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A STUDY OF SPATIAL NARRATIVE IN OF MICE AND MEN

Abstract. In his novel *Of Mice and Men*, American writer John Steinbeck portrays two farm workers, George and Lenny, who depend on and support each other. The two heroes struggle to survive on the edge of a brutal society, where a strong friendship and shared vision are finally strangled by brutal reality. Through the meticulous description and cutting combination of different Spaces, the novel reflects the geographical space of nature and reality, the space-time space of three parallel clues and the interlacing and opposing text space. Based on space writing, this study interprets the themes of loyal friendship, loneliness and disillusionment of hope in the novel, reveals the author's criticism of the contradictory relations between man and man, between man and nature, between man and land, and his longing for a harmonious society in the future.

Keywords: of *Mice and Men*; cartographic space; space-time space; text space.

Of Mice and Men is Steinbeck's second of three books based on California farm workers. The text mainly tells the story of the Great Depression in the United States, the two main characters Lenny Small and George Milton as temporary farm workers have just lost their jobs due to mistakes on the previous farm. The two traveled to California to find work and fight for the ideal of owning their own land. Lenny was mentally handicapped and stupid, but possessed of unparalleled strength and did George's bidding. George is smart and the decision maker of the two. Through the depiction of different Spaces, the article vividly shows the mental state and living conditions of farm workers in the era to the readers.

1. Cartographic space

In his book *Narrative Theory towards Space*, Zora Gabriel expounds the narrative theory system that takes spatio-temporal factors into consideration at the same time. The main theoretical result is that he puts forward and explains three paradigms of different levels of spatio-temporal construction: cartographic space, spatio-temporal space and text space. In *Of Mice and Men*, there are many descriptions about the space of the topography. But the most ink

in the text is the nature and reality of two specific spatial levels.

1.1 Natural space

In almost every chapter of the text, the author begins with a delicate and touching description of the surrounding vibrant natural scenery and lively animals. For example, at the beginning of the article, the scenery around the Salinas River was described, "The Salinas River flows quietly, and when it reaches several kilometers to the south of Soledad, it suddenly approaches the foot of the mountain, and the water suddenly turns dark and green ... Only the low-hanging branches occasionally left a few leaves." At the beginning of the article, the poetic power is exhausted, and it is also the beginning of the dreams of the two protagonists. The contradiction between the beautiful fantasy and the cruel reality in the whole article starts from the beauty of this moment. There is still a long scene at the end of the article, As George is about to shoot Lenny, the scene is described in a quiet and tragic way. There is another bright spot in the description of natural space, which is the vivid description of animals and the metaphor of animal behavior to human action. The article begins: "The

leaves are so dry and brittle that a lizard would slide over them. At dusk, rabbits emerge from the bushes... Some are raccoons, some are farm dogs with pointy toes, and the wedge-shaped ones are deer that come to the river to drink at night." At this time the animals are full of life, charmingly naive. The long description is full of the author's love of nature. At the end of the article, the scene of a heron preying on a water snake symbolized the scene of George shooting Lenny. "A water snake glides lightly across the water... The heron stood motionless in the shallow. Then, all of a sudden, it lowered its head noiselessly and closed its long beak on the water snake's head. George took Lenny off guard when he was looking across the river and shot him dead.

1.2 Real space

The description of their real life space is mainly focused on their new working farm, which is detailed and reflects the difficult living conditions of farm workers in the era. In the writing space of the farm, a series of supporting characters are vividly depicted. The author begins: "The settlement is a long rectangular building with whitewashed walls... There were wooden boxes round the table for the players to sit on." There is also a description of Crook's harness room: "There is a small house next to the stable, which is the harness room... The little room had a square cross window on one wall and a narrow slatted door on the other... Crook's bed had an apple box nailed to it, and a row of medicine jars on it." The author gives a detailed and detailed description of the spatial levels of George and Lenny's real life, mainly relying on the scope of activities of the protagonists, especially Lenny. The living environment of farm workers is made up of small Spaces such as rectangular squatters, Crookstalls and open Spaces where workers play horseshoes.

2. Space and time

Einstein's term "space-time body" was incorporated into the field of literary criticism by Bakhtin, who defined it as "a complex of time and space, including objects, events, psychology, history, etc."

However, in Zolon's three-tier structure paradigm, space-time space is defined as "a category that can be integrated by space and time as motion and change". Moreover, these spatio-temporal relations gradually embodied in the narrative can be divided into synchronic and diachronic relations. Synchronic relations refer to the textual content embodied in the narrative in both motion and stillness. Diachronic relation refers to the fact that in a specific narrative space, the development direction of space-time body, the main line of creation, the axis of movement and the force of will all play a role in space. The main feature of space-time space in *Of Mice and Men* is that three narrative clues are parallel, resulting in the cutting combination of space-time. Many blank structures in time and space emerge as the narrative progresses. The reader's doubts in the process of reading are gradually solved, and the narration of multiple spatial dimensions is parallel and complementary to each other.

This is best illustrated by the descriptive narration of the time that took place on the three farms. The first farm is the old farm where George and Lenny made a mistake and were forced to escape. The first mention of the farm is in Chapter one, when George reminds Lenny that "he did a terrible thing on the old farm, and he will never do it again." A short sentence, coupled with the escape of George and Lenny at the beginning of the article, greatly aroused the reader's interest in the old farm event. It isn't until George and Slim's chat in chapter 3 that Lenny is arrested as a rapist for clinging to the girl's skirt at the old farm. The story of the old farm also hints at where the main clue is heading. The second farm is the farm where George and Lenny work, and it is also the main place where the events of the text take place, which is also the main narrative clue of this paper. George and Lenny encounter a variety of characters while working on their new farm, culminating in Lenny losing control, strangling the farmer's daughter-in-law and escaping, only to be found and shot by George. The third farm is George and Lenny's fantasy private farm. The author gives a

vivid and detailed description of this utopia in another time and space. Then chapter three's vision of an ideal private farm even draws in another aged and helpless farm worker, Candy. Even in the face of Candy's skepticism, George adds a realistic way to own an ideal farm. Until the fourth chapter, the new partner Candy has great enthusiasm for the ideal farm, the idea of the farm attracted another black horse crook. That was the end of the description of the ideal farm. No matter the description of the old farm, the working farm or the ideal farm, there is a cutting combination of time and space. The three space-time clues gradually show their original appearance in the activities of the protagonist, and the space-time relations exist or change in the development of the plot, which together constitute the construction of the author's text.

3. Text space

Dren's explanation of text space is that "spatial structure acts on space through the content expressed in language text". At the level of text space, the author creates a structured material schema representing the world, focusing on the selectivity of language, linearity of text and unity of structural viewpoints in text. In *Mice and Men*, the author clearly shows the antagonism between race, gender, and human and animal through the division between the laborers and the harness, the division between men and women, and the division between man and animal.

3.1 Antagonism between blacks and whites

The antagonism between blacks and whites is particularly evident in the textual space. The isolation of the black Crook's premises from everyone else suggests racial antagonism. The farm where George and Lenny work has an unwelcome black groom named Crook. More than once, the article describes the isolation between Crook and other people. "I'm not allowed in your camp, and you're not welcome here... They play poker over there, but they won't let me play because I'm a nigger. It is through this description that the author highlights the racial confrontation of *The Times*, the discrimination and even oppression of white people against black peo-

ple. The article writes that Crook expressed surprise when Lenny stumbled into his room to see the newborn puppy and repeatedly told Lenny not to enter his room. When Candy, an old farm worker, went to the harrymoon to look for Lenny. Crook tried desperately to look unhappy, but it was easy to see he was happy." This description highlights the high and low position in the discourse of power incisively and vividly. Crook's words highlight his inner loneliness and desperate need for company. Man himself is a social animal, and everyone is eager to express himself, even if he does not say anything, silent existence is also a kind of expression. But the isolated space did not give Crook this opportunity, and his heart was occupied by the loneliness of the opposite space.

3.2 The opposition between men and women

The opposition between men and women is mainly reflected in the opposition between Mrs. Curley and the whole spatial relationship of the farm. Mrs. Curley, the farmer's daughter-in-law, had been confined to the narrow space of marriage and family since her marriage. She was young and vigorous and had no window of perception and understanding of the outside world. In the article, Mrs. Curley often went to the workers' camp to find Curley under the pretext of communicating with the outside world and expanding her own living and activity space. But the farm workers always saw her as a slut and trouble. There are many references to farm workers talking about Mrs. Curley behind her back, flirting and flirting. When George arrives at the new farm and meets Candy, the first topic of conversation is to arrange Mrs. Curley. When Mrs. Curley went to look for him in his harness, His revulsion was clear. "I think you'd better go home. We don't want to get in trouble." Mrs. Curley tries her best to break through the divide in space, but the farm workers, who regard her as a monster and believe that she belongs only to the family side, unite with blacks and whites to strangle her freedom. In the only time she was alone with Lenny, the loneliness caused by the spatial opposition came out on the page. "Let's have a chat.

I have no one to talk to for a long time. ‘You can talk to a lot of people, but I can only talk to Curley. “Don’t I even have the right to talk to people? Then I don’t understand why I can’t talk to you? I’m not going to hurt you.” This series of descriptions constitute another level of mutual opposition in the text space. The opposition between men and women in the farm is very unfair to Mrs. Curley, the only woman on the farm, resulting in her loneliness for a long time, which echoes the main idea of the text.

4. Opposition between man and animals

The spatial opposition between human and animal runs through the whole text. This division and opposition are mainly manifested in two aspects. The first aspect is that in the range of human activities, that is, in the farm, animals are unhealthy, which is in sharp contrast to the vitality of animals in the natural state described by the author. The second aspect is shown by the public’s attitude towards Candy’s dog and Lenny’s rat and dog. The animals in the text, far away from humans, are full of exuberance and exuberance. The first chapter opens with a scene of nimble lizards, cunning rabbits, lithe rabbits and various animals in action. The animals in these descriptions all contain rich vitality and vitality. Farm animals are weak or sick. Candy, Slim, Lenny’s dog, and crook’s horse were all dead sick. The main antagonism between man and animal was the rejection of Candy’s dog and Lenny’s rat and dog by the people in the colony.

“Every time it entered the camp, I could smell it for two or three days”. the dogs belong in the barn, and the workers strictly divide the two Spaces. Lenny’s rats and dogs were the object of George’s boycott, and George bluntly warned Lenny, I told you not to bring puppies in here.” The obvious sense of space distance between workers and animals can better reflect the passive or active separation of socialized people from nature, and this kind of space cutting can better reflect the loneliness between people.

5. Conclusion

Of Mice and Men tells the story of George and Lenny, who dream of owning a piece of land of their own, achieving wealth and financial independence. That may be true today, but it was the unrealistic dream of many industrial workers during the Great Depression. The author’s exquisite use of spatial narrative techniques builds a complete and vivid spatial narrative structure by cutting and combining a series of Spaces, including geographical space of natural and realistic levels, space-time space of three parallel clues and text space of interlacing and opposing each other. The strengthening of spatial features deeply reflects the three themes of loyal friendship, loneliness and disillusionment of hope in the work. In addition, the text also profoundly reflects the author Steinbeck’s deep concern and sympathy for the agricultural workers and all the working people at the bottom of the Great Depression.

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