CHAPTER 4

BIOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND CRISIS TIMES IN THEATRE OF THE TIMES ...

The three plays, *Dialogues with Socrates* [Весёлые сократов], *Lunin or Death of Jacques Recorded in the Presence of the Master* [Лунин, или смерть Жака записанная в присутствии хозяина] and *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca* [Театр времен Нерона и Сенеки] form a trilogy with an interesting title - *Theatre of the Times* ... [Театр времен ...]. This title can be read in a number of different ways. Firstly, it can be read as a metaphor, implying that the trilogy not only portrays the theatre and theatricality of different periods and places, but also re-presents the real world of its protagonists. It is interesting, in this regard, that the title of the trilogy seems to be a shortened version of the title of the third play, *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*.

However, the title can also be read to mean that time is the main protagonist in the trilogy, and that it re-presents a theatre or a world in which the main actor is time. What is this time? How is it re-presented? What forms does it take?

This chapter explores answers to some of these questions. The first section discusses narrative time and investigates temporal structures of these plays, untangling the sequences of present and past times. The following sections focus on the forms of narrative time. It discusses how narrative time is transformed into biographical, historical and crisis times, and how it becomes the main protagonist. Because the chapter uses the Bakhtinian notion about the forms of time in literary narratives, it begins with a short discussion of this notion. This section underlines the differences between structuralist and Bakhtinian understandings of the role of time in literary narratives.

**Bakhtinian Notion about the Forms of Time in Literary Narratives**

The difference between Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and formalist concepts such as motif, device, function and theme was discussed in an earlier chapter. It is noteworthy that Bakhtin's approach to time and its forms in narratives is also quite different from that of formalists and structuralists. The philosophical basis of these differences reside in Bakhtin's basic disagreement with structuralist and formalist literary-critical theory and praxis, underlined in a number of his literary-critical works. For instance, in *Notes* [Заметки], Bakhtin very succinctly formulates his differences with structuralism:
Мое отношение к структурализму. Против замыкания в текст. Механические категории "оппозиция", "смена кодов" ..... Последовательная формализация и деперсонализация: все отношения носят логический (в широком смысле слова) характер. Я же во всем слышу голоса и дипломатические отношения между ними ..... В структурализме только один субъект - субъект самого исследователя. Вещи превращаются в понятия (разной степени абстракции); субъект никогда не может стать понятием (он сам говорит и отвечает). Смысл персоналистичен: в нем всегда есть вопрос, обращение и предвосхищение ответа, в нем всегда двое (как диалогический минимум) [emphasis in the original].

In Bakhtin’s opinion structuralism closes the text, and operates with mechanical and formal categories which are intrinsic to the text, consistently formalising and depersonalising literary texts and practices. Where structuralism sees all relationships mechanically, Bakhtin hears voices which interact dialogically with each other. Structuralism recognises one subject - the subject-investigator who transforms every other subject into objects of investigation. According to Bakhtin, subjects cannot be objectified and converted into concepts.

In Bakhtinian discourse, centres of every artistic practice, including literature, are subjects - authors and readers - who interact dialogically with each other. The presence of speaking and listening subjects is an essential condition of aesthetic activity. In his opinion, texts cannot be reduced to objective meanings independent of subjects.

Although structuralist readings of narratives recognise temporal succession as an essential requirement for constituting a story, time is understood by them as one of the several elementary units which create the field of signification of a narrative. The elementary ‘narrative units such as story, temporal order, character, focalisation are thought to function as signs in the same way that words and images do.’ Underlying this approach is the basic assumption that narratives are structured like a language (langue) and function like it.

Within structuralist models, the role of time in constituting a narrative is usually analysed at two levels: the level of story as story-time, and at the level of plot as narrative, plot-, or text-time. The differential relation between the story and narrative or plot times are discussed by using the concepts of order, frequency and duration as theorised by Gerard Genette. A similar approach to the role of time in dramatic texts was discussed in

the last chapter. The structuralist analysis of narratives does not recognise a relation between the temporal organisation of a literary text and the notions about time used by authors and readers. The possibility that this temporal organisation of narrative might be associated with or in some way reflect conventions about the nature of time is not given due consideration.

Another important feature about structuralist understanding of the role and nature of time in narratives is the way temporality is conceptualised in isolation from space. According to Bakhtin, however, time and space in literary texts are inseparably linked together. The word chronotope (literally time-space) reflects this ineluctable unity.

The chronotopes also determine the relation between a text and the extra-textual reality, and because of this, they always acquire evaluative or qualitative aspects:

Хронотоп определяет художественное единство литературного произведения в его отношении к реальной действительности. Поэтому хронотоп в произведении всегда включает в себя ценностный момент, ....

Thus, in literary narratives, temporal and spatial definition are not only linked together but carry values. They are not perceived by human beings as neutral but as good or bad - as positive or negative times or positive or negative places. M. Holquist describes this aspect as the ‘axiological’ dimension of chronotopes. It results not only from the fact that literary texts and their chronotopes are related, in a very complicated way, with the extra-textual reality, but also because ‘the presence of human subjects’ is the central moment of ‘of every literary text.’

This essential presence of human subjects is a key to Bakhtin’s understanding of the function of time and space in narratives, and of the way they are represented in these narratives. In his analysis of the forms of time in novels, Bakhtin describes narrative time in terms of its relation with subjects - the protagonists. This time is either ‘adventure’ time in the ancient Greek adventure novels or is ‘biographical’ time in the ancient and more recent biographical and autobiographical narratives. In chivalric novels, narrative time is a

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4 It is interesting, however, to note that Rimmon-Kennan in his structuralist analysis of narratives gives some consideration to the spatial aspect of temporality in narratives when he suggests that ‘both story-time and text-time are no more than pseudo-temporal’ (Rimmon-Kennan, p. 45). According to him, the text time, represented by ‘the disposition of elements in the text’ is the time constituted by ‘the linear (spatial) disposition of linguistic segments in the continuum of the text’ and is perceived ‘in the process of its reading’ (Rimmon-Kennan, p. 44). But Rimmon-Kennan’s book is a typical example of the ways structuralist literary practice isolates temporality of the narrative from its spatial dimension. In this book space only appears as the environment or physical surrounding.

5 Bakhtin, FTCN, p. 275.

6 Holquist, p. 152.

7 Holquist, p. 152.
special type of adventure time - the miraculous time. Similarly, time in Rabelaisian novels is 'folkloric' time.

Describing the significance of the chronotope of the threshold in Dostoevskii’s novels, Bakhtin notes that this chronotope is associated with crisis. In this chronotope narrative time, ‘... becomes equivalent to split-seconds, loses its span and is thrown out of the normal flow of biographical time.'

Thus, the above examples clearly demonstrate Bakhtin’s approach to the understanding of time in literary narratives. Narrative time is always viewed in terms of its relation and involvement with the protagonists.

The Present and Past Time Sequences

In a general sense, the three plays are play-biographies, telling the life-stories of well-known historical figures. *Dialogues with Socrates* is the story of Socrates. *Lunin ...* is not only the story of Mikhail Lunin but also of the two Tsars and their third brother. In *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*, Seneca is forced to tell his life-story and the story of the life of the Roman emperor.

But these biographies are plays, and hence are to be narrated or ‘shown’ within the limits of the performance time. This constraint leads to a mode of narration complicated by an intricate combination of the present and past time sequences. The present time sequence is represented by the chronology of events that are meant to take place on the stage in the present; they constitute the present time of these narratives. The past time sequence, on the other hand, is constituted by the narration and showing of past events. These past events are described and enacted in such a way that they are directly perceived by the readers and spectators.

The Present and Past Times in *Dialogues with Socrates*

In all three plays, the present time is defined by clear markers of time, present in extra-dialogic as well as dialogic texts. For instance, in *Dialogues with Socrates*, the play opens in Athens ‘around midday’. The first act *The Feast* unfolds during the night, with action taking place in the palaces of Prodicus and Frasibulus. The next act *The Trial* is also set in Athens, but opens in the morning with Socrates’ trial, and ends with his conviction. The next two scenes of this act take place in the evening and at night, and the final scene opens again in the morning. This is the scene in which Socrates is sentenced to death. The last act *The Prison* also opens in the morning, but between the first and the final scene of the third act there is a time gap of about thirty days. The final scene unfolds

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8 Bakhtin, FTCN, p. 281.
at dawn. The prison-cell where Socrates is sleeping is ‘lighted by the first rays of the rising sun’. This scene ends with the death of Socrates. Thus, the whole play spans around thirty to thirty two days, and events are arranged in a chronological order.

It is interesting that main events in Socrates’ life - his trial, conviction and execution - are set in the morning, in the presence of the rising sun, symbolising a time of rejuvenation and catharsis. In contrast the setting of the night is used to enact conspiracies and assassinations. For instance, the young poet Meletus is murdered at night, and the first pupil of Socrates informs Anytus about the planned escape of Socrates also at night.

Temporal markers are also present in dialogic text, but they are not reported from a neutral position. They reflect the speaker’s emotional state, his or her personal experience of that time, and illustrate what Holquist described as the ‘axiological’ dimension of time and space in human perception. For instance, for Socrates the night in Prodicus’ palace is full of happiness:

Сократ. А сегодня после полудня я понял, что устами Продика нас созвала судьба. Я счастлив, что эту ночь я проведу в беседе ... за чашей ... и с вами [9].

He is grateful to Prodicus for arranging a feast on ‘this divine night’:

Сократ. Пить и славить тебя, собравшего нас в эту благую ночь ...[14].

But for Socrates’ wife Xanthippe, the night is not at all divine. She intrudes during the feast and forces Socrates to stop feasting and return home so that he could defend himself in the trial. The most common words in Xanhippe’s outbursts are ‘tomorrow’ and ‘the trial’:

Ксантиппа. .... Они продырявят до полудня, а ты голос пропьешь, крипешь завтра будешь! Или, может быть, ты решил проиграть суд, преспокойно умереть ... [15].

Ксантиппа. .... Только он петь не будет. (Сократу.) Тебе завтра выступать, ты окрипешь .... [16].

Ксантиппа. .... Защитись, пожалуйста, завтра в суде. Хорошо? [18].

Ксантиппа. .... Только посмей проиграть завтра суд .... [18-19].

In the final dialogue of this scene, Socrates asks his host Prodicus to inform Anytus, at whose behest Prodicus had arranged the feast and had invited Socrates, that during the feast he has completely unravelled the mysteries of this world. On this ‘wonderful night of freedom’ he understood that ‘his death is a blessing’:
Thus, for Socrates his night at the feast is ‘wonderful’ and ‘divine’, the ‘last night of freedom’ when he has solved the riddles of life. For Xanthippe, however, this night is the night of crisis. For Anytus, the night is also wonderful because he is successful in initiating a trial against Socrates and getting him convicted. He is pleased that the night will be the most painful one in Socrates’ life.

The protagonists also perceive the first night after Socrates’ sentencing differently. This was Socrates’ first night in prison. On this night Meletus was assassinated in front of the acropolis. For an old and sick Frasibulus, the night was ‘bad and uneasy’ not only because of his age, but also because he was feeling guilty that Socrates had been convicted. It was also difficult because that night ‘in Athens the books of Pythagoras were burnt, Anaxagoras was exiled and Diagoras was pronounced a heretic’. But for Anytus, ‘the night was peaceful’ because ‘Socrates spent that night in prison.’

The Fusion of Present and Past Times in Lunin ...

The present time sequence in Lunin ... is also well defined. The play opens late in the evening, with the narrator announcing that ‘that day he could sleep only at dawn’. In the opening scene Grigor’ev - the prison officer - warns the prison clerk to finish his statement by ‘the next morning’. The time is defined more clearly when Grigor’ev enters Lunin’s cell, and wishes him ‘good evening’, followed by the clocks striking midnight. The passage of the following three hours, which lead to Lunin’s execution at three o’clock in the morning is recorded clearly in dialogic and extra-dialogic texts, in particular, by clocks striking ‘two thirty’ [113] and ‘three’ [125].

Thus, if in Dialogues with Socrates the present time sequence covers approximately thirty-two days of Socrates’ life, in Lunin ... it spans a little more than the final three hours of Lunin’s life. This short span of three hours in which a significant part Lunin’s life has to be told, creates a certain amount of tension which is reflected in a complex intertwining of the present and the past time sequences. The prison cell becomes an improvised ‘stage’ where Lunin’s life-drama is enacted. In Dialogues of Socrates, the past events of Socrates’ life are described in passing. They are not intended to be enacted and shown.
Apart from clocks which define the time ‘physically’, the dialogic text contains repeated references to time. For instance, in the opening scene, Grigor’ev, the prison officer informs Lunin that he would be executed at three o’clock in the morning, and the time ‘three o’clock’ becomes a repeated reference in their exchanges:

Лунин. Когда удалить думаеть?

Григорьев. В три после полудня ... Уж после никак нельзя. К трем всех заключенных из тюремного замка выведем ... вроде на поверху ... [77].

Григорьев. Я того не говорил, только к трем часам выведем всех! Всех! Из замка. [77].

The time of three o’clock is mentioned again when Grigor’ev, saying goodbye to Lunin, reminds him:

Григорьев. Значит, до трех, Михаил Сергеевич? ... [79].

When the clocks strike midnight, Lunin suddenly realises that he is left only with the last three hours of his life:

Три часа ... Три часа – трёх лет – три тысячи – все пустые слова. А есть только то, что сейчас. Сейчас я есть. Три часа. "Сейчас" ... вечность [81].

In *Dialogues with Socrates* the present time sequence shows linearity. In *Lunin* ... on the other hand, linearity is associated with an element of cyclicity. The opening and the final scenes are quite similar. In the opening scene the narrator introduces Lunin and other main protagonists of the play, and describes Lunin’s emotional state in the following words:

Сегодня я забылся сном только на рассвете. В груди болело. Сон был дурен .... Знобило. И тогда, в дурном, я увидел ясно готическое окно и Вислу сквозь него .... Был ветер за окном .... И воды реки были покрыты пенистыми пятнами. Всплеское движение в природе так отличалось от тишины вокруг нас .... Ударил колокол .... Звонили к вечерне. Я знал мне нужно обернуться, чтобы увидеть твое лицо. Но я не мог! Я не мог! Я не мог! ... Я так и не увидел твоего лица ... Потому что я забыл его! [73].

In the final scene of the play, when the two prisoners are ready to pounce upon Lunin and strangle him, he sees the face of the woman standing in front of him:

... В окно я увидел Вислу. Ее воды бурлили под набежавшим ветром ... но вокруг нас была тишина, так отличайная от беспокояства в природе. Неожиданно звук колокола
The natural landscape - the river Vistula, its waters, the bells ringing in the church tower - remains the same although it is described in slightly different words. However, the psychological state of the main protagonist undergoes a change. He moves from the state of 'not being able to see' to the state of 'seeing again'. The temporal sequence defined by this change frames the whole narrative. But the duration of time defined by this transformation is different from that of the present time: in the former instance, it is of the order of many years, whereas in the latter instance, it is not more than a few hours. Lunin is in prison. He is old and sick and counting the last few hours of his life when the scene of parting with his beloved starts haunting him. Through the castle-window, he can see the Vistula and its waters covered by foam. More than twenty years have passed since that parting, and he is unable to see the face of his beloved clearly. But now, just before his death, when memory is selectively re-creating and enacting the choicest moments of his life, the face appears to him once again.

As noted above, the present time sequence shows linearity. The announcement of Lunin’s execution in the opening scenes of the play is followed by its planning, and culminates in the execution itself. The sequence of the reconstructed past also shows a similar type of linearity. The 'flash-back' sequence starts with Lunin’s childhood and traces his youth, his army career, the conspiracy, his falling in love in Poland, his arrest, imprisonment and exile in Siberia, his re-arrest and confinement to the 'most horrible prison' in Russia. This sequence takes readers to the beginning of the 'present time sequence' of the play.

In spite of this general linearity in the past time sequence, there are some clear ruptures, where the linear chronology of events is broken. For instance, the scenes of the childhood follow the opening scene of the masquerade-ball [84-85]. The scene showing the transportation of the exiles to Siberia [86] precedes the scene showing the crushing of the Decembrist rebellion in the Senate square [105].

The present and past time sequences, which were discussed separately, are closely intertwined in the text. This intermixing or fusion of the two forms of time can be detected even in individual dialogues. For instance,

Лунин. "Я сделаю это, господа! Я готов взять на себя убийство государя" .....  
Как они задрожали от восторга опасности, и опять пошли разговоры ... и
объятия ... и пуш ... и пуш! [89].
Here, Lunin is describing an evening at a ball where, in the company of his friends, he undertook to assassinate the Tsar. Lunin’s vow and the reaction of his friends to it are narrated by using verbs in different tenses: the vow to kill the Tsar is in the present-tense, and is included within quotation marks. The reaction of his friends, on the other hand, is in the past-tense. It can be argued that the presence of two times is aimed to foreground Lunin’s daring vow, but it is clear that the reading of such a text generates narratological tension, because the two times - the two past events - are framed differently within the temporal structure of the narrative: one past is turned into present while the other remains unchanged.

This fusion of present and past times is not limited to a few isolated cases, but is present throughout the play. For instance, the scene of Lunin’s parting with his beloved is recreated by using the same technique of mixing times:

Лунин. "Потому что каждый раз перед голгофой проявляешься ты, и я должен отдавать тебя... Всем вокруг даны чувство отца, супруга, любовника. Я свободен и оттого легко могу вступать... (смешок) на крестную тропу. Я благодарю судьбу и господа за эту встречу, Мария. Я считаю ее последней улыбкой жизни..." И я простился с тобой во вторую раз в жизни... и опять навсегда [119].

Lunin is talking to ‘she’ who, in this dialogic exchange, is playing the role of Mariya. The first part of Lunin’s’ dialogue is in the present tense, and is enclosed within quotation marks. It reads like a general statement. Here a reference to Christ and Mary Magdalene is quite obvious. The last sentence, on the other hand, is in the past tense. The short reply by ‘she’ also shows the same fusion of two times:

Она. "Лунин... седой Лунин... последняя война Лунин, я перекресту вас на подвиг...". Она сказала, что будет молиться за тебя? [120].

It is possible that this fusion of two times is also associated with the character ‘she’. The ‘she’ is the main character of the play’s present time, but acts a number of female roles including Mariya Pototskaya, the young Polish princess, and her mother. In the final scenes, ‘she’ plays the role of Mariya Volkonskaya, the wife of the exiled Decembrist Volkonskii. In the dialogue cited above, ‘she’ plays the role of the mother, and the first sentence of the dialogue represents her daughter’s words, quoted by her. In Lunin’s vision all three women, the three Mariyas, have a metaphoric resemblance with Mary Magdalene. It can be argued that the merging of different female characters into a single ‘she’ leads to a fusion of several pasts into one present.
How Seneca Dies Twice?

The structuring of narrative time in Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca is very similar to that described in Lunin ... The play opens in the late hours of a night in a Roman circus, where Nero has summoned his mentor Seneca for a trial. The play ends when the trial is over, and Seneca along with Diogenes are executed. Diogenes is the old man who lives in a barrel. He is the custodian not only of past time, but of time in general. The play thus spans a few hours of the fateful night during which the story of Nero’s and Seneca’s lives is told and enacted.

As in the other two plays, the present time in this play is also defined clearly by extra-dialogic and dialogic texts. For instance, Nero, while explaining to Seneca why the ‘horse-senator’ could not be the respected senator Antonius Flavius, notes:

Нерон. ............ Сеячас ночь, и он наверняка преспокоино храпит в своей постели. ..... [130].

Then, drawing Seneca’s attention to the carnivalesque atmosphere in Rome, Nero asks Seneca,

Нерон. ............ Ты хоть поинтересовался, почему не спит сегодня Рим. ..... [133].

and, answering his own question, Nero adds:

Нерон. ............ Понимаешь, завтра в Риме я открываю вот этот цирк ..... [133].

According to Nero, Roman citizens are too excited to sleep; they are eager to grab the best seat in the Neronias - Nero’s games:

Нерон (хохочет). Как ты сказал - "давно спят"? Опять удачна фраза. (хохочет.) Что ты Сенека, какая сегодня сон? Ты же сам видел - повсюду топла ... проходят повозок ... Где же тут заснуть? Любимые сограждане с вечера толкуются у всех входов в мой цирк. Чтобы первыми с утра занять лучшие даровые места ... [136].

Like the time of the play’s opening, the time of its ending is also indicated clearly in the text. For instance, Nero scolds Seneca for reading his letters slowly:

Нерон. ............ Ночь на исходе... меркнут звезды, а сколько писем ты еще не прочитал! [169].

This play is biographical and like in the other two plays of the trilogy, the present and past time sequences are closely intertwined. But if in Lunin ..., Mikhail Lunin is the main narrator, in this play the story is told by Seneca who is forced to read his letters.
aloud. During the reading, a group of actors assembled and directed by Nero enacts the main events described in the letters.

The present time sequence is linear: it begins with Seneca’s appearance in Nero’s circus-like court, and ends with his execution. The past time sequence is also predominantly linear, but is complicated by several ruptures. For instance, the ‘metamorphoses’, such as senator Antonius Flavius changing into the ‘horse-senator’, the young Sporus turning into a girl, and the prostitute changing into the divine Rubria, are set at the beginning of the play. Similarly, the assassinations of senator Piso, consul Lateranus and the poet Lucan, the three close friends of Seneca, are reported in the opening scenes of the play. The past events acquire their normal linear sequence only after Seneca begins to read his letters. These letters trace Nero’s life chronologically from his birth to the arrest of Seneca for plotting Nero’s assassination. During this narration, the assassinations of Claudius, Britannicus, Rubria, Octavia, Agrippina and Pappea Sabina are reported and enacted in a sequence which confirms Nero’s biography.

One of the most interesting ruptures of linearity is connected with Seneca’s own death. In the first part of the play, Nero ask Eros to call Seneca from his palace. Eros, however, returns and reports that Seneca ended his life in a bath tub by asking his surgeon to cut his veins. This account of Seneca’s suicide is in agreement with the version recorded by Suetonius. Thus, in the opening scenes of the play, Seneca is confronted with a story of his own death. He is told that he has committed suicide, and that every Roman citizen knows about it. However, Seneca meets his ‘actual’ death, as constructed by the play, only in the finale, when he is burnt in the barrel of Diogenes. He is thus murdered twice, or alternatively, two different versions of Seneca’s death are shown in the play. This is not a mere dramatic device; it helps to destroy the normal temporality of human life, according to which one is born only once and dies only once. This rupture in the normal linearity of time imparts a strong dramatic effect to the narrative.

In addition to the above mentioned linearity of the present time, and ruptures in the past time sequence, the play also shows cyclicity. Like Lunin..., this final and opening scenes in this play are very similar, and the whole play is framed within this scene and the cyclic reversal created by them. In the opening scene, the narrator introduces the main protagonists, the three godly figures - Apollo, Eros and Venus - are sitting on the floor of the amphitheatre:

... Тишина. Молчание. ..... В тишине вдруг раздается нежный смех Амура. Этот смех как-то очень мелодично подхватывает Аполлон, потом пекающая Венера. Так они смеются тихим завороженным смехом - будто три юных прекрасных божества [128-129].
In the finale, after Seneca has been burnt alive in a barrel, the narrator, as it were, takes the readers and spectators back to the very beginning of the play:

... Тишина. Молчание. В тишине раздается нежный смех Амура. Смех этот - как мелодию - подхватывает Аполлон, потом Венера. Так они сидят вокруг догорающей бочки, как три юные божества. И тихонечко смеются - будто переговариваются о каком-то только им известном тайне [182].

However, this cyclic reversal, like the one observed in Lunin ...., is not complete because it includes some changes. In the opening scene, the three godly figures are accompanied by the 'horse-senator', and a wooden barrel occupied by an old man. In the last scene, the barrel is on fire. The old man of the barrel has been crucified, and Seneca, who has jumped into the barrel to replace the old but ageless and timeless Diogenes, has been burnt alive. The trial has ended, the execution is over, and the three actors, the godly figures, who enacted the trial, 'the comedy of life', with the help of a group of actors, have again turned into actors. The use of the theatre and theatrical conventions as framing devices for the main body of the text will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

**Narrative Time as Biographical Time**

As was mentioned earlier, the three plays are biographical, and as a result, their present and past time sequences represent the sequences of present and past events in the lives of the main protagonists. Because of this, the narrative time of these plays becomes biographical time.

In *Dialogues with Socrates*, the last thirty two days in the life of Socrates are at the centre of narration. The play repeatedly refers to Socrates’ age and his physical and emotional states. For instance, Socrates’ age is mentioned in the very first lines:

Сократ пещив, уродлив. Ему седьмдесят лет, но это седьмдесят лет без всяких следов дряхлости[8].

His age is mentioned again in the opening scene, when he is walks back home from the feast. Socrates is happy that he has lived a long life:

Сократ. ...... Я рад, что на тебе женился. Рад что прожил семьдесят лет ....

[18].

Then, noticing his friend Prodicus embracing his wife Xanthippe, Socrates mockingly calls for a spear to kill Prodicus but, after a few minutes, remarks that it was a joke, and that he was not Hector - the eldest son of Priam the king of Troy - who would pick up a spear and fight:
In the second act *The Trial*, in his reply to the prosecutors, Socrates notes that ‘his whole life passed in dialogues with people, that he asked them questions, and was always ready to answer their questions’ [22]. For him human nature remained the most intriguing object of exploration, and he never stopped wondering at its complexities:

At the trial, just before being sentenced, Socrates scolds the citizens of Athens:

In the last act *The Prison*, Prodicus comes to see Socrates in his cell, and confesses about fathering Socrates’ children. Their whole conversation seems to centre around the topic of their respective ages:

It is interesting that Prodicus, the childhood friend of Socrates, sees himself as much younger than Socrates. However, the most interesting aspect of this exchange is that readers come to know about Prodicus’ real age not from him, but from Socrates. In the opening exchange of this passage, Prodicus calls himself Socrates’ childhood friend, which means that he is measuring his life, its duration, by using Socrates’ life as a marker. Throughout this play only Socrates’ real age is mentioned. Even Prodicus’ age is informed by Socrates. Socrates, his age, his life, and various events of his life become
the temporal markers for measuring the biographies of other protagonists. All other protagonists are either ‘old and sick’ like Frasibulus or ‘young, rude and ambitious’ like the poet Meletus. In this regard, an exchange between Socrates and Meletus during the trial is very interesting. Socrates inquires from young Meletus if he knew him:

Сократ. .... Ты обвинил меня, пифияк Мелет. Но я хочу спросить тебя: давно ли ты меня знаешь? [22]

Meletus tells a lie by answering ‘yes’. Socrates knows this and remarks:

Сократ. Ты уверен, Мелет, что сейчас ты всех нас ложно обманул. Но ты сказал правду. Ты знал меня очень давно, с рождения. И все вы — тоже.

Ропот толпы.

Как только вы появились на свет, вы услышали: "Есть в Афинах хитрец. Сократ! Он исследует то, что под землей и над землей. Он добыывается до неба — тула, где звезды образуют величия порядок. И этому хитрецу ничего не стоит доказать юношам, что белое — это черное, и не щадит он даже бессмертных богов!" [22-23]

According to Socrates, although by telling a lie Meletus has deceived everyone present at the trial, he, in fact, was not lying when he said that he knew Socrates. Socrates, then, deconstructing his own myth, suggests that not only Meletus, but many citizens of Athens knew Socrates from the time of their birth. Socrates’ life, his biography, his legend, were already circulating independently in Athens. The young Athenians inherited the legend of Socrates like stories about their gods. In many cultures such myths and legends serve as markers of time and place. Instead of mentioning the exact date of birth of a person, it is often said that the person was born in the year when Columbus ‘discovered’ the ‘new world’ or the day Stalin died. Even the exact dates of birth and death are measured by calendars, the beginning of which is usually taken to be the beginning or ending of the life of a historical figure, an emperor or a god. In Dialogues with Socrates biographical time of Socrates, limits, binds and encompasses the biographies of every other protagonist.

In Lunin ... the life-story of Lunin constitutes the narratological centre of the play. The text contains numerous references to Lunin’s age. The past events of his life follow a chronological sequence, and are arranged in the increasing order of Lunin’s age. As soon as the clock strikes midnight, Lunin realises that he has only three more hours left to live, and starts reconstructing his past life, ‘returning to the beginning’:

Лунин. Я вернулся к началу? [84] (emphasis in the original).
He is surrounded by masks from a masquerade-ball, and looking through them, he begins to locate images of his childhood:

Лунин. Это детство! ... Мне перевязали глаза ..... [84].

But soon, he is forced into a time which is even earlier than his childhood:

Лунин. Нет, нет, это еще прежде детства ... Это меня мото в большом корыте ... и прикрыла глаза рукой, чтобы не попало мыло .... [85].

Very quickly, the exuberance of his youthful days overpowers him, and everything seems to him to glitter like a grand ball:

Лунин. Нет, это уже маскарад! ... Ну понятно! Как же я не признав! Жизнь начинается с бала, господин. Ах, жизнь начинается с нашего тепленького восторга. С орехового пирога начинается жизнь ..... И через три десятка лет .... [85].

Events and images from the past continue to flood his vision, and each vision carries a date in the form of his age:

Лунин. Мне было за тридцать [96].

Лунин. Мне было тридцать семь. Бал кончился. Мне было тридцать семь. Тридцать семь - это рубион в империи ... Пройди благополучно тридцать семь, и все! .... В тридцать семь завершается человек .... А в тридцать семь я жил в твоей Польше .... Я жил, как должен жить тридцатьсемилетний холостяк богатый гусар .......... И вот тогда, в тридцать семь, я переживал очередную собачью любовь. Мы договорились с нею встретиться с нею на балу у твоей матери [101].

Лунин. В двадцать лет я был старик. В тридцать - я чувствовал себя Вечным жицом, засидевшимся зачем-то на свете. И вот мне было тридцать семь, и я снова был счастливый мальчик [102].

Лунин. Тридцать семь! Попел птицы сквозь комнату .... [104].

Лунин. Еще вчера начало жизнь, и вот тридцать семь лет - "с ярмарки, с ярмарки" [104] (emphasis added).

It is interesting to note how many times the words 'thirty seven' - representing Lunin's age - are mentioned.

The convicts chosen by Grigor'ev, the prison officer, to strangle Lunin are brought into his cell, and Lunin recognises one of them. He is the man who was dying of hunger, and to whom Lunin gave some bread, when both of them were being transported to
Siberia. Lunin asks the convict if he will not feel any moral pangs while killing him. The convict’s reply, once again, is centred around the theme of their respective ages:

Второй мужик. А что тебе жалеть, барин? ...... Тебе вон попста – но ты жил, хоть сколько, а жил! А мне сорок, а я всю жизнь спрашивая, за что? За что родился? ...... [100].

Even the Tsar is aware of Lunin’s age:

Мундир государя. Этот способ устраивал и нас тоже ... Но Жак, бедный старый Жак ... Тебе почти шестидесят ..... Точнее, шестидесят тебе никогда не будет. ..... [123].

As was mentioned above, the present and past events in Lunin’s life are intricately intertwined. This is reflected in the presence of present and past tenses in some dialogues and also in the way past memories invade Lunin’s vision. They are confused, and resemble images in a badly arranged photo album. For instance, when Lunin ‘returns to the beginning’ he finds himself at a masquerade-ball, which is not only full of masks, but also of images from his childhood, including his nanny and the game of the blind-man’s buff. The image of a young toddler in his bath tub looking through the fingers of his nanny is overprinted by an image of a wooden body pierced with bullets received in the name of ‘faith, the Tsar and the fatherland’ [85]. This confused state of images which overprint and merge with each other, is similar to the state in dreams. The dream-like effect is more pronounced in Lunin’s dialogues with ‘she’, whose identity itself remains confused, fluctuating between Lunin’s beloved Mariya Pototskaya and her mother.

In Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca, the life-stories of Nero and Seneca occupy the central position. All present and past events of the play are related with their biographies. Seneca is forced to read his letters to Lucilius, and through them the biography of Nero is enacted on the stage. Seneca thus becomes the main narrator of Nero’s life-story, but because these letters were intercepted by Nero, Seneca reads a doctored version of his own letters. They no longer represent Nero’s biography written by Seneca, but Nero’s autobiography, narrated by Seneca. Nero appropriates Seneca’s voice to tell his story, but the letters also tell the story of Seneca’s life. As in real life, the biographies of Nero and Seneca become interlinked.

In the opening scenes of the play, Nero presents a resume of his life. He remembers his childhood, and the youthful days when he was a pupil of Seneca:

Нерон. ..... Помнишь в дни юности – у камелека – ты рассказал мне, как некий афинский философ взялся воспитывать ученика .... [139].
But Nero’s recollections about his lessons around a hearth are grounded in the present. Through them he reminds Seneca that unlike the ungrateful pupil of Socrates’, he plans ‘to pay back’ Seneca for his lessons. He tells Seneca that he has summoned him because he wants ‘to pay him back’ for the ‘good, old days of his childhood’:

Нерон. Да-да. Сколько раз ты беседовал со мною о бренности жизни ... Ах, старые, добрые, времена детства. Я так порой жажду твоих поучений .... [140].

Нерон. Ах, как хорошо ... Будто детство вернулось ... Будто опять мы вдвоем у нашего каменка ... [141].

Нерон. (бросается на грудь Сенеке). Прости, учитель! Ты ведь знаешь, у меня с детства обратный рефлекс: у всех слезы, а мне хочется смеяться ...

[141].

These frequent references to his childhood and to Seneca’s lessons are perhaps aimed to make Seneca responsible for his unhappy and terrible childhood. They show how Nero’s life from the very beginning was linked with that of Seneca, and force the reader to think that Seneca is a party to most of the crimes committed by him.

These short excursions into Nero’s childhood are accompanied by the enactment of various metamorphoses engineered by Nero. Simultaneously, readers are also informed about the forced suicides of Piso, Lateranus, Lucan and Seneca. The ‘comedy of life’, which follows this opening resume, represents the enactment of Nero’s autobiography. In this way, the narrative time becomes transformed into biographical time of Nero and Seneca.

**Narrative Time as Historical Time**

It was suggested earlier that in *Dialogues with Socrates* the biographies of all protagonists are measured by using the life of Socrates, the main protagonist, as a temporal marker. The same is true for the *Lunin* ... and *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*. But because the main protagonists of these plays are prominent historical figures, their lives become interwoven with the history of their times and places. Consequently, a depiction of their lives represents, albeit in a fragmentary way, the history of their contemporary society. Their biographies turn into prisms through which the history of their times is refracted, and their biographical time becomes a measure of historical time. The preceding section examined the way in which narrative time of these plays took the form of biographical time. This section will discuss how this biographical time becomes closely interlinked with historical time.
In the third act of *Dialogues with Socrates*, there is a long monologue by Frasibus, who is disturbed by Socrates’ conviction and sentencing. He complains that he spent a sleepless night after the sentencing and recalls how he met Socrates as a soldier without shoes and uniform. Socrates was wearing his usual worn-out cloak, which created a commotion amongst the soldiers, who thought that Socrates was ridiculing them. At that time one of the officers almost decided to kill Socrates, but Socrates somehow escaped:

Фрасибул. ....... Тогда один из стратегов для успокоения воинов чуть не велел казнить Сократа ... Потом Сократ вернулся, и слава его гремела. В результате Аристофан осмеял его в своей комедии ... Потом Сократ стал стар, и весть в Афинах захватили тираны. И главный тиран — Критий, его бывший ученик, позав Сократа и грозил заключить его в тюрьму за то, что Сократ не хотел прислушиваться к управам ... Теперь мы изгнали тиранов, и вот уже мы приготовляем к смерти Сократа .... [43].

This passage is interesting because in it Frasibus recounts important events in Socrates’ life but they become the vantage points from which he looks also at the history of Athens, a history that includes the rule of the tyrants and their subsequent removal.

A clearer example in this respect is Anytus’ remark on his visit to Socrates in the prison cell. Socrates is hailed as a person who has witnessed the rise and fall of Athens:

Ант. ...... Да жалко, У тебя была длинная жизнь, на твоих глазах построили великие храмы Акрополя, на твоих глазах Афины расцвели и увяли .... [62].

Similarly, the battle at Poteidaia is remembered by Socrates’ contemporaries as an important battle, but also a battle in which Socrates passed the whole night standing and pondering. Socrates’ pupil, the ‘first pupil’ in the play, asks Socrates to explain his inaction during that night. Socrates explains that on that night as a foot soldier, after killing many people, he suddenly became sick and realised that in that battle he was killing his own self:

Сократ. ......... И мне стало больно в животе. И тут я понял, что есть — общее "я" ... что мое "я" — есть у другого, и он тоже "я". Я убивал "я"! [29].

In the same way as the history of ancient Greece cannot be visualised without Socrates, the history of early and middle nineteenth-century Russia cannot be represented without mentioning the Decembrists. Mikhail Lunin was not only one of them, but was perhaps one of the most controversial figures of his time. In *Lunin* ... his life-story becomes the vantage point from where the story of nineteenth-century Russia is reviewed.
and retold. Because of this biographical time in this play becomes intricately intertwined with historical time.

Historical time is re-presented through masquerades, balls, card games, masks and uniforms and also by the repeated mentioning of historically important dates. These dates are significant in Russian history, but are equally important milestones in Lunin’s own life:

Лунин. И все-таки это случилось! Все это случилось ... на нашем балу ... Я хотел бы отметить. На веселом молодом тщеславном маскараде .... случилось это! Война двенадцатого года! [86] (emphasis added).

After the failed rebellion, many Decembrists were imprisoned, exiled or executed. Lunin remembers the historical year of 1825, and the following years of repression and reprisals:

Лунин. ......... Должно записать господа. Был в России двадцать пяты год, когда почти все...хоть сколько талантливое, хоть сколько мыслящее .... было истреблено .......... Так что ты тоже - сын двадцать пяты года ... [92] (emphasis added).

Lunin recalls his first meeting with the Tsar which took place in the campaign of 1805, when he was an adjutant to the Tsar:

Лунин. Вот она. Встреча Хака с Хозяином на балу! (Представляясь, государю.) Я Михаил Сергеевич Лунин, кавалергард, участник всех сражений Отечественной войны, награжден Золотым оружием за храбрость ... В компании тысяча восемьсот пяты года я был вашим адъютантом. Бал начинался, и вы любили меня тогда, ваше величество, государь Александр Павлович [95] (emphasis added).

These historical dates are very common in Lunin’s dialogues, but they are also mentioned by other protagonists, including the Tsar. The year of the failed rebellion is mentioned most often:

Оторя мундир. 14 декабря 1825 года я уже поднялся, ... ж105ю (emphasis added).

Мундир Государя .... Господа офицеры, я созвал вас всех, чтобы сообщить вам чрезвычайную весть. Четырнадцатое декабря тысяча восемьсот двадцать пяты года без сомнения войдет в историю России [106] (emphasis added).

In Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca, the lives of Nero and Seneca are at the centre of the narrative, but through their lives the narrative reconstructs the history of
Nero’s and Seneca’s Rome. Seneca’s letters to Lucilius tell the story of Nero’s and Seneca’s lives, but they also record the history of Rome. For instance, in the opening sequence of the ‘comedy of life’ Seneca reads his first letter to Lucilius, and begins an account of Nero’s life from his birth, reminding Lucilius that he would begin the story in a chronological order:

Сенека. "... Начну по порядку. Цезарь Нерон родился в Акция в восемнадцатом году жизни. И я согласился" [155].

Сенека. "... на одинадцатом году жизни Нерона меня предложили стать его воспитателем, и я согласился" [155].

Сенека. "...... Тебе шел семнадцатый год. Ты был еще мальчик [156].

To this Nero replies:

Нерон. Я был юноша, Сенека. Мне шел семнадцатый год ... Что ты сказа

тогда? Ну?! [156].

In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca answers Lucilius’ question about Nero’s heavy drinking and debauchery by comparing Nero’s Rome with the Rome of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius:

Сенека. "Ты пишешь, что молодой Цезарь — развратник и пьяница? Зато он свято блюдет уважение к Сенату. Зато в стране мир. Зато впервые в Риме сенаторы сами издают законы. Ты пишешь, что он истребляет свою семью ... Зато в его правлении не подвергается посягательством жизнь и свобода частных граждан. Зато совершенно исчезли политические процессы ... А вспомни страшные времена Тиберия — Капикулы — Клавдиа" [161].

The above excerpt from Seneca’s letter puts Nero’s Rome in the context of Rome’s past history. However, Nero has little patience to hear even the history of his own time. At one point, during Seneca’s reading of his letters, he becomes so irritated that he snatches the bunch of letters from Seneca’s hand, exclaiming that the letters were useless, because they did not tell anything new, and described only the unending sequence of murders and suicides:

Нерон. ..... (Выхватывает свитки из рук Сенеки.) Прочь все лишнее! (поглаживает торопливо письма, бормочет.) "Вчера убит Сенатор Цезония Руф" ... Ну это ясно! (Рвет. Поглаживает следующее.) "Вчера удавлен консул Корнелий Сабин" (Отшвыривает.) "Вчера убит Децим Помпея" ... как скучно! (Рвет.) "Вчера умер богач Ватия. Он
The repeated occurrence of the word ‘yesterday’ in the above passage is remarkable. The word seems to lose a sense of the past attached to it, transforming into ‘everyday’, implying that Nero’s Rome was a city of daily murders. The days, when people died of natural causes were exceptions. The manner in which Nero reads these letters is also interesting. He takes a letter, reads a sentence, and then either throws it away or tears it up. The whole history of Nero’s Rome is reduced to one recurring sentence.

One of the most visual images of historical time in this play, however, is the wooden barrel of Diogenes. It seems to function like a clock that has kept on ticking and recording time. Nero wants to appoint an adjudicator of the trial, the ‘comedy of life’ and finds a wooden barrel in the arena. The barrel was sent to him by the prefect Achaea along with a letter, which reports that it was ‘four hundred years old and stood in the market square in Corinth’. Diogenes of Sinope was the first of the cynics who entered and lived in the barrel, followed by other Diogenes, including Diogenes the Apollonian, Diogenes of Babylon and Diogenes of Rhodes.

The wooden barrel is mentioned in the very third line of the play as a part of the setting, where it stands beside a tall cross and ‘contains an old man whose long grey hair, high forehead and eyes bob restlessly in and out’ [128]. The significance of this theatrical prop becomes clear only after its four-hundred-year long history is foregrounded. The barrel is occupied successively by different persons with the same name. They come from different places and times, and through them the barrel becomes a site of philosophical tradition. But more interestingly the barrel becomes a place where time keeps its continuous presence. The barrel and the timeless Diogenes sitting in it, irritate and challenge Nero, and he tries to stop this historical clock by dragging out Diogenes, and ordering the old man with broken arms and legs to be nailed onto a cross. However, Seneca has other plans. He wants to keep the clock ticking, and jumps into the empty barrel.

**Narrative Time as Crisis Time**

It was discussed earlier that the three plays are play-biographies, and because of this, narrative time in these plays takes the form of biographical time. However, this biographical time is not that time when the life follows a normal, day-to-day mode. The main protagonists of each of the three plays are facing death. Hence, biographical time is in its crisis mode, confronted with a threat of its own death. It is crisis time.
In *Dialogues with Socrates*, Socrates is facing the last thirty-two days of his life. The play *Lunin* ... tells the story of the last three hours of Lunin’s life. In *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*, Seneca is living the last night of his life. In the morning he will be executed along with Diogenes.

The readers and audience are made aware of the impending danger in the opening sequences of these plays, and as the action moves toward its climax the tension generated by the crisis mode also increases. This tension is visible in the words and actions of every protagonist.

In *Dialogues with Socrates*, the tension is present even in the opening scenes of the first act, *The Feast*. Socrates’ wife Xanthippe repeatedly reminds him of the impending trial. It was noted earlier that in this scene Xanthippe’s dialogue contains reference to the trial. She is worried that Socrates will be drunk or lose his voice, and that consequently will not be able to defend himself. In the first scene of the second act, *The Trial*, Xanthippe is equally tense and worried, scolding Socrates for wasting time with his sandals. ‘Socrates, it is time, Socrates,’ she shouts at him, reminding him of the battle of Poteidaia where he spent the whole night lost in his thoughts.

The tension builds up gradually, and reaches its crescendo in the final scene of the third act. The first scene of this act finds Frasibulus tense, disturbed and agitated, unhappy that Socrates has been sentenced to death. Anytus tries to calm him down by informing him that the execution has been postponed for thirty days.

In this act Socrates goes through an emotional crisis after Anytus tells him about the real father of Socrates’ children. Socrates is taken ill, and the illness brings a catharsis. According to Socrates, this was a ‘pleasant illness’ [52]. Describing his illness to the ‘first pupil’ he recalls that it made him realise that he had only a few days to live:

> Сократ. (уже думая в своем). Я лежал в бреду и глядел на потолок ... ... А потом сознание вернулось, и однажды под утро я проснулся весь в поту ... Я понял, что впереди у меня день ... день жизни. И я был счастлив и чувствовал любовь ко всем ... любовь ... [52].

In the last scene of this act the prison warden is happy that Socrates wants the cup of poison to be brought as soon as his last visitors have left. Socrates is also excited. He is rubbing his benumbed hands with pleasure. He is surprised at the changes in his body:

> Сократ. ...... Еще недавно моим ногам было тяжело и больно от оков, а теперь всему моему тelu сладостно и приятно. Тема для басни Эопа [63].
In this scene the actions of the prison warder are described by such adverbs as ‘happily’ and ‘hastily’. Socrates is also anxious to finish the execution quickly, which surprises the ‘second pupil’ who asks:

Второй. Зачем ты спешишь, Сократ? [66],

and the ‘first pupil’ adds:

Первы. Слыньце еще не закатилось, Сократ, а все принимают отраву после его захода [66].

Socrates takes the cup in his hand, and is ready to drink. This generates laconic, at places tense, almost single-word reactions from the three protagonists, Socrates, the ‘first pupil’ and the prison warder:

Первы. Не надо ... Не торопись ...  

Тюремщик. И не пропей.

Сократ. (держа чашу, не оборачиваясь.) А где Аполлодор?

Первы. Он вышел ... и скоро придет к тебе.

Сократ. Пир! (Пьет.)

Тюремщик. До дна! как пьяница! (Принимает чашу из рук Сократа.) Порядок!

Вот это старичок! (Уходит с чашей.)

Первы. Сократ ... [67].

In Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca the crisis time and the tension associated with it are present throughout the play. Nero is tense and irritated, and continually builds up the tension. He forces slaves and gladiators, who are caged inside the basement cells, to shout and scream. His whip is a fitting device for creating tension. He whips and the ‘horse-senator’ neighs. He whips and the ‘horse-senator’ starts making Ciceronian speeches praising Nero and his senate. This tension is also visible in the way Nero abruptly interjects, interrupts and cuts short Seneca’s speech.

If Nero is always laughing and shouting, raising his whip and hitting with it, Seneca, most of the time, remains outwardly cool, controlled and balanced. The most common adverbs used for his actions are ‘imperturbably’, ‘dispassionately’. Even the announcement of his own death does not disturb him. When Nero hits him on his face, Seneca ‘initially shouts but soon takes control’ over himself [149]. He loses control only once when he is confronted with the enactment of Britannicus’ murder which makes him ‘terrified for the first time’ [160].
As Seneca reads his letters, the night also approaches its end, and Nero irritated at the slow reading, snatches the pack of letters from his hand, and starts to read himself, throwing them away or tearing them after reading a sentence or two. At this point, the slogan-like speeches of the horse-senator, in which he had been praising Nero, become dislocated. They are made up of long sentences without stops and punctuations. Nero is happy that his last metamorphosis has occurred - the senator has finally ‘been metamorphosed into a horse’ [169].

After the ‘comedy of life’ Seneca makes his concluding speech. At this point Seneca seems to lose control over himself. He shouts and screams. This is a reaction to Nero’s statement that ‘Seneca, the greatest moralist trained the greatest murderer’ [173]. From this point onward, Seneca’s actions are out of his control: he is ‘angry’, and ‘scared’, his voice becomes ‘hoarse’, and he shows signs of physical and emotional pain. In the final outburst he jumps into the empty barrel, and is burnt alive.

Crisis time and the tension associated with it reach its apogee in the play Lunin .... In this play crisis time is present in every moment of the play. It breathes through it like an independent protagonist. In the opening sequence of the play, Lunin is told about his execution which will take place at three o’clock in the morning. It has been noted earlier that dialogic exchanges between Grigor’ev and Lunin in this scene are marked by repeated reference to the time of ‘three o’clock’. As soon as Grigor’ev comes out of Lunin’s cell, Lunin is overcome by a feverish haste. He looks at the female figure, and remarks that their meetings always occurred ‘on the eve of’ a crisis [79]. He is ‘strangely very happy’, and ‘hastily’ dresses himself. Then, he is ‘suddenly’ lost in deep thought, and after some time looks ‘apprehensively’ at the candle and ‘hastily’ blows it out. The most common adverbs describing Lunin’s actions, in this passage are: hastily, suddenly, and apprehensively.

Soon the clock strikes midnight, and Lunin is plunged into a dream- or nightmare-like sequence of present and past images. Lunin’s first verbal reaction to the clock is in the form of broken sentences in which the most common word is ‘three’:

Три часа ... Три часа - триста лет - три тысячи - все пустые слова [81].

Throughout this photographic sequence of present and past events his physical movements are those of a person haunted by nightmares: he ‘whispers’; he is lost in thoughts; and he frequently ‘shouts’.

He is so tense that it seems to him that time is galloping past. When lieutenant Grigor’ev brings in the convicts to show them to Lunin, as he had requested, Lunin assumes that the final minute has come. ‘Too early’, he shouts, and rushes towards the wall of his cell [98].
Then the clocks strikes ‘two thirty’ and Lunin, realising that the time is really short, remarks:

ЛУНИН. Тридцать минут ... жизнь прошла [113].

From this moment onwards the passage of time is not recorded in the extra-dialogic text, but is visible in the physical actions of every protagonist. Lunin is astounded at the silence which is so profound that even the footsteps of time can be heard:

ЛУНИН. ...Боже моя ... Тишина-то какая. (Еп.) Ах да! Их увезли уже ...
двадцать минут [117].

In the prison office adjacent to Lunin’s cell, the prison officer Grigor’ev wakes up the prison clerk sleeping with Marfa. He is tense and shouts at them and orders the clerk to show the file:

ГРИГОРЬЕВ. Молчать. (Марфе.) Быстрее, быстрее. (Яростно Писарю.) А депо!
Где депо! [118].

Before entering Lunin’s cell, Grigor’ev ‘looks at his watch. He is nervous and at times a chill takes over his whole body’ [118]. Meanwhile in his cell Lunin is talking to ‘she’, and his first words are:

ЛУНИН. Двадцать минут всего ... [118].

The tension reaches its climax when Grigor’ev enters Lunin’s cell, and the two start arguing about the last few minutes:

ГРИГОРЬЕВ. Шутить время вышло, Михаил Сергеевич, ребятки уже за стеной — готовятся.
ЛУНИН. Так поди, четверть часа осталось.
ГРИГОРЬЕВ. Десять минут, сударь. Но вам и приготовиться нужно, и свечу зажечь, и улечься ... [124].

The presence of crisis time is thus felt throughout the play, made visible through the striking clocks and watches, and through the tension which seizes every protagonist. Time, in this way, seems to become an independent protagonist, controlling the action and dictating its will. It is present even after Lunin’s execution. The prison clerk, who makes a list of the dead man’s possessions, records that a wall clock was found in Lunin’s cell.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter discussed the forms of narrative time in the three plays. It was argued that Bakhtin’s approach to the forms of time in literary narratives is more useful than the
structuralist notions about narrative time. Bakhtin’s approach provides a basis to see how narrative time is related to the lives of the protagonists and to the society which they represent.

The three plays of *Theatre of the Times*... narrate the life-stories of well-known historical figures. Because of this, the sequences of present and past events combine to constitute biographical time. Narrative time thus turns into biographical time. However, this biographical time is closely interlinked with historical time because a representation of the biographies of well-known historical figures also becomes a representation of the history of their times and places. The events of their biographies become the plot-constitutive elements of the history of their societies. Their lives provide vantage points from where the history of their people is constituted and narrated. Frasibulus uses Socrates’ life to reflect on the history of Athens. Lunin’s reconstruction of his past overflows with historical dates, significant for the history of nineteenth-century Russia. Similarly, when Seneca reads his letters, through them, he tells the story of Nero’s Rome.

But the most significant feature of narrative time is its crisis-mode: biographical and historical times are present in the form of crisis times. The main protagonists of each play face execution and are killed at the end of each play. The plays thus represent the last few days or hours of their lives and the tension generated by this crisis is present throughout. The protagonists talk about it continually, and it affects them physically and emotionally. Their actions and speeches become distorted and disjointed, like the slogans announced by the horse-senator in *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*. In *Lunin* ... the visual presence of time is maintained also with the help of clocks and watches.

The presence of crisis time puts constraints on the modes of narration and representation. Perhaps that is why the narration employs a complicated intertwining of present and past events, including the use of the ‘flash-back’ in *Lunin* ... and of reporting with simultaneous enactment in *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*.

In this type of narration the role of space or setting is crucial. This question will be discussed in detail in the following few chapters, which will discuss the chronotopes and their sequences, employed by these plays, and foreground their role in creating graphic representations of biographical and historical times.

This chapter has thus focused on biographical and historical times of the protagonists. But to suggest that these plays only represent real biographical and historical times will be a gross generalisation. It will simplify these complicated plays, invested with multiple layers of meanings, significations and representations. These plays were written in the sixties and seventies, and were read and seen by Soviet audiences
from within their own time-space. Hence, the writing and reading of these plays cannot and should not be dissociated from the contemporary cultural and historical situation. The interconnection between the real historical time, space and human beings, represented in these plays, and the contemporary Soviet time-space will be discussed in a separate chapter.