

Analysis of Narrative Situation in The Torrents of Spring

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Abstract

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) stands as one of the most influential literary figures of the 20th century and is revered as a master of modern narrative art. In 1954, he was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1926, Hemingway created the only parody The Torrents of Spring, which combines humor, satire, romanticism and naturalism, and uses rich narrative techniques. From the perspective of narratology, this paper studies the narrative situation: narrative person, narrative focalization and narrative manner in this novel, trying to explain Hemingway's exceptional narrative art.

Key Words

The Torrents of Spring; Narratology; Narrative situation.

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was a distinguished American author and a pioneer of modernist literature. He was renowned for his mastery of contemporary narrative techniques and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. *The Torrents of Spring* was written by Hemingway in only one week in 1925 and published in 1926. But as a parody of Sherwood Anderson's novel *Dark Laughter*, it has almost remained unnoticed. And in this work Hemingway also made a serious attempt at narrative technique, which shows his brilliant talent, his great intelligence. So *The Torrents of Spring* is definitely not a joke, but a work of narrative exploration.

The narrative centers on two Americans, Scripps O'Neil and Yogi Johnson, as they navigate their quests for love and the search for meaning in their lives. Scripps, a Harvard alumnus and aspiring writer, juggles the complexities of having two wives while exhibiting a lack of intellectual depth. He presents himself as a protagonist, having relocated to Petoskey following the departure of his first wife and daughter. There, he encounters Diana, an elderly waitress at a local diner, and they marry shortly thereafter. However, he soon finds himself infatuated with a younger waitress named Mandy. Both Scripps and Yogi are employed at a large pump factory. Yogi, a World War I veteran, has renounced romantic relationships after experiencing two blissful weeks in Paris and is contemplating suicide. His perspective shifts dramatically upon encountering a naked Native American woman, prompting him to pursue her into the night, where the warm Chinook winds herald the arrival of spring.

Narratology was originally born in France in the 1990s, and it can be divided into two major development periods, which are commonly called Classical Narratology and Post-Classical Narratology by general scholars. Narratology finds out how narrative elements such as characters and setting interact. It is the study of narrative and also called narrative theory. Its objective is to describe the constants, variables and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies) (Fludernik 8). And Fludernik also point out that "Narratology has traditionally been a sub-discipline of the study of literature and also has particularly close ties to poetics, the theory of genre, and to the semiotics, or semiology, of literature" (Sherwood 9).

So narratology resembles poetics and semiotics. It can analyse the characteristics of literary texts, their aesthetic functions and the constitution of meaning in the text.

As a framework, narratology has many different levels, which can analyse different characteristics of a narrative. And the structure of narrative includes narrator, focalization, perspective, point of view, presentational modes, and time. Through analyzing narrative structure, we can clarify the context of the story and understand what the author is trying to express. In *The Torrents of Spring*, we can understand the skill of author and the message he conveys better with the analysis of its narrative situation.

1. Narrative Person in *The Torrents of Spring*

In thinking about the relationship of narrators to the figures they tell about- the term for this relationship in narratology is person- we are exploring another set of basic aspects of the structure of narrative (Fludernik 30). There are different types of narrator: homodiegetic narrator(narrator=character) and heterodiegetic narrator(narrator≠protagonist). And actually first-person narrative is regarded as the former, and third-person narrative is regarded as the latter. First-person narrator gives an account of adventure that he involves in as a character in the story, and first-person narrator usually predominates in conversational narrative. Third-person narrator tells stories that happen to others. And second-person narrative tells the story of a narratee (Fludernik 31).

The narrator can affect the distance between the narrator and the reader or the virtual art world shaped by the work, and whether this distance is near, far or still in the middle is due to the different effects of different people in Hemingway's works, and the integration of the three narrators is more exciting.

1.1. First-person Narrative

First-person narrative is that the story is told by the narrator who is also a character in the story. The narrator uses "I" and tells what he sees, hears and feels (Zhao Yanqiu 2002) . And first-person narrative removes the narrative distance from the author's narrative situation, thus making readers' perception of the story direct and real (Chen Liangmei 2005).

In *The Torrents of Spring*, first-person narrative is used well, and through "I" characters' psychological situations are described vividly. In Chapter 10, "If I can only hold him, she was thinking. If I can only hold him..." (Hemingway 45). In this sentence, first-person narrative "I" use to show Diana's mental process, emphasizing her anxiety and worry. And through her mental situation, readers can understand the plot and the character well, which can also reduce distance between character and readers.

And author also uses first-person narrative to tell characters' personal story to develop the story better. For example, in Chapter 5, two characters use first-person narrative to tell their own life. Scripps tells his story, "I write stories. I had a story in *The Post* and two in *The Dial*. Mencken's trying to get a hold of me. I'm too wise for that sort of thing. No Pulitzer for mine." (Hemingway 18). In this excerpt, Scripps shares his personal narrative, which is profoundly anchored in both practical experience and the emotional necessity of expressing one's innermost feelings, thereby resonating powerfully with the reader. If Hemingway had opted for a second-person or third-person narrative, the authenticity of the experience would have diminished, and the emotional depth would likely have been disregarded, as feelings become less tangible and personal when they are merely observations of others rather than intimate sensations.

And at the same time, waitress Diana also told her story to Scripps by first-person narrative, "It was the year of the Paris Exposition, I was a young girl at the time, a *jeune fille*, and I came over from England with my mother." (Hemingway 200). And two characters both use first-person

narrative to make them have heart-to-heart communication and make them fall in love with each other quickly, which paves the way for the development of the plot.

1.2. Second-person Narrative

Hemingway usually uses second-person narrative in a character's words. And in fact, the usage of "you" refers to another "I". It is a way that characters conduct a dialogue with themselves. For example, in Chapter 3, "Scripps left Mancelona. He was through with that place. What had a town like that to give him? There was nothing to it. You worked all your life and then a thing like that happened. The savings of years wiped out." (Hemingway 8). In these sentences, Scripps engages in self-reflection. Clearly, the term "you" refers to the narrator himself. Hemingway aims to expand the narrative distance by transitioning from a first-person to a second-person perspective. This shift allows Hemingway to expose Scripps' profound sorrow and disillusionment, enabling the reader to experience Scripps' internal struggle.

And Hemingway also uses "you" to show that he want to talk to the virtual reader or implied reader. For example, in Chapter 11, "First, you were brave because you didn't think anything could hit you, because you yourself were something special, and you know that you could never die. Then you found out different. You were really scared then, but if you were a good soldier you functioned the same as before..." (Hemingway 57). Here, "you" isn't a real reader but the fictional readers imaged by author. And it creates a self-contained illusion of ambiance, enticing readers to perceive themselves as the fiction readers. This technique significantly diminishes the gap between the narrator and readers, potentially establishing the most direct connection possible. Consequently, it fosters a sense of intimacy, as the narrator demonstrates heightened awareness of readers, evoking feelings of astonishment and appreciation.

Meanwhile, in author's note there are the usage of second-person narrative. For instance, in Chapter 12, "Please, reader, just get that idea out of your head. But you would have done the same thing in our place, reader, and I think if you think it over you will agree with us on this." (Hemingway 69). In these sentences, all use the present tense. The narrator reveals his deepest thoughts to us explicitly. In the excerpt, "you" signifies the actual reader. Hemingway engages in a dialogue with the reader, thereby diminishing the gap between the author and the audience. In this context, Hemingway prioritizes the reader's experience, fostering a sense of closeness (Zhang Wei 2005).

1.3. Third-person Narrative

In this novel, Hemingway mainly uses third-person narrative to tell the story about two central characters Yogi Johnson and Scripps O'Neil. With third-person narrative, the narrator is able to sustain a degree of detachment to facilitate contemplation. He can vividly depict the grand scenes of the macrocosm while delving into the intricacies of human emotions. This approach offers expansive narrative possibilities, allowing for a remarkable flexibility and an unparalleled scope of vision, characterized by both freedom and audacity.

1.4. Integration of Three Types of Narrator

The incorporation of three distinct narrative perspectives in Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* represents a remarkable artistic achievement that enriches the novel's overall texture. The narrative frequently transitions from third-person narrative to second-person narrative, and at times to first-person narrative, creating a seamless and organic interplay among these narrative voices.

For example, in Chapter 11, there is third-person narrative that is suddenly inserted in second-person narrative. "Yogi had played centre at football and war had been much the same thing, intensely unpleasant. When you played football and had the ball, you were down with your legs spread out and the ball held out in front of you on the ground..." (Hemingway 55). The reader finds it hard to discern who this second-person narrative "you" is. Perhaps "you" refers to the

two Indians or readers. Nobody can tell for sure because the story is so intriguing and captivating because of this ambiguity.

And when author describes character's mental activities, third-person narrative and second-person narrative appear simultaneously. For instance, in Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, "If I can only hold him, she was thinking. If I can only hold him..." (Hemingway 45) and "Well, Yogi though, women are gone, perhaps, though I hope not; but I still have my love of horses" (Hemingway 52). In order to add the novel more colorful, the pronouns "I" in these words are internal monologues that depict the thoughts and emotions of the characters. Readers are shown an inward monologue by changing "he" to "I". The reader has little trouble recognizing the feelings of resentment and annoyance. Furthermore, the reader's empathy and feelings are strongly aroused.

Hemingway skillfully uses a variety of narrative personas in *The Torrents of Spring* to portray the narrator's thoughts and deeds. The narrator's history and experience are integral parts of his story. When three different narrative personas are combined, we experience not just the immediacy and real-timeness of the first person, but also the implied readers of the second person, the self-dialogue between "you" and "I", and the projection angle effect of the third person as a camera. Three different narrative personas are combined to create a video network that allows us to infer the plot from a variety of angles.

2. Focalization in *The Torrents of Spring*

Focalization refers to the lens through which we see characters and events. It stresses "who sees" instead of "who speaks". And according to Gérard Genette, focalization is divided into three types: zero focalization, internal focalization and external focalization.

2.1. Zero Focalization

In zero focalization the authorial narrator is above the world of the action, looks down on it and is able to see into the characters' minds as well as shifting between the various locations where the story takes place. This perspective is unrestricted or unlimited in contrast to the limitations of internal and external focalization (Fluernik 38).

Zero focalization can be seen in the whole novel, especially in omniscient narration area. For example, in Chapter 1, "Yogi Johnson stood looking out of the window of a big pump-factory in Michigan.", "Near Yogi at the next window but one stood Scripps O'Neil, a tall, lean man with a tall, lean face." (Hemingway 3). Here, the author focuses on Yogi Johnson and uses the way of omniscient narrator to show that narrator knows Yogi and Scripps both at the window, but they don't know each other's location. So narrator knows more than characters. And in Chapter 9, author take Diana as the central figure to show her thoughts and feelings. Narrator knows everything about Diana and tells these to readers, which makes readers understand the whole novel better. "Diana looked into the mirror. Could she hold him? Could she hold him? That thought never left her now, that made a fump come in her throat and made her throat feel hard and choky..." (Hemingway 42). The reader might infer from the narrator's extensive description of Diana's mental state that although she has a profound affection for Scripps, her lack of confidence stems from her advanced age, lack of education, and lack of romantic desire. Because Mandy ends her marriage, Diana despises Mandy. Diana acknowledges to herself that she is aware of Scripps' fascination in Mandy, yet she chooses to keep him close. Despite Diana's strong desire to maintain this uncommon and happy marriage, Scripps and Mandy are unaware of her thoughts.

2.2. Internal Focalization

Internal focalization refers to that one character who participates in the fabula as an actor and at the same time functions as focalizer. In internal focalization narrator says what a given

character knows. And everything is presented in terms of knowledge, feelings and perceptions of one or some characters. The narrator tells only what these characters know and tell.

Hemingway uses internal focalization throughout the book. By doing this, there is very little psychological and temporal separation between the narrator and the character. As a result, rather than using the narrating self's perspective, the story is presented using the experiencing self's.

For example, in Chapter 10, "If I can only hold him, she was thinking. If I can only hold him. As they walked along the slushy snow of the narrow sidewalk of the Northern town, something began to beat in her head. Perhaps it was the rhythm of their walking together. I can't hold him. I can't hold him. I can't hold him." (Hemingway 45-46). Our hearts are on the verge of breaking with pity as we read the internal monologue. The use of internal and first-person focalization contributes to the scene's power. It would be impossible to capture Diana's love for Scripps so vividly and impressively if Hemingway had used external focalization to tell the story. Furthermore, it is impossible to convey Diana's inner complexity in such a clear, poignant, and penetrating manner. The focalizer of the entire event is the first-person narrator. Her lack of knowledge about the physical surroundings and mental stressors around her makes her terribly depressed. Unlike the witness focalizer, the narrator could not be impersonal or omniscient. As a result, the narrator shifts the focus from the outside world to his inner world. The great artistically soul-stirring attraction is caused by the narrator's interior focus.

2.3. External Focalization

External focalization refers to that in which an anonymous agent, who is situated outside the fabula, functions as an external focalization is called the external focalizer. In external focalization, the hero performs in front of us without allowing us to know his thoughts and feelings. And narrator presents everything from the outside and tells less than one or some characters know.

In this novel, author uses much more external focalization than internal focalization. For example, in Chapter 1, "Scripps O'Neil had two wives. One lived in Mancelona and the other lived in Petoskey. He had not see the wife ...and then sit together and drink and watch the trains go by." (Hemingway 4). This section focuses on Scripps and uses external focalization to present the character's story to readers. And in dialogue, there is also external focalization. In Chapter 15, "Won't you come, Scripps?" "No, I don't give a damn about Mencken any more." "Scripps." "What's the trouble?" "Can I take the bird, Scripps?" "Sure, why not?" "Thank you, Scripps. Thank you for this bird. And now I must be going" "That bird she just took out," Mandy was saying. "Oh, did she take a bird out? Go on the story." "You used to wonder about what sort of bird that was." "That's right." (Hemingway 83-84). Author uses external focalization to show the dialogue of characters. Characters discuss the bird in this exchange. Diana wants to take the bird away because it holds great significance for both her and Scripps. When they first meet, they discuss about the bird with joy. One could consider the bird to be a symbol of love, but Scripps is now unresponsive to her plea and ignores the bird. He now gives Mandy his whole attention and is interested in hearing her stories. The conversation between Diana and Scripps makes up the first half of this exchange, while the conversation between Mandy and Scripps makes up the second. It goes without saying that two sections compare Scripps's treatment of Diana and Mandy. The latter is passionate, whilst the former is unconcerned. Diana is really upset and sad, and she tells Scripps in a low voice that she is unable to hold him. However, Mandy and Scripps speak contentedly and ignore Diana.

2.4. Integration of Three Types of Focalization

The *Torrents of Spring* gathers zero focalization, internal focalization and external focalization together. And author uses different focalizations to describe different things, and produces different narrative effects.

In order to convey Diana's thoughts and feelings, Hemingway interjects a psychological descriptive paragraph into the internal focalization. Diana's rage and anxiety are more palpable and immediate to us. Hemingway's use of external focalization will make it difficult for us to understand Diana's emotions. The entire novel will lose its color and significance if we only sense the narrator's feelings toward Mandy rather than Diana's.

In *The Torrents of Spring*, characterization is primarily achieved through the skillful interplay of three distinct types of focalization. This variable focalization allows readers to gain a clearer and more nuanced understanding of each character's temperament and personality, regardless of whether they are serving as the focalizer or the focalized. As readers, we are granted access not only to the protagonist's innermost thoughts through the use of internal focalization but also the ability to infer events from the perspectives of zero and external focalization. And it help readers understand the whole story well.

2.5. Narrative Manner in *The Torrents of Spring*

According to Genette's theory, repetition narrative is that "narrating n times what happened once." (Genette 113). And in this novel, the narrative pace is very slow because of repetition.

For example, If I can only hold him, she was thinking. If I can only hold him. ... I can not hold him. I can not hold him. I can not hold him. Scripps took her arm as they crossed the street. ... All she knew was that rhythm that beat her brain. I can't hold him. I can't hold him." (Hemingway 45-46). In these sentences, Hemingway employs the phrase "I can not hold him" to convey Diana's fear and anxiety, repeating it seven times as she confronts her emotional turmoil and desperately clings to the faint hope of retaining her husband's affection. Despite the repetition, it serves a purpose here, propelling the narrative forward and lending significant weight to the novel's conclusion, which sees the separation of the two main characters. The tragic figure of Diana, an average-looking, older woman burdened with emotion yet devoid of confidence, leaves a lasting impression on us.

Conclusion

Hemingway's artistic influence in the 20th century is indeed extensive and profound. The techniques he masterfully wields in his novels are a testament to his exceptional literary prowess.

By integrating close textual analysis with theoretical frameworks, the author of this paper aspires to shed new light on the fictional narrative and rejuvenate the appreciation for *The Torrents of Spring*. The author's examination and dissection of the novel primarily focus on three key elements: narrator, narrative focalization, and narrative manner. These techniques not only showcase his literary talents, but also provide the reader with a deep understanding of the characters' personalities and emotions, while also driving the novel forward and determining the tragic ending in which the two main characters are eventually separated. Through these narrative techniques, Hemingway successfully conveyed his satirical intent and had a profound impact on 20th century literature.

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