

An Analysis of the Temporal and Spatial Interweavings of Pedro Páramo from a Narratological Perspective

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Abstract: This thesis explores the novel *Pedro Páramo*, written by Mexican author Juan Rulfo, from a narratological perspective, focusing on its temporal and spatial interweavings. The novel, a masterpiece of Latin American magical realism, blurs the boundaries between reality and magic, presenting a complex narrative world. The author breaks traditional notions of time and space by incorporating events from different periods and places within the same frame, resulting in a narrative freedom beyond conventional limits. By analyzing the narrative time and narrative space, the thesis examines how Rulfo's use of prolepsis, analepsis, and other modernist techniques contribute to the novel's interwoven character of time and space. Additionally, the study delves into the various narrative perspectives employed in the novel, which shift between the real Comala and the magical Comala, impacting the story's development and themes. The temporal and spatial interweavings in *Pedro Páramo* reflect Mexican cultural elements, including the coexistence of ghosts with the living, and provide insights into the country's history and identity. The thesis highlights the novel's significance as a groundbreaking work in the context of Mexican literature and its lasting impact on literary studies, particularly in the realm of magical realism.

Keywords: *Pedro Páramo*, Narratological Perspective, Temporal and Spatial Interweavings, Mexican Literature, Magical Realism

1. Introduction

Pedro Páramo is one of the masterpieces of Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, whose original modernist techniques and narrative arts of mixing humans and ghosts and reversing time and space form an intertwined world of reality and magic. It is a classic of Latin American magical realism and has had a major influence on its development. The novel begins with Juan Preciado's journey to Comala, guided by his mother to find his father. Through what he sees and hears along the way, a multifaceted image of *Pedro Páramo* is presented and the decadence of the countryside after the Mexican Revolution is reflected.

As for the reasons for choosing this theme, it is mainly due to the novel's distinctive narrative characteristics. The author breaks the traditional concept of time and space by including events occurring at different times and places in the same frame, which gives the novel a narrative freedom that transcends time and space. He also uses open narrative arts and various modernist techniques such as dialogue, monologue and flashback to give the novel an interwoven character of time and space [1]. In addition, Gerard Genette's theory of narrative time and Bakhtin's theory of narrative

space that I learned in the Stylistics class also provide me with a theoretical basis. Therefore, this thesis will analyse the narrative arts of *Pedro Páramo* from the perspectives of narrative time and narrative space, based on the classical narrative view.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Magical Realism and Latin American Literature

The literary genre of magical realism emerged in Latin America and gained prominence through the works of authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Juan Rulfo. Scholars have extensively studied the characteristics and significance of magical realism in the region's literature. *Pedro Páramo* is often regarded as one of the foundational texts of this genre due to its seamless blending of the mundane and the supernatural. The temporal and spatial interweavings in the novel serve as powerful devices to create a dreamlike atmosphere and invite readers to explore the cultural complexities of Latin America [2].

2.2. Narratological Perspective

Narratology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the structure and elements of narrative works. By analyzing the narrative time and narrative space of *Pedro Páramo*, scholars have gained valuable insights into Rulfo's storytelling techniques. Previous studies have shown how Rulfo manipulates narrative time to create a non-linear, fragmented narrative that blurs past and present, life and death. Additionally, scholars have explored how the novel's narrative space fluctuates between the real and the magical, presenting readers with an ambiguous and enigmatic setting [1].

2.3. Time and Space in *Pedro Páramo*

The relationship between time and space is a central focus in the analysis of *Pedro Páramo*. Scholars have highlighted the ways in which Rulfo's use of flashbacks, foreshadowing, and multiple perspectives contribute to a narrative that transcends conventional temporal constraints. These temporal dislocations mirror the tumultuous history of Mexico, reflecting the effects of the Mexican Revolution on the land and its people. Moreover, the novel's exploration of narrative space, especially the coexistence of the real and the magical Comala, serves as a metaphor for the complexity of Mexican identity and cultural heritage [3].

2.4. Identity and Cultural Roots

The temporal and spatial interweavings in *Pedro Páramo* are intimately connected to the theme of Mexican cultural identity. Scholars have argued that the novel's narrative technique mirrors the disintegration of traditional Mexican values and the struggle to establish a cohesive national identity after the Mexican Revolution. Rulfo's representation of Comala as a microcosm of Mexican society reflects the tension between indigenous and European cultural elements, offering readers a profound exploration of the nation's historical and cultural roots [4].

3. Analyzing the Temporal and Spatial Interweavings

3.1. Narrative Time and the Mismatch of Time

What is narrative time? According to Genette's theory, narrative time is divided into story-time, which refers to the actual time in which the story is told in the novel, a fixed physical time, and discourse-time, which refers to the time in which the story is told in the narrative text and can vary

according to the order of the text and the use of narrative techniques [5]. *Pedro Páramo* presents these two types of narrative time using a double parallel narrative. This is the parallel development of Juan's search for his father and *Pedro Páramo's* domination of Comala. The time of *Pedro Páramo's* actual existence, that is, his life in the real Comala, is the time in which the story actually takes place, while the discourse-time passes through what Juan sees and hears in Comala, revealing through his mysterious and magical perspective Comala [1].

In the narration of this novel, there is an incongruence between the story-time and the discourse-time, that is, a mismatch of time in which the two do not coincide exactly. In narrative texts, the time mismatch is usually caused by prolepsis and analepsis in the narrative. Prolepsis is the narrative activity that recounts or refers to later events in advance, while analepsis is the later narration of events that precede the development of the story up to the current stage [6].

In *Pedro Páramo*, various techniques of prolepsis are used to alter the chronological order, crossing between present and past time throughout the entire time frame. There are conventional techniques of internal prolepsis, such as "many years later". For example, "El padre Renteria se acordaria muchos anos despues de la noche en que la dureza de su cama lo tuvo despierto y despues lo obligó a salir. Fue la noche en que murió Miguel Páramo. " [7]. The author also uses dialogue, monologues and metaphors to foreshadow and hint at future events in the narrative. For example, after Juan enters Comala, he inserts the following words: "Me sentí en un mundo lejano y me dejé arrastrar. Mi cuerpo, que parecía aflojarse, se doblaba ante todo, había soltado sus amarras y cualquiera podía jugar con él como si fuera de trapo." [7], which already suggests to the reader that Juan is dead and has become a ghost.

The novel also uses supplementary analepsis, in which an event is omitted from the narrative and then retold in retrospect to fill in the gaps left at the time [8]. For example, when Susana's tragic experience is recounted, the story begins with Dorotea's account of her dementia and then flashes back to the loss of her mother at a young age, the death of her husband as an adult, and the murder of her father by Pedro in order to become his wife.

Juan Rulfo's use of prolepsis and analepsis dislocates the story-time and the discourse-time, incorporating and stitching together events from different times and places into a complete three-dimensional story, which makes the narrative more compact and increases the tension of the novel.

3.2. Narrative Space and the Transformation of Narrative Perspectives

What is narrative space? Narrative space is divided into the story-space, which is the place where the events occur, and the discourse-space, which is the place where the act of narration takes place. In *Pedro Páramo*, the story-space is the real Comala, while the discourse-space is the magical Comala. Blurring the boundaries between life and death, earth and hell, magic and reality, the author represents the real Comala after the Mexican Revolution by depicting the magical one where ghosts roam, and also constructs the magical Comala with the real one [2]. However, the story-space and the discourse-space are not fixed, and the constantly shifting narrative perspectives in the novel also continually alter the two types of narrative space, giving rise to a phenomenon of spatial interweaving.

The narrative perspective frequently used in the novel is the first-person perspective (the fixed Internal focalization). For example, the novel begins: "Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal *Pedro Páramo*. Mi madre me lo dijo." [7]. It begins with the "I" in the first person, who is both the actor and the narrator of the story. The narrator then gives a panoramic description of the space of Comala through his mother's delirium: "Hay allí, pasando el puerto de Los Colimotes, la vista muy hermosa de una llanura verde, algo amarilla por el maíz maduro. Desde ese lugar se ve Comala, blanqueando la tierra, iluminándola durante la noche." [4]. The discourse-space of this representation of the landscape is the magical Comala, while that of the story is the real homeland of Doloritas' youth. In her mother's eyes, Comala is a living and beautiful land. "Ahora

estaba aquí, en este pueblo sin ruidos. Oía caer mis pisadas sobre las piedras redondas con que estaban empedradas las calles. Mis pisadas huecas, repitiendo su sonido en el eco de las paredes tenidas por el sol del atardecer.[7]" This spatial description, from the point of view of the "I", establishes a space in which all the inhabitants of Comala struggle throughout the novel.

In addition to the first person, there is also a third-person narrator in the novel. For example, it is used when describing Fulgor: "Al amanecer, gruesas gotas de lluvia cayeron sobre la tierra. Sonaban huecas al estamparse en el polvo blando y suelto de los surcos..... Fulgor Sedano sintió el olor de la tierra y se asomó a ver cómo la lluvia desfloraba los surcos.[7] " It is through Fulgor's eyes that he catches a glimpse of Comala after the rain. The vision of Comala in the past is the same as that remembered by Doloritas. However, the vitality of the past contrasts with the desolation in Juan's eyes. It is under Pedro's control that Comala falls into decay [4].

The shifting narrative perspectives, as foci of varying angles, create a mismatch of the story-space and the discourse-space. While the first of the novel is limited to Comala, the second extends over three levels. The first level is the beautiful Comala, a place of abundance and peace, based on the narratives and memories of departed spirits such as Doloritas. The second level is the desolate, gloomy and ghostly Comala of Juan's eyes. The third level is the real Comala, which is neither the hell of Juan's eyes nor the paradise of the departed, but the Comala constructed by the memories of many narrators who bring together the life of *Pedro Páramo*, and which is the most prominent level of the discourse-space of the novel. This level of Comala is revealed to the reader as *Pedro Páramo*'s life unfolds. At first he spent his childhood in beautiful Comala, but then he became a brutal feudal lord oppressing his people. Going through the revolutionary destruction that forced the villagers to abandon their homes and flee, Comala became desolate and decadent, eventually joining its ruler, Pedro, in his demise [3]. It is clear that, in the context of the novel, in the early twentieth century, caciquism was prevalent in Mexico, wreaking serious havoc on the Mexican people. While Pedro is the embodiment of the vicious Mexican hacendados, Comala is a microcosm of the ignorance, violence and poverty of rural Mexico and even Latin America. The author uses the changes in this town as a metaphor for the changes before and after the Mexican Revolution, reflecting the reality of the Mexican countryside under the hacienda system, attacking the power politics that turn people into ghosts, and revealing the incompleteness of the Mexican Revolution and the bad consequences of caciquismo. Comala, the narrative space of the novel, is full of the author's complex emotions: pain, resentment and disappointment.

3.3. Temporal and Spatial Interweavings and the Search for Mexican Cultural Roots

Normally, time and space are linked in a novel, and events and scenes take place in a particular temporal and spatial setting. According to Bakhtin's theory of the "Chronotope", the connection of temporal and spatial relations is artistically embodied in literature [9]. Combining the temporal and spatial dimensions, it can be seen that in *Pedro Páramo* there are many interweavings between space and time.

First, Juan Rulfo's use of ghosts outside of time and space as interpreters of history blurs the boundaries between life and death, the living and the ghosts, and earth and hell in the novel, allowing the reader to move freely between the magical Comala and the real Comala, which rationalises the spatial and temporal intertwinings. In Mexican culture, death is a continuation of life, and ghosts can coexist with the living, communicate with them and tell them their stories in a magical way. This original Mexican view of life and death gives the whole novel a mysterious and magical atmosphere [3]. Moreover, having the ghost monologue is also an artistic innovation in the context of Mexican culture.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the play adopts multiple narrative perspectives, with the monologues of Juan, Pedro and Susana constituting the first-person perspective and the rest the third-

person perspective. The alternation of characters and the change of narrative perspectives make the time and space of the play go completely beyond the traditional concept.

Finally, the use of various stream-of-consciousness techniques, such as monologues, voice-overs and flashbacks, means that they lead to different times and spaces. For example, the present in which Juan narrates his trip to Comala and the present in which he talks to Dorotea in the tomb, the past of Comala in Doloritas' memory and the past when Pedro is in power [1]. Furthermore, in many dialogues in the work, the author does not provide backgrounds or contextual relationships, nor does he even mention the speaker, leaving the reader to guess his relationship to the narrative reality based on the content of the conversations, which creates great ambiguity and allows the whole text to move between different times and spaces.

The rupture of the concept of time and space gives the novel a fragmentary narrative full of randomness. In this magical world, the dead tell Pedro Páramo's stories bit by bit, creating a hell on earth with scattered memories. Indeed, Juan's journey to find his father is an allegory of the Mexican search for national identity, for early in his quest, he learns that his father is long dead, suggesting that Mexicans cannot find a sense of belonging in the vestiges of European colonial culture. Nor is the town of Comala, heir to Aztec civilisation, a place of belonging for Mexicans, and where Juan eventually dies. After the Mexican Revolution, Mexico returned to its European past, and it was difficult for this colonised country to return to its indigenous culture, which the colonial culture had already been integrated into the Mexican culture, so the two cultures could not be completely separated, and the search for a single culture would end in failure [4]. Juan Rulfo has lived through a series of social conflicts, such as the Mexican Revolution and the religious wars, in an attempt to find and reconstruct the Mexican cultural identity in a society full of strife. In *Pedro Páramo*, he expresses the anxiety of the Mexican people in their search for national roots and the uncertainty of their national identity.

4. Conclusion

Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is a masterpiece that uses temporal and spatial intertwining to create a magical and complex world.

In terms of narrative time, the novel presents a mismatch between the story time and the discourse time. The author uses techniques of prolepsis and analepsis to alter the chronological order of events and create a three-dimensional narrative that merges different moments into a coherent whole. These techniques, along with the use of dialogue, monologue and metaphor, add tension and depth to the story, allowing the reader to discover past and future events in a non-linear fashion.

In terms of narrative space, Rulfo presents a Comala that unfolds on different levels. Through shifts in narrative perspective, a beautiful and lively Comala is revealed from the perspective of the departed spirits, a real Comala constructed by the memories of many narrators who bring together the life of Pedro Páramo, as well as a desolate and oppressive Comala seen through Juan's eyes. This transformation of narrative perspective generates a spatial interweaving in the novel, in which the boundaries between the real and the magical world are blurred, and the reader is transported to different dimensions of Comala.

The temporal and spatial interweavings in *Pedro Páramo* not only serve as innovative narrative techniques but also have a deeper meaning in the context of Mexican culture. The presence of ghosts coexisting with the living reflects the Mexican view of death as a continuation of life, and the magical communication between the two worlds is a distinctive element of Mexican culture. Furthermore, through the representation of Comala, Rulfo shows the reality of the Mexican countryside under the hacienda system and criticises the oppressive power of the caciques. Through Juan's journey to find his father, the author also seeks to explore Mexican cultural roots and reflect on the country's history

and identity, recounting the anguish and contradictions of the Mexican people at a particular moment in history and reflecting the thoughts of life and suffering of Mexico and humanity as a whole.

In short, *Pedro Páramo* transcends the conventional boundaries of narrative time and space. Through its temporal and spatial interweaving, Juan Rulfo creates an enigmatic and powerful narrative that addresses important social and cultural issues. This masterpiece of Latin American magical realism has left an indelible mark on literature and continues to be studied and admired for its innovative narrative exploration.

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