

Fragment to Panorama: A Cross-Analytical Study of History and Literature in "The Hive" by Cela

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Abstract: Camilo Jose Cela's "The Hive" is considered one of the important works of Spanish post-war literature because of its fragmentation and unique structure of group narrative. The existing research focuses on analyzing its criticism and reflection with the real society, and the comprehensive analysis of the narrative strategy, historical experience and collective memory of the work is not systematic enough. Based on the social context of post-war Spain, the author uses the theory of Genette's narrative, Ricoeur's "time and narrative" and cultural memory to conduct a comprehensive analysis of "The Hive", focusing on its nonlinear time structure, polyphonic narrative and fragmented writing. The author believes that the decentralized narrative structure of the center of the work and the details of mediocre daily life creates a historical expression that is completely different from the official view of history, so that the survival experience of the ordinary people can be seen in the narrative of history and literature, which is the presentation of the unique value of the work in the intertwining of history and literature.

Keywords: Postwar Spanish Literature; Fragmented Narrative; New Realism; Narratology; Collective Memory; Alternative Historiography

1. Introduction

The novel "The Hive" (*La colmena*) by Camilo José Cela (1916-2002), first published in Buenos Aires in 1951, is widely regarded as the beginning and representative work of post-war Spanish literature. The novel was completed in 1950, its publication in Spain was delayed until 1962 due to the stringent censorship apparatus of the Franco regime, forcing its initial release in Argentina. Set in Madrid during December 1943, the narrative unfolds over a compressed three-day timeframe yet encompasses a

sprawling cast of over 300 characters, with a deliberate focus on the urban middle and lower classes. The main setting of the novel is a coffee shop, which symbolizes a miniature social space where ordinary people experience daily conflicts and trivial life. Cela uses this to construct a multi-layered social picture, breaking through the concealment of the hardships of reality in the official narrative of the Franco regime. In terms of style, "The Hive" is classified as a New Realism work. This formal choice also corresponds to the broader transformation of European literature after the war, as people argue: literary Europe becomes polycentric and polygenetic, replacing older models of organic unity and continuity with those of diversity and discontinuity.[1] And Fuentes Ríos emphasized Cela's complex literary self-positioning and his function as a cultural mediator in post-war Spain[2]. Its unique portrayal of a large group of characters and fragmented structure give the novel both literary and historical significance. From a historical perspective, it truly presents the state of Spanish society after the end of the civil war, revealing the differences and circumstances between the victors and the losers in their daily lives, and reflecting the profound infiltration of Franco's regime ideology into the social structure. From a literary perspective, the work showcases the dual innovation of narrative in content and form through the organic combination of character portrayal, plot fragments, and spatial transitions. As Dru Dougherty has pointed out, in this novel literary fragmentation becomes the explicit analogue of social disintegration [3]. This approach not only touches upon sensitive topics at a moral level but also has aroused widespread responses in the public and academic circles.

Previous studies have mainly focused on the realistic tradition and social critical function of "The Hive", emphasizing its reproduction of post-war social reality and implicit criticism of authoritarian rule. However, these studies often overlook the complexity and originality of the

work at the narrative level. In other words, although "The Hive" is valued for its realistic characteristics, there is still a lack of systematic research on its fragmented narrative, multi-voice structure, and time handling. This article intends to use the narrative framework of Gérard Genette and Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between "time and narrative" to explore how "The Hive" reconstructs the historical experience of post-war Spain through unique narrative strategies, thereby demonstrating its unique value at the intersection of literature and history. In this context, it is worth noting that Literature plays a crucial role in the research field of Memory Studies [4].

2. Theoretical Framework

When discussing the narrative significance of "The Hive", this article introduces a multi-theory framework to avoid the common one-dimensional interpretation in traditional close reading. Specifically, the research will combine Gérard Genette's narrative theory paradigm, Paul Ricoeur's temporal narrative theory, White's historical narrative perspective, supplemented by cultural memory theory, to conduct a systematic analysis of the fragmented structure and New Realism writing of the novel. Firstly, Gérard Genette's narratology provides a methodological foundation for the examination of the internal structure of a text. His distinction of narrative time - sequence, duration, and frequency, as well as the division of narrative perspectives - zero focalization, internal focalization - help to reveal the non-linear time and multi-voiced structure characteristics in "The Hive". The events in the novel show a clear sense of "non-sequentiality", with the narrative threads constantly interrupted and reorganized, reflecting the fragmentation of post-war social experience; while at the frequency level, the repetitive narration of daily trivial matters reflects the overall survival predicament of society. Secondly, Paul Ricoeur's "Time and Narrative" theory emphasizes that narrative is a way for humans to organize experiences, and it can integrate scattered events into a meaningful whole. Memory is not passively preserved but actively shaped through narrative processes.[5] Although "The Hive" breaks the linear time in form, it achieves the reorganization of collective experience during the narrative process,

Narrative gives meaning to lived experience by configuring time,[6]and Recent academic research has further developed Ricoeur's description of narrative time by emphasizing the interrelationship between life time, memory and narrative configuration.[7]thereby indicating that literature is not an appendage of history but an important means of constructing and understanding historical experiences.

Furthermore, Hayden White's theory of historical narrative suggests that historical writing also relies on narrative structure and rhetorical strategies, historical representation is shaped by narrative choices rather than neutral facts, [8]thus having an isomorphism at the narrative level with literature. "The Hive" presents an "alternative history" that is different from official historiography through literary narrative. It is neither an objective record nor a fictional escape, but rather reveals the multiplicity and constructiveness of history through narration.

Finally, Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory enriches our understanding of "The Hive". In post-war Spanish society, there was collective trauma and memory loss, and the official narrative often selectively forgot. Literature, on the other hand, preserved the experiences of the lower classes through narration. The fragmentation and character portrayal in "The Hive" are the artistic expressions of cultural memory, and its cacophonous narrative strategy provides a unique textual medium for the construction of historical memory.

3. Analysis and Discussion

In Cela's works, there are many violent and pornographic chapters. According to a study: Cela's aggressive tendencies, in our opinion, will reappear several years later (compared to childhood and adolescence) through literary creation, and a character - Pascual Duarte - was shaped, who is the protagonist of Cela's first novel and thus has a psychological autobiographical nature.[9]

Childhood is the source of many poetic, dramatic and even philosophical elements in a writer's works.[10]Cela was born in Iria Flavia, a town in the Province of the Galicia Autonomous Region. His father was a customs officer. According to his family tree, many of his ancestors were highly respected in their respective fields, which is also reflected in the

creation of the fictional characters in his works. Due to his father's profession, Cela experienced numerous moves throughout his childhood: Barcelona, Madrid, London... The constantly changing environment shaped Cela's personality, making him intelligent and courageous enough to accept new ideas. Initially, his intentions were not firm, and his aspirations were changeable, which was also reflected in his choice of studies. To obtain a high school diploma, he transferred to four schools; during his university years, he changed from the medical school to the liberal arts college due to his interests, and later, following his father's request, he passed the customs examination. These years inspired the creation of "San Camillo", which was published in 1936. The material for this novel were all drawn from the history of these years. "Walking under the Vague Dawn. The Poem of Cruel Youth" was published in 1945, but the creation time of this poetry collection was from November 1st to November 10th, 1936. At that time, Spain was suffering from the pain of the civil war, and Cela remained in the capital controlled by the Republican side, this poetry collection expresses feelings, thoughts, doubts and considerations about the civil war. Regarding life after the war, Cela resumed his studies at the law school of the university, repeating his previous experiences, but without obtaining any certificates. Subsequently, he sought a job as a proofreader, during which he created works that brought him fame: "The Family of Pascual Duarte". This work was published in 1942 and, like a stone sinking into the sea, triggered a huge response, with unexpected effects. The development of the novel's content originated from "terrorism" (this was a kind of expression style created by Cela). The emergence of "terrorism" had its historical reasons, that is, this expression style emerged to reflect the reality of society using extreme language. Jeronimo Mallo defined terrorism as a literary genre, namely: "Novelistic stories about truly terrifying people, events and situations, sometimes due to their large scale, and sometimes due to the accumulation of terrifying elements, leaving a deep impression when read" (1956, p. 49). Mallo, J. (1956). The "Terrorism" Feature and Value in Spanish Fiction: "Terrorism" is the development process of Spanish traditional literature, which draws on the characteristics of satirical novels, the painting style of Francisco Goya, the absurd

novels of Valle-Inclán, etc. On this basis, it incorporates other features and eventually forms a completely new literary style. At that time, the most representative works of this type were Camilo José Cela's "The Family of Pascual Duarte" (1942) and Carmen Laforet-Díaz's "Nothing" (1944), the latter using realistic techniques and first-person narration to depict the situation in Barcelona after the Spanish Civil War, which was of great significance in reflecting the society at that time.

Since the 19th century, Spanish literature has begun to increase the amount of description of the daily lives of the lower classes based on realism. Writers of the 98 generation often focused their creative efforts on depicting and reflecting the lives of the common people. For instance, the works of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867–1928) centered on these themes.

The Spanish social novelist Pablo Gil Casado classified these writers as the "1940s generation": Camilo José Cela, Carmen Laforet, Juan Antonio de Zuñisueño. The works of these writers reflect the reality of society in the early post-war period, but they did not share the same fate, that is, they did not have a fixed pattern to develop a comprehensive consciousness.

In the field of literature, there are various viewpoints on describing "terrorism". Pablo Gil Casado believes that "beauty" was an aesthetic feature in the 1940s. They avoided the tragic and sorrowful reality through black humor, and readers felt both entertained and uneasy (The Spanish Social Novel). José García López described in his book "The History of Spanish Literature" that Cela not only adopted a single perspective, but also focused on satire and sadness, oscillating between simple distorted images and cruel satire. He always revealed the absurd nature of every thing.

His extensive social experiences provided him with a wealth of materials. He worked in various occupations: journalist, painter, stenographer, actor, mechanic, gangster, and even censor... He suffered the joys and sorrows of life, experienced the hardships of people at the bottom of society, and made friends with people from all walks of life.

Due to these changes, Cela contracted tuberculosis and had to suspend his work to rest. During this period, despite being severely afflicted by the disease, Cela still had the opportunity to acquire rich literary knowledge.

He studied and reflected on the works of relevant writers. José Ortega y Gasset's works deepened his understanding of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's thoughts...

After this period of time, he created a large number of works with a more mature ideological system, so it is not difficult to find the impact of tuberculosis in his works. In 1945, he began to write "The Hive", and at the same time, World War II ended. Around 1950, he completed the creation of "The Hive", but the work was difficult to publish due to the obstruction of the censorship system. Finally, he decided to publish the book in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This work is Cela's masterpiece. With the spread of "The Hive", Cela became the banner figure of Spanish literature during that period. The publication of this novel marks that the post-war novel has entered the stage of New Realism. On the other hand, it also shows that Cela's creation has entered a period of comprehensive prosperity. In 1982, Camilo José Cela's *Hive* was adapted into a film directed by Mario Camus García. This adaptation has achieved great success, is a model of literary film, and won the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival. The narrative text structure of "The Hive" determines that its adaptation into a film has an advantage over other books. As a model of literary translation, the adapted work not only respects the original work, but also has artistic freedom, but the complexity and length of "The Hive" make it impossible to achieve a complete and literal adaptation of the narrative work that revolutionized the post-war Spanish novel. The work has attracted attention for its innovative narrative skills similar to audio-visual language. Interestingly, a novel style defined by film terms, such as neorealism, reporting literature, objectivism, documentary style, etc., has become the most difficult problem in adapting Cela's important work into a film.

For Spanish critics, they have two distinct views on Cela. On the one hand, they think that Cela is a writer with sharp critical intentions about the times and society; on the other hand, they think that he is an aesthetic writer who is addicted to evasive and marginal interpretations of reality. Some people mix these two views together. The two complement each other. For example, "The Hive" and "The Family of Pascual Duarte". In addition, Cela did not adopt or praise Franco's ideology to promote local peace, and most of the

contents of these two novels reflected his negative comments and feelings about post-war Spanish society.

The author's way of thinking has always occupied the core of the structure of the work, and the fragments of the novel also reflect the writer's inner world.

According to his words: "Sometimes I think that literary works are by no means accidental, but for mysterious and inevitable reasons. [11] I must state that I believe there is no creation without a reason, no creation without an essential goal - whether it is an ethical, social, political, religious, moral, or even aesthetic goal - if a writer merely focuses on pure writing. [12] And the answer to the following question: "Do you think the author always writes autobiography to some extent?"

Cela replied, "To some extent, in a certain proportion, it is undoubtedly so. Full of nuances, distinctions and maturity, the author always writes the same work. However, a person does not fully identify with his role, but there is always one thing in common. Although in the mind of the novelist, the real novelist has the ability to divide, which is not in the mind of the reporter. The reporter only reflects every moment he sees.

His character and works make him a literary pioneer of the Generation of 1936. He is full of adventurous spirit. He has never stopped exploring writing methods and genres. He is open-minded and committed to the innovation and expansion of creation. His novels, as he said, contain a large number of references to personal experiences. His thoughts permeate the text and convey his emotional state through the medium of language. The title "The Hive" is like a metaphor, pointing to the society of the 1940s. It was a symbol of Spanish society in the 1940s. It reproduces the atmosphere of ordinary citizens' daily life. By the 1950s, the censorship system became more flexible and not as strict as before. Through the description of the pale, repetitive and boring life of ordinary citizens in the 1940s, Cela showed what happened in people's lives from the "an omniscient perspective". This is an innovation of the narrative style, revealing the problem with an objective attitude. The novel shows the powerlessness of citizens on the margins of society. They are marginalized and isolated by society. The leap of time and space and the power of expression makes "The Hive" shine in the literary field. This work has

triggered many comments, the most incisive of which comes from its author Cela.

He said, "My novel "The Hive", as the first part of the "Uncertain Road" series, is just a faint reflection of the rough, kind and painful reality in daily life, and its humble shadow. Those who try to cover up their lives with the crazy mask of literature are lying. The evil that corrupts the soul, the evil that can be crowned with countless names, cannot be countered with obedient cloth, rhetoric and poetic perfunctory. The original intention of this novel is nothing more than to tell a journey of life step by step, without concealment, without mixing with bizarre tragedies, without giving grace, just like life itself, whether we like it or not. Life exists inside or outside of us; we are just its carriers. [12]

He explained the concept of creating this book, the description of the problem, the negative state, and the criticism of society. These are all indispensable elements for the author. However, in the era of dictatorship, it is difficult to describe these criticisms in the face of most silent people. Therefore, it is very valuable to tell the truth in lies and resist the fear of challenging authority. From the point of view of writing method, structure and style, the story of the novel "The Hive" breaks the traditional order of narrating stories from beginning to end and adopts a decentralized narrative method. The story first unfolds around the cafe, and then extends to multiple plot lines. The events in these branch lines are accidental scenes, and the conception is relatively casual. There are not too many shocking events, and there is no complete storyline from beginning to end. However, when these branches are combined, they form the intersection of the narrative background. This plot is similar to the rhythm of other novels, but different from the logic and orderly development of the plot in traditional novels. It does not clearly divide the space of prologue, beginning, development, climax and end, but realizes the concentration and investment of time and space through the interweaving and expansion of a series of plots. Due to the large number of characters, the plot development is slow and multi-line parallel, which determines the slowness of time and the relative concentration of space in the plot development. Therefore, the space of the novel is limited to a neighborhood in Madrid, and its background and core intersection is Ms. Rosa's "cafe". The

time span of these events is limited to two and a half days. Due to the slowdown of time, the works are divided into the first afternoon, the first night, the next morning, the second afternoon, the second night and the next few days. Cela can calmly reproduce the story scene in many ways. In addition, in order not to make readers bored, Cela reverses the chronological order; he advances the climax according to the chronological order of the novel. According to the order of the story, the number of chapters of the novel should be Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 4, Chapter 6, Chapter 3, Chapter 5 and Chapter last. In terms of narrative, Cela is like an omniscient narrator, controlling the facial expressions, emotions and situations of the characters in the novel. The character's status, consciousness change, speech and behavior allow him to freely cut and combine fragments. This book is divided into 266 parts. That is to say, the different fragments of each character make up a chapter. The novel is structured through a series of brief scenes depicting the everyday life of numerous characters.[13] According to the order of this book, we can only understand the plot and content after reading all the chapters. As the title of the book "The Hive" shows, these chapters are intertwined like a beehive. Although there is not much direct connection, they are closely related to the background of the times and the core ideas. Cela did not intervene in the content of the novel. His views and anger were transformed into objective narratives. Therefore, when I read this novel, I could clearly feel depressed. Although it does not describe amazing events and the characters are ordinary, it captures the historical environment and the physiological and psychological state of the characters. It not only wants to tell the story of the characters, but also tries to reveal the atmosphere of that era. From the perspective of Gérard Genette's narrative, "The Hive" shows obvious "non-sequentiality" through frequent time switching and narrative omission. This fragmented narrative structure also shapes how experience is remembered.[14] And This temporal disruption reflects the separation between story time and discourse time.[15] There is no complete causal chain between events, but they are placed in changing daily scenes. This misalignment of narrative sequence reflects the chaos and uncertainty of post-war Spanish society.

At the same time, the narrative fragments and

polymorphic characteristics of the novel can also be associated with the construction of collective memory. In this sense, collective memory does not mean unified or identical memories, because as Astrid Erll pointed out: Collective remembering does not mean that all individuals have identical mental representations in their minds.[16] As pointed out by the theory of cultural memory, it is often difficult for society to form a unified narrative framework after experiencing great changes, and memory is more fragmented and partially preserved. The intertwined and unintegrated fragments in "The Hive" are the artistic portrayal of the post-war Spanish social reality. Through this narrative form, Cela not only reproduces the trivial details of social life, but also reveals the sense of rupture of historical experience.

Therefore, the fragmented narrative of "The Hive" is not a simple formal choice, but a deep response to post-war social memory and historical experience. Cela's reflections on literary genres reveal an unstable and resistant attitude toward fixed narrative forms.[17] This emphasis aligns with approaches to cultural memory that foreground social processes rather than individual self-narration.[18] By breaking the traditional plot pattern, it makes literature an important medium for understanding social trauma and historical rupture.

Many characters in this book can play the leading role, that is to say, there is no specific protagonist. There are only about 200 pages, but there are 346 characters. Everyone occupies an important position, and everyone is the protagonist. This is the proof of the originality of post-war literature. Cela showed the talent of controlling fragments, quoting content, and shaping characters... These characters have their own characteristics and are as vivid as us. In real life, everyone is independent, but there is a connection with others, thus forming complex social relationships: Cela builds character relationships according to this principle of realism. Existence and appearance are used to highlight the theme: meaningless life. Therefore, the narrative, development and the story of each protagonist are told in an objective manner without any critical color. Cela himself said in the book that this novel describes real life. To some extent, urban life is the sum of all the lives that are noisy in it. These lives are gray, ordinary, daily, and not too brilliant... "Hive" is a novel

without heroes, in which all the characters are immersed in their own insignificance like snails.[19] This is an excellent literary and historical work. During that period, the Spanish people suffered from the trauma of civil war, poverty and hunger. This is a commendable work, which not only refers to the originality of its content and structure, but also to its historical and humanistic value.

4. Conclusion

In summary, Cela's "The Hive" shows the multiple dimensions of post-war Spanish society through a fragmented narrative structure and a neo-realist style. Fragmented narrative not only formally breaks the traditional model of linear time and unified plot, but also deeply reveals the breakage and trauma of post-war social memory; and the group portrait description and detailed narrative of neorealism embed the grand history into the micro-picture of daily life, so that the experience of ordinary people can enter the calendar. The map of historical narrative.

At the theoretical level, Gérard Genette's narrative provides an analytical framework for understanding the non-order and frequency of novels. Ricoeur's "Time and Narrative" reveals how literature realizes the reorganization of historical experience through construction. White's historical narrative emphasizes the homomorphism of literature and history in narrative mechanisms, and the cultural memory theory. It further clarifies how the novel preserves and activates the collective memory of the post-war society. It is this interdisciplinary theoretical integration that makes "The Hive" not only a literary work, but also a kind of "alternative historical" writing.

Therefore, this article believes that the narrative significance of "The Hive" lies in breaking through the two divisions of traditional literature and history, and placing literature in the process of constructing historical memory. It not only reflects the social reality, but also transcends reality, and has become an important text for understanding the social psychology and cultural memory of Spain after the war. Future research can further expand the understanding of Cela's works in cross-media comparison, dialogue with other post-war literature, and a broader European historical context.

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