



The Perception of Home in Zoya Pirzad's *I'll Turn off the Lights*: A Merleau-Pontian Reading

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Abstract

This article employs an interdisciplinary approach which draws on theories and concepts from fiction and architecture to examine the perception of architectural spaces in literary fiction. It investigates the process through which the perception of home in fiction reveals certain aspects of fictional characters. This study utilises Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception' and Juhani Pallasmaa's 'Architectural Phenomenology' in its analysis of Zoya Pirzad's *I'll Turn off the Lights*. Through the lens of Phenomenology of Perception, it becomes evident that the identity of the main character, Clarice, is intertwined with her daily and continuous interactions with home and concepts associated with it. She finds a new identity as an integral part of home which leads to a dissolution where both she and others forget Clarice. However, she becomes aware of the events in the story and gradually takes steps toward self-realisation. By the end of the narrative, Clarice transcends the threshold, undergoes transformation, and attains an independent identity.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, Pallasmaa, Architecture, ZoyaPirzad

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In his *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty thoroughly investigates the role of the body in spatial perception. Although the mind/body binary opposition has always been a matter of discussion among philosophers, Merleau-Ponty believes in their fusion which is why he investigates the body and its function in sensory perception. In accordance with interdisciplinary

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studies, which employ theories from a specific field to analyse another, we can employ the phenomenology of perception as a tool for literary analysis. As a result, one can investigate this relationship in fiction to reveal interesting information about characters and other elements of fiction.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception' and Juhani Pallasmaa's 'Architectural Phenomenology.' Pallasmaa is a Finnish architect who employed Merleau-Ponty's theories in his studies on architecture. In accordance with the phenomenology of perception, he investigated the role of the senses in studying a work of architecture. He emphasises the importance of 'lived experience' in relation to a work of architecture, which in this interdisciplinary study is approached as a work of literature.

3. Methodology

This article is an analytical-descriptive study which employs the phenomenology of perception as a critical tool for its literary analysis. Zoya Pirzad's *I'll Turn off the Lights* provides the corpus of this study. The analytic data explored in this study are taken from library sources.

4. Discussion and Analysis

In the novel, the identity of Clarice and home are 'intertwined.' Clarice is the narrator and specifies our point of view. Not only does she narrate what she sees, but she also describes all that she perceives. She describes the smells which trigger odour-linked memories and synesthesia.

The way Clarice acts as well as her perception of home represents the correlation between the subject and the object. Clarice becomes one with home to the extent that she is able to perceive the events without the need to witness them. She knows home and sees and understands the events taking place in it through and through. Merleau-Ponty's 'Intentionality' conceptualises similar events. Another concept addressed by Merleau-Ponty is 'Habituation' which happens in Clarice's life and is among the reasons which make her special in her surroundings. However, after what happens to her in the story and her decision to pursue her true identity, she starts to notice things which she was unaware of before.

In architecture, 'threshold' is a place between inside and outside. It is a passage from one side to the other. To reach her self, Clarice must cross the threshold. Step by step, she walks her journey of self-discovery. By the end of the book, she walks past the threshold and reaches her self. Clarice is in a state

of metamorphosis due to her interaction with her home in Abadan and separation from her paternal home in Tehran. She constantly remembers Tehran in a 'nostalgic' sense; this foreshadows her return to Tehran, which symbolises a return to her-self.

5. Conclusion

Investigating Clarice's relationship with home and her process of perception show that she is submerged in her home and has forgotten about herself. Her daily interactions have made her a part of her home. A close reading of the text reveals that her habituation is a result of her relationship with her home. Unlike others, she does not need her eyes to perceive the events of the home. She is one with her home. As a result of this fusion, she is neither seen nor appreciated in her home. To understand her self, she unconsciously evades home by going out, but she is so deeply attached to her home that she can not enjoy the outside world. Another representation of this separation is a change in the process of perception and connection with her home. Among Clarice's loved possessions, one can easily detect her vases beside windows. In architecture, a window is a threshold or a border between the outside and the inside worlds. To realise her self, Clarice must go beyond the threshold. Her negligence toward the broken vases symbolises her detachment from her home. In the end, her decision to go to Tehran symbolises her moving beyond the threshold toward her self.

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