

Spatial Narration and Psychotherapy in Suspense Novels

—Taking "Shutter Island" as an Example

Shiqi Wang^{1,a,*}

¹Capital Normal University, Beijing, 100048, China

a. 13051898805@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: In the 21st century, suspense novels have evolved and authors increasingly explore narrative theory and techniques. This study analyzes the employment of narrative techniques in Dennis Lehane's "Shutter Island" by applying Lefebvre's space theory. This theory links space with social production, infused with Marxist concepts, imparting social attributes to space, transcending its conventional geometric definition. The research delves into three dimensions: spatial practice, spatial representation, and the space of representation to expound on how the spatial narration in the text mirrors the psychological transformations of the characters. Characters' memories within the spatial context influence their actions, generating a sequence of spatial clusters. The emergence of new spaces and imagery impacts character cognition. The three enigmatic symbols in the text encode the protagonist's memories, unravelled through dreams, constructing a novel textual space. It is within this multifaceted interplay that the treatment of 'mental illness' is addressed. This analysis demonstrates how narrative techniques intertwined with spatial theory serve as a compelling medium to portray intricate psychological facets in Lehane's "Shutter Island".

Keywords: Suspense Novels, "Shutter Island", Spatial Narration

1. Introduction

The narrative of "Shutter Island" unfolds in 1954 against the backdrop of the aftermath of World War II in 1948 [1]. The enduring and brutal conflict has left a multitude of soldiers afflicted with traumatic stress syndrome, rendering them physically and mentally debilitated, thus impeding their reintegration into society. Concurrently, a profound schism and conflict persisted within the psychiatric community, pitting the 'biological school' against the 'psychoanalytic school.' The former advocated for the institutionalization of psychiatric patients and the administration of high-dose medications, a practice that starkly reveals its inhumanity within the narrative. In this unique political and historical milieu, the prevailing atmosphere of horror and suspense in "Shutter Island" is further intensified, delving even deeper into the exploration of human psychological development, thereby piquing scholarly interest.

Overall, "Shutter Island" has garnered limited attention in both Chinese and English scholarly circles. Research predominantly gravitates towards the realms of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Notably, Shafira Azhari Salsabila conducts a psychoanalytic examination of Teddy's descent into madness [2], while Elfi Rahmi and Tomi Arianto scrutinize symptoms of schizophrenia [3].

Alexandra Katz extends this exploration by weaving schizophrenia into the fabric of social media and the broader societal system [4]. Another segment of scholarship situates "Shutter Island" within the context of Hollywood cinema, comparing it with other works, as exemplified by Jusup and Patrik's comparative analysis with "The Shining" [5]. In Chinese scholarship, attention has been given to the film's narrative techniques. Xueying Sheng, for instance, dissects the non-linear narrative structure and the 'anti-narrative' narrative techniques, with a particular focus on dream imagery and surgical symbolism [6]. Qian Liu delves into similar territory, albeit with a divergence in focus, as she overlooks the interplay between narrative techniques and the psychological evolution of characters, failing to analyze the underlying reasons for these transformations [7]. As a result, a critical gap exists in comprehending the correlation between spatial narrative and the novel's plot progression.

By employing Lefebvre's socio-spatial space theory, this study scrutinizes spatial practices, spatial representations, and spaces of representation within "Shutter Island". It elucidates the intricate interplay between spatial narrative and the psychological states of the characters by meticulously examining the actions of the protagonist, Teddy, the mechanisms through which power asserts itself on the island, and the distinctive imagery employed.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The theory of Lefebvre of social space

Henri Lefebvre's triadic dialectic of space presents a framework for understanding the intricate relationship between space and social practices. Within this framework, space is not just a static backdrop, but a dynamic entity that shapes and is shaped by historical and social structures.

Lefebvre's spatial triadic dialectic consists of three core categories. The first category is spatial practice, encompassing the everyday experiences of perceiving and utilizing space. It involves the production and reproduction of specific places in accordance with a particular mode of spatial production. The second category, representation of space, is constructed by bureaucrats and architects using symbols and codes, often manifesting in city plans. This representation is closely intertwined with relations of production, social practices, and the concept of 'order'. The final category, space of representation, pertains to the perception and imagination of space rooted in daily experiences, offering a potential for revolutionary change [8].

Lefebvre delves into the relationship between the power of the State and the production of space. The State employs space as a tool for the indirect exercise of power, shaping and transforming it to influence people. Simultaneously, individuals resist the State's spatial control through their differentiated daily lives, asserting their right to utilize space on their terms.

This ternary dialectic of space provides a valuable lens for analyzing Denis Lehane's novel. The story unfolds on a remote island in the sea, where a former post-war prison has been repurposed into an intensive psychiatric hospital. This institution plays a pivotal role in maintaining social order and eliminating destabilizing elements. The existence and structure of such prisons are deeply connected to the broader societal production practices.

Moreover, the isolation of this spatial setting intensifies its complexity, exacerbating pre-existing social issues. Thus, by applying Lefebvre's triadic dialectic of space, we gain insight into the power dynamics and relationships embedded in "Shutter Island"'s spatial style. We can explore how the characters in the narrative construct their personal living spaces through spatial practices, sparking a series of confrontations that ultimately lead to spiritual healing.

2.2. Spatial practices: the course of action of Teddy

As a federal law enforcement officer, Teddy's presence on Confinement Island sets the stage for a narrative in which the spaces he traverses and interacts with become integral components of the

unfolding investigation. Teddy's perceptions and experiences, as portrayed in the text, take on a role in shaping and reshaping the spatial dimensions. These manifestations of space give birth to an empirical realm endowed with its own distinct autonomy and mobility.

Furthermore, Teddy's evolving thoughts and deepening understanding continuously influence the routes and spaces he selects for exploration. In this dynamic process, he becomes engaged in a complex interplay with the structures of power and order that govern the island.

The entire narrative underscores the close connection between Teddy's actions and the expansion of his spatial domain, all rooted in his personal resolve. His initial arrival on the confinement island and his subsequent meetings with Dr. Cowley are driven by his pursuit of his wife's murderer, Andrew Laddies, and his quest to unravel the mystery of his missing patient, Rachel Solando. Teddy's inner journey leads him to venture into the island's depths, to the cemetery, in his quest to decipher the enigmatic messages within Solando's room and to verify the patient count in the sick bay. His determination to reach the fort and lighthouse springs from his conviction that Patient 67 is none other than Laddies himself, as he seeks closure and vengeance.

Crucial to understanding Teddy's motivations is his encounter within the caves, where Rachel Solando persuades him that the institution intends to subject him to permanent confinement and inhumane experiments. This encounter compels him to undertake the daring swim to the lighthouse and the subsequent conversation with Dr. Cowley, which ultimately shatters his perceptions. He comes to the startling realization that he is a schizophrenic with profound delusional tendencies, and that Rachel Solando is, in fact, his own wife, while he himself is Andrew Laddies, the perpetrator of his wife's murder. The entire narrative, as it turns out, is an intricate fabrication, a self-devised tale engineered by Teddy to escape the guilt of murdering his wife. Dr. Cowley masterminded this elaborate ruse, employing role-play as a therapeutic tool to aid Teddy in confronting the painful truth.

The sequence of events from Teddy's arrival at the harbor, his journey within the enclosure of the asylum, and his final destination at the fort and lighthouse all remain inextricably bound to Teddy's investigative pursuits and evolving cognition. Consequently, it is Teddy's personal agency and autonomy that serve as the driving forces behind the dynamic transformation of the island's spatial landscape.

2.3. Representations of space: mechanisms for the functioning of power on "Shutter Island"

The geographic layout and operational structure of "Shutter Island" closely resemble that of a prison. Here, patients find themselves subjected to extensive surveillance, long-term incarceration, and severe activity restrictions. The blueprint for this establishment was conceived by bureaucrats and designers who incorporated features like electrified barbed wire fences, centrally controlled confinement cells, and designated activity areas for group therapy. This meticulous design is essential for maintaining control, enforcing authority, and upholding the rules, thus profoundly influencing people's perception of the space and intensifying the novel's eerie atmosphere, while also alluding to the concealed conspiracies within the island's confines.

The historical backdrop of "Shutter Island" is explicitly elucidated within the novel. Isolated from the mainland, the island once served as a prisoner of war camp before being repurposed as a mental hospital. This history naturally draws associations between violence, incarceration, and the predicament of the patients. The asylum's physical location on the island's northwest side is further noteworthy. With the exception of the Superintendent and Chief Physician's residence, the facility is encircled by an extensive orange brick wall that spans the entire length of the island. This formidable barrier stands at a formidable ten feet in height and is topped with a formidable barbed wire fence. Even the hospital gates are guarded by prison personnel. Patients are not only housed in the standard AB section but also in the more secluded C section, which accommodates the most severe and perilous cases. This sector is situated at the remote end of the island, housed within an abandoned

fortress enclosed by a brick wall and barbed wire, vigilantly monitored by armed soldiers. Patients within the C section are subjected to additional restraints, including handcuffs and shackles.

Drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault's "Madness and Civilization," it is evident that the design of "Shutter Island", both in its geospatial layout and the mechanisms of power governing it, fuels Teddy's suspicions of hidden conspiracies on the forbidden island. As Foucault observed in his exploration of the "great confinement" of the seventeenth century, individuals, initially associated with madness and excess as symbols of freedom and progress, were repressed and incarcerated in the name of reason. This act of confinement served the purpose of defining societal norms and clearly demarcating the boundaries between the rational and the 'other.' Within the citadel of confinement, people were subjected to stringent moral and rational doctrines [9].

The sinister practices on "Shutter Island" further exemplify the depths of its clandestine operations. Patients are administered hallucinogenic substances and drugs to induce abnormal behavior, subjected to brainwashing to transform them into 'ghostly' murderers, or even used as unwilling subjects for medical experiments on their bodies.

2.4. Spaces of representation: dream texts and the use of imagery

Beneath the confines of this secluded island, lies a realm of privatized symbolic narratives, carefully crafted as spaces of representation, employing ciphers and dreams to evade the vigilant gaze of authority and logic. In a cryptic twist, the text alludes to Solando's departure, marked by the enigmatic presentation of three riddles. The first puzzle, the 'Law of Four,' the second, the peculiar spelling of 'Andrew Laddies,' and the third, an intricate solution to Teddy's identity predicament. These enigmatic riddles serve as condensed repositories, encoding a wealth of concealed information. Teddy, the tenacious federal law enforcement agent, embodies the deciphering process, persistently probing to unveil Solando's whereabouts. As he delves deeper into this process, the intricate layers of concealed truths begin to unfurl before him, concealed beneath the coded surface. Consequently, with each encounter of the code, Teddy experiences vivid dreams. According to Freudian theory, dreams materialize during the night when the censoring mechanisms of the mind temporarily relax, allowing concealed thoughts to surface. In this context, Teddy's dreams can be seen as a manifestation of the repressed information that he has been grappling with, gradually surfacing and taking form in his subconscious mind [10].

2.4.1. Riddles and Dreams

In the text, Teddy feels his brain stimulated after seeing the riddle about the law of 4, as if the brain is about to remember something, and just as about to do so, the memory disappears. By Teddy's state, it can be seen that the memories buried deep in the subconscious mind are about to be awakened by the symbolic mapping of the energetic fingers, but the defense mechanism in the brain after the great traumatic event prevents from recalling the whole thing. Dolores is the wife of Teddy. And later that night, Teddy has a dream about a soaked Dolores and sees several 'stakes' floating outside the window. Dolores mentions Rachel and the Law of Four, and suggests that both Rachel and Laddies are in the cottage they are in. In Teddy's story, Dolores dies in her flat off Sycamore Street, killed by the arsonist Laddies. In the dream, Dolores is in the cabin by the lake, soaked to the skin, and bleeding from her abdomen. From Dolores's hints, it can be seen that there are actually four people in the house: Rachel, Laddies, Dolores, and Teddy, which is the answer to the riddle "They are four", and the scene in the dream where Dolores is soaking wet and bleeding from her abdomen is the actual scene in which she kills her child by holding him down in the lake and asks her husband to shoot her. scene. These truths, because they are difficult to accept in real life, are disguised in Teddy's story, such as replacing the log cabin by the lake with a flat off Sycamore Street, and the wife being covered in

water with being burned to death by fire. Teddy deliberately avoids the fear of water by using elements that are the opposite of the way his wife died. These elements emerge in Teddy's dreams after the 'authoritative' self has receded, guided by the code.

The second code was discovered by Teddy standing on a black rock formation with his partner Chuck, who saw thirteen piles of rocks on the plain, the number of which made up a string of codes. The night he saw the code, the 'worst dream ever' occurred. In this dream, Rachel wields a machete and kills three children, suggesting that she could become his wife to ease his longing for her. In the episodes following this dream, Jim's (Rachel's husband) and Teddy's names are then used interchangeably, and Rachel's and Dolores's names are used interchangeably, and Teddy himself doesn't see a problem with this. For example, Teddy would say, 'My home is Rachel,' or Rachel would say, 'You'll be my Jim and I'll be your Dolores.' It can be seen that in this dream, Teddy has loosened up about Rachel and who he really is, and that he feels powerless and deeply remorseful for the failure to save the child from a machete-wielding Rachel. The code is cracked by Teddy at the end of the chapter, and the answer is 'Andrew Laddies,' which is the real name of Teddy. The dream, apart from its fragmentary mystical overtones, not only basically recreates the scene in which Dolores kills the three children but ultimately points to Teddy's schizophrenic nature and his attempts to cover up the truth with an intricately structured story, his inability to face up to the fact that he indirectly killed his wife because of long-lasting lack of care for her and failure to put the medication in the medicine cabinet, but also to the failure to save the three children and to the failure to save them. There is also guilt for not saving three children and handing them over to his wife. The code about 'Laddies' points to Teddy's own inner world, in which he transfers this great unbearable helplessness, fear, pain, and self-blame to Laddies as a way to escape from the moral accusation and to fulfill revenge on the murderer of his wife.

The third string of ciphers is the one Teddy sees on the plain after crossing the promontory, the same heap of stones piled up to form '13(M)-21(U)-25(Y)-18(R)-1(A)-5(E)-8(H)-15(O)-9(I)'. In this section of the dream, Teddy dreamed that Laddies had wild sex first with Dolores, who had sex with Rachel, and after this, Rachel had sex with Laddies, who placed his hand on the opening of his wife's abdomen, entered through the abdomen, and pushed the wood off the table. The presence of the sex scene in the dream suggests that Teddy is betting Libido on Dolores and Rachel. The cipher is the jumbled 'He is him,' which directly identifies Teddy as Andrew Laddies. As loves the wife so much that he has to forgive for killing three children, this situation shows that he has over-bet Libido on the object wife, and in the process of betting, is exhausted, and by the fact that is Laddies, feels the crisis of survival and trust, which creates the anxiety of love and death, causing such a dream.

The Law of 4 is the structure of the symbols of the whole story, and the story starts from this riddle and continues to develop downwards according to it. The riddle of the two piles of stones, on the other hand, reveals the problem of Teddy's identity, constantly linking up subconscious memories and emotions through the true identity of patient 67, Laddies, and the relationship with Laddies. The three riddles codify and construct a conceptualized space through symbols and continuously produce text when decoded, and Teddy's dreams make the embodiment of the text.

2.4.2. Spatial imagery

The spatial imagery in "Shutter Island" has been carefully considered and properly organized by the author. By making different imagery appear repeatedly in the road map of Teddy's actions and giving them new connotations, the author allows readers to grasp the spatial imagery and the subtle changes in his inner depths while reading, thus forming a hidden narrative thread.

In the text, the hospital, the lighthouse, and the fort, surrounded by high walls and barbed wire and guarded by soldiers with guns, are symbols of surveillance and control in the text. Separated from them are vast tracts of untouched, unexplored wilderness. For example, the wilderness, cliffs,

cemeteries, and woods are often difficult to walk on and are rarely visited, symbolizing nature and secrecy. In this book, the cliffs and headlands can be described as a defense mechanism, a barrier of repression after being bound by self-morality. Before discovering the first set of ciphers, they find piles of rocks about half a mile from the sea. They go over wet cliffs, and they get covered in mud as they climb. Before meeting the second set of ciphers, they similarly crossed a narrow headland and met an almost vertical rock face. It can be seen that the space here characterizes a deeper penetration from the conscious mind to the subconscious mind, where the exploration of unprocessed memories and information is hampered by censorship mechanisms, making it difficult for people to go deeper inside and explore their underlying memories and feelings.

Another important spatial imagery in the text is the woods. The woods can likewise be seen as the hidden subconscious as well as a place for the preservation of repressed emotions and memories. For example, here, disappearing behind the trees, a conical tower can be discerned, and the jutting edges of the building can be vaguely seen. And again, At this point they reached a small plateau surrounded by tall trees that held back some of the rain. And then they travelled further and further, and deeper into the woods they found the graveyard of Forbidden Island, where, in a dream, Teddy found his own grave: 'Edward Daniels, lousy sailor, 1920-1975.' The 'bad sailor' in this grave refers to the fact that he did not get his children out in time when his wife pushed them into the water, and thus could not escape the condemnation of his conscience. The motivating force of the dream is provided by the subconscious mind, the system of subconsciousness that is the starting point of dream formation, and the process of the hero's travelling through the woods, going deeper and deeper into the woods, and eventually finding the grave, is also the process of the subconscious motivation of mind, the process of perceptions and traces of memories being facilitated by the subconscious mind's efforts to enter the preconscious mind, and eventually reach the conscious mind, which begins to loosen his trust in the story, and eventually facilitates his self-awareness.

3. Conclusion

The culmination of this analysis reveals the intricate interplay between the author's spatial practices, the representations of space, and the spatial dimension of the character's own mental landscape. These elements synergistically influence the protagonist's thoughts and actions throughout the narrative, creating a symbiotic relationship that underscores the profound impact of spatial dynamics on the unfolding of the story. The character's identity and background serve as catalysts for the formation of a sequence of behaviors. As he embarks on the exploration of the forbidden island, a cascade of new spaces within the novel's universe gradually emerges. These spatial transformations, in turn, mold the character's perception of the forbidden island. The eerie and perilous ambiance surrounding the graves, caves, and cliffs fosters an association with conspiracy theories, deepening the intrigue. Beyond the narrative's progression, there exists another thread concealed within the textual fabric—a series of implicit codes. These codes weave together to construct a dreamlike realm that incessantly guides Teddy in his relentless pursuit of the truth. The recurring imagery in this dream space concurrently functions as a symbolic representation of Teddy's inner emotional journey, mirroring his evolving psyche. By scrutinizing the textual shifts in space and their underlying rationales, as well as delving into the symbolism inherent in the imagery, we gain a more profound comprehension of the text's spatial narrative style. This, in turn, enables a deeper exploration of the central theme of the work. This research employs a methodology suited to the unique nature of 'non-linear narrative' texts, enhancing our insight into the protagonist's psychological metamorphosis and the overarching dynamics of the narrative's development. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. It does not comprehensively address the imagery in "The Island of Confinement" or delve extensively into the historical backdrop and the mechanisms of power at play within the novel. Thus, there remains ample room for continued analysis and exploration in these areas.

References

- [1] Lehane, D. (2003). *The "Shutter Island"*. Great Britain: Bantam Press.
- [2] Salsabila, S. A. (2019). *Andrew's Schizophrenia in "Shutter Island" by Dennis Lehane*. Sunan Ampel Surabaya University.
- [3] Rahmi, E., & Arianto, T. (2019). *Schizophrenia Symptoms Acute in Teddy Alias Andrew in the "Shutter Island" Novel by Dennis Lehane*. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris*.
- [4] Katz, A. (2019). *Mental Illness in The Media: How Narrow Portrayals Invoke a System of Stigmatization*. Emory University.
- [5] Jusup, P. (2021). *Isolation and Insanity in Stephen King's The Shining and Dennis Lehane's "Shutter Island"*. *FFOS-repozitorij*.
- [6] Sheng, X. (2017). *The Narrative Structure and Symbolic Implications of "Shutter Island"*. *Movie Literature*.
- [7] Liu, Q. (2016). *A Brief Analysis of the Narrative Features of "Shutter Island"*. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*.
- [8] Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- [9] Foucault, M. (2019). *Madness and Civilization: The Crazy History of the Rational Era*. Joint Publishing.
- [10] Freud. (1984). *Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. Commercial Press.