective on temporality or exhibit variability based on the individual experiences of each character within the narrative.

Ultimately, the interplay between the reader's interpretative potential, cognitive-discursive abilities, and the various dimensions of textual time, combined with their personal perception of time, creates a complex representation of artistic time within the work (Likhushina, 2021).

The characteristics of artistic time are closely related to its variable nature and encompass several key elements (Nikolina, 2008; Kandrashkina, 2011).

1. *Conventionality*. This refers to the representation of both a relatively precise and abstract historical period.

2. *Systematicity*. This involves the comprehensive artistic reality presented in the text, as well as the individual author's worldview.

3. *Antinomy of Temporal Essence*. This highlights the distinction between the time within the text and the time experienced by the reader.

4. *Heterogeneity*. This allows for the depiction of both continuous and discrete representations of reality.

5. *Reversibility*. This is expressed through retrospection, which serves as a means of uncovering implicit content.

6. *Multidimensionality*. This refers to the coexistence of a linear narrative and a more complex, multidimensional storyline.

7. *Unity of the General and the Particular*. This concept illustrates how isolated events or situations are integrated into the broader temporal context of the work of art.

8. *Finitude and Infinity*. This encompasses the temporal limitations of the series of events within the work, contrasted with the ongoing "life" of the artwork beyond its textual existence.

The study of artistic time presents a greater challenge compared to spatial coordinates defined by loci and topoi, primarily due to its abstract nature and often conditional “invisibility” in the text. However, the potential implications of the concept of time are significantly broader, given its philosophical and existential dimensions. This complexity arises from the interplay between the fictional temporal context within the text and its reflection in the recipient’s extra-textual worldview.

In D. Keyes’ novel, the artistic representation of time is pragmatically oriented. Beyond fulfilling the primary aesthetic function of the artistic text, the category of time fosters dialogicity and enhances the text’s interpretability. The author’s unique perception of time allows the text to address sociological issues not merely in relation to a specific era, but also to explore themes such as the social integration of individuals with mental disabilities, the philosophical implications of the human life cycle in relation to time as a limiting factor, and the inevitability of decline, even for the most brilliant minds. Additionally, it raises existential questions regarding the meaning and purpose of existence, which remain highly relevant in contemporary discourse.

The novel as a philosophical parable

The novel can be interpreted as a philosophical parable exploring Adam’s loss of innocence and the acquisition of knowledge, which comes at the high cost of earthly life, suffering, and death. This theme resonates with ancient Gnostic theories. The narrative begins in March with a 32-year-old protagonist, Charlie, who turns 33 in April. Charlie’s progress reports, written on the request of doctors, serve as a diary chronicling his life before and after an experimental surgery that transforms him from an intellectually disabled individual into a genius.

The timeline of the novel spans from March 3 to November 21, covering a mere nine months. Within this brief period, Charlie undergoes a profound spectrum of physiological, mental, and, most importantly, psychological transformations. He experiences intellectual catharsis, makes a significant discovery for humanity known as the Algernon-Gordon Effect, and ultimately faces the tragedy of rapid degradation, which he perceives as a form of death. This decline leads him to dissolve into oblivion among the residents of the “Warren” institution.

The narrative is deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian paradigm, echoing the Old Testament story of the fall of Adam and Eve. Numerous references to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which Charlie reads and subsequently tears apart – reinforce this connection. The recurring motif of the forbidden apple from the Tree of Knowledge, along with Charlie’s newfound experience of shame (as reflected in the biblical passage, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed”, Genesis 2:25), further aligns him with the symbolic figure of Adam.

For Charlie Gordon, the operation represents a second chance at life – a form of rebirth. Time itself emerges as a character in the novel, its relentless passage marked by the dates of Charlie’s entries. It becomes “the sand of knowledge, unstoppably flowing into the funnel of consciousness” (Keyes, 2002, p. 193). Charlie perceives time as an adversary: “There is so little time left for me” (Keyes, 2002, p. 207); “I want to stop time, freeze myself at this level...” (Keyes, 2002, p. 205). This relentless progression ultimately leads to a solitary death, described as the “goal-box of solitary death” (Keyes, 2002, p. 205). For Charlie, death is not merely the cessation of physiological functions; it signifies the loss of the ability to think. The loss of intelligence is portrayed as a profound tragedy, rendering a person with intellectual disabilities a “living dead person” (Fomina, Kirsanova, 2022).

Guidelines for developing the temporal structure of the novel

Through a structural and semantic analysis of the text, along with its linguistic and stylistic manifestations, we have identified several guidelines.

1. *Zero Chronotope.* The diary format employed in the novel’s exposition is distinctive and encourages readers to make deductive inferences regarding the time and place of the events described. In Report No. 1, the protagonist conveys essential information about himself using monosyllabic phrases, which are marked by numerous grammatical and spelling errors, as well as graphons (Borisenko, 2023). For example: “My name is Charlie Gordon. I werk in Dormers bakery where Mr. Donner gives me 11 dollers a week and bred or cake if I want. I am 32 years old and next munth is my birthday” (Keyes, 2002, p. 1). Prior to the operation, Charlie’s life is characterized by a blissful ignorance, with the countdown to change beginning only when he decides to participate in the experiment.

The operation intended to enhance the protagonist’s intellectual abilities serves as the narrative’s pivotal starting point. Before this decision, the character exists in a temporal space devoid of a clear time vector. The term zero chronotope in this context refers to the spatial-temporal artistic cohesion that emphasizes the temporal aspect, marking the beginning of the hero’s journey while disregarding preceding events, biographical details, and memories. In this novel, unlike in other literary works, the principle of a temporal “zero point” takes on an exaggerated significance, shaped by the author’s unique artistic vision.

The temporal initiation is presented in a nominal fashion: “Dr. Strauss says I should rite down what I think and remember and everything that happens to me from now on” (Keyes, 2002, p. 1). The phrase “from now on,” the limited vocabulary, the transcriptional representation of sounds in written speech, and the exclusive use of the Present Simple tense to describe ongoing events all serve to reinforce the plot-forming role of the zero chronotope.

2. *Dichotomy Past vs Present.* Following the intelligence enhancement surgery, Charlie Gordon acquires the ability to dream and recall images from his

past. This connection to the protagonist's past is crucial, as prior to the surgery, Charlie's brain was incapable of recording and retaining memories of his experiences. The conceptual representation of the past serves as a temporal framework within the narrative, contrasting sharply with the present. This contrast is illustrated through the antithesis between the consciousness of a mentally challenged individual and that of a highly developed personality.

From the perspective of Charlie's intellectually advanced self, his past is characterized by darkness and timelessness: "I was in the dark for more than thirty years" (Keyes, 2002, p.120). This darkness stems from an information vacuum and the limitations of his mental capabilities. As Charlie gradually begins to recover memories, these recollections are predominantly tied to negative and traumatic experiences, including bullying and various instances of physical and psychological abuse from his mother, neighborhood children, former classmates, and coworkers at the bakery where he was responsible for cleaning. "Shadows from the past clutch at my legs and drag me down. I open my mouth to scream, but I am voiceless. My hands are trembling, I feel cold, and there is a distant humming in my ears" (Keyes, 2002, p. 92). The metaphor of "shadows from the past" and the personification of these shadows as they "clutch" and "drag down" illustrate the profound impact of the past and its consequences on the protagonist's life during the narrative.

The opposition between the present and the past is further highlighted by the depth of emotions experienced by Charlie, the psychological complexity of the plot, and his intellectual catharsis. He begins to rationally assess the limitations of his existential "lifetime": "This day was good for me. I've got to stop this childish worrying about myself – my past and my future. Let me give something of myself to others. ... Who is better equipped? Who else has lived in both worlds?" (Keyes, 2002, p. 139). The quotation reflects the pragmatic thinking of a highly intellectual individual and conveys a factual, communicative focus. The temporal plane of the present, in which the protagonist has reached the pinnacle of intellectual development, is portrayed as not only filled with empirical contemplation but also imbued with significance.

3. *Reminiscence as a Temporal Catalyst.* The reconstruction of past episodes serves as a primary stimulus for reflection, self-discovery, and exploration of the subconscious and unconscious mind. The epistolary genre of the novel effectively utilizes reminiscences to activate memorable episodes, thereby constructing a temporal framework of the past and establishing cause-and-effect relationships with present events.

The following passage illustrates this concept: "It's hard not to control the direction of your thoughts... just to leave your mind open and let anything flow into it... ideas bubbling to the surface like a bubble bath... a woman bathing... a girl... Norma taking a bath... I am watching through the keyhole... and when she gets out of the tub to dry herself, I see that her body is different from mine. Running down the hallway... somebody chasing me... not a person... just a big flashing kitchen knife, and I'm scared and crying, but no voice comes out because

my neck is cut and I'm bleeding..." (Keyes, 2002, p. 59). The use of expressive syntactic constructions, particularly parcellation, highlights the fragmentation of a cohesive reminiscence and the efforts to restore it through free association. Ellipsis, as a graphic expression technique, represents the author's unique approach to conveying isolated memories, stimulating the dynamics of the protagonist's dreamlike state and compelling him to confront psycho-sexual issues during the postoperative period. Additionally, the text's expressive richness is further enhanced by phonetic stylistic devices such as paronomasia and alliteration (e.g., "bubbling," "bubble bath," "bathing"), which draw upon onomatopoeia to depict the brain's activity, overflowing with unconscious stimuli.

4. Conceptualization of Time. The concept of «time» emerges as a pivotal theme within the narrative, evidenced by its recurrent presence throughout the text and its semantic interrelations with a variety of lexical items, both within individual sentences and across the overarching structure of the narrative. Moreover, the universal notion encapsulated by the term "time" operates as a conceptual framework that facilitates associative and paradigmatic connections among distinct plotlines and episodes within the text's architecture.

Time serves to delineate and constrain the protagonist's life cycle, particularly in relation to a finite period characterized by productivity and efficacy in the enhancement of intellectual faculties. The protagonist's perception of time assumes increasing significance as his intellectual capacities evolve. This evolution is explicitly articulated through the author's technique of "linguising" time (Potaenko, 1997), which entails the verbal manifestation of time's presence. For instance, the protagonist reflects, "Not much time for work – between the nightly club-hopping and the morning hangovers" (Keyes, 2002, p. 148). He acknowledges, "She's right though – I've got to take time into consideration" (Keyes, 2002, p. 148). He further realizes, "Time was the barrier. If I was going to find out the answers for myself, I had to get to work immediately" (Keyes, 2002, p. 151). Additionally, he articulates, "I'm jealous of every moment away from the work – impatient with anyone who tries to steal my time" (Keyes, 2002, p. 165).

Among the linguistic and stylistic devices that enhance the expressive representation of the conceptualization of time in these instances, the use of ellipsis in the first quotation is noteworthy, as it omits the predicate and engenders a sense of dynamism and repetition of events. The deployment of expressive punctuation, such as dashes, amplifies the emotional tension experienced by the protagonist, underscoring his acute awareness of the ephemeral nature of his intellectual flourishing. Finally, the metaphorical language employed in the last quotation illustrates the protagonist's existential perspective on time as a critical category.

The explicitly articulated conceptualization of time can be interpreted as a scientifically grounded representation of divine nature, which not only delineates the duration of existence but also influences the variability or

stagnation of activities within a given life period. As articulated by Charlie, “I don’t know how much time I have. A month? A year? The rest of my life? That depends on what I find out about the psychophysical side-effects of the experiment” (Keyes, 2002, p. 146). The employed technique of parcellation underscores the themes of fatalism and the ephemeral nature of the time allocated to the protagonist. Furthermore, the use of temporal parcels and lexical gradation serves to condense the significance of the statement, thereby enhancing its interpretive depth.

Conclusion

In D. Keyes’ novel, the concept of artistic time serves as a fundamental category that underpins the psychologism and profound philosophical subtext of the narrative. This is articulated through the zero chronotope, as well as through the intricate interplay of memories, flashbacks, hallucinations, reflections, and the protagonist’s conclusions. The temporal structure of the novel is constructed using a variety of linguostylistic devices across all levels of text organization, including plot, narrative, and composition.

The protagonist Charlie does not express regret regarding his choices; for him, the relinquishment of a state of blissful ignorance and timelessness is justified by the joy derived from the capacity to learn. He posits that intellectualism, and even genius, hold limited intrinsic value. At the conclusion of the novel, Charlie enters a state of mystical trance, during which he perceives a lotus flower. This flower, along with the rose and lily – elements of the dominant triad in world mythopoetics (Makarova, 2013) – shares a symbolic resonance that signifies the source of divine power, the genesis of the universe, the foundation of existence, purity, chastity, and the enigma of love. Through his mystical experience and encounter with light, Charlie arrives at a profound realization: love for another transcends fear and suffering, elevating the individual and fostering a sense of connection to a greater whole. In this transformative journey, time is recontextualized from an adversary to an ally, as the protagonist utilizes it to achieve self-realization and establish a connection with enlightenment and knowledge.

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