

Research on the Space Construction of the Novel *Ready Player One*

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The novel *Ready Player One* shows Ernest Cline's ability of space construction, and demonstrates charm and artistic value of the virtual fantasy space it depicts. It is a science fiction with perfect combination of ideological content and artistic form. This thesis aims to discuss the Ernest Cline's construction of the virtual space and the real space in *Ready Player One* and the function of their construction. In real space, the environment is awful and dilapidated, and people's lives are depressed. While in the virtual space, the world is colorful and people have varied ways of entertainment to fulfill their mind. This Thesis summarizes the effects brought by both the real space and virtual space for *Ready Player One*. With such a strong contrast, the conflict between the two spaces promotes the narrative process and also highlights the theme of the novel.

Keywords: Ernest Cline, *Ready Player One*, space construction, science fiction

Introduction

Ernest Cline and *Ready Player One*

Ernest Cline is an American novelist and screenwriter. He is the author of the novels *Ready Player One*. Once his works were published, they won the love of foreign teenagers. After the success of the novel, Ernest Cline also worked with Steven Spielberg to adapt his novel into a film. The main story was set in 2045. The real world on the verge of chaos and collapse was disappointing. People pinned their hope on "OASIS"—a virtual game universe created by the genius James Halliday. As long as people wear VR devices, they can enter this virtual world, which forms a strong contrast with reality. In this world, there are bustling cities, different and glamorous players, and classic characters in video games of different dimensions can also gather here. Even if you are a loser struggling in society in reality, you can still become a superhero in "OASIS". On his deathbed, Halliday announced that he would leave the ownership of the huge property and the "OASIS" to the first person who broke through three riddles and found out all the hidden Easter Eggs in the game. The announcement has triggered a worldwide competition since then.

Literature Review

The novel *Ready Player One* was released in 2011. As an entertaining novel, it is widely loved by geeks and video game fans. In 2012, the book received an Alex Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association and won the 2012 Prometheus Award. *Ready Player One* made Ernest Cline famous after it was

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adapted into a movie. Before the release of the movie in 2018, there have already been many scholars abroad who studied the novel. After the huge success of the movie, this wave of novel research reached a climax.

The research of foreign scholars on this novel *Ready Player One* can be roughly divided into the following categories:

A large number of scholars have paid attention to the virtual reality world “Oasis” created and described by the author in *Ready Player One*. Justin Nordstrom discusses the virtual world “OASIS” and the novel’s main theme in combination with Bernard Suits’s philosophical method of defining games and utopia (Nordstrom, 2011, p. 238). Andrew Monteith put forward new views in his analysis. He thinks that Cline’s imagined cyberworld immerses users into an alternative kind of space and allows them to inhabit bodies of their own choosing; this represents a kind of transhumanist, utopian impulse. At the same time, the novel questions whether the relationship between people in the created world has real meanings (Monteith, 2011, p. 1).

Dr. Indrajit Patra, in his thesis, used Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation theory to analyze how the difference between the virtual world “OASIS” and the real world disappeared in *Ready Player One* and *Ready Player Two* (Patra, 1658). Anelise Farris’s thesis used the same theory to explore the differences between the identities of the three main characters in the virtual world “OASIS” and those in real life (Farris, 2011, p. 214). Zanida Rihadasari used a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the protagonist Wade’s shift to the virtual world as a form of logging away, which results in his identity change (Rihadasari, 2020).

Many popular cultures appeared in *Ready Player One* also attract most scholars to do research. Rareș Moldovan put forward the concept “Geektopia” and focused on the image of “geek” in popular culture mentioned in *Ready Player One* (Moldovan, 2011, p. 242).

To sum up, the research on Ernest Cline’s novel *Ready Player One* abroad has already reached a large scale and covers many aspects.

Compared with the numerous and varied studies and the fruitful results abroad, the novel *Ready Player One* has encountered a very embarrassing situation in the domestic academic research fields. It was after Ernest Cline, as a screenwriter, cooperated with Steven Spielberg, the director, to adapt the novel and make it into a movie, which was released in China in 2018, *Ready Player One* has started to attract wide attention. However, even though the film became popular in China and made great box office achievements, his original novel still did not catch widespread attention. Domestic scholars, such as Jiang Dongsheng, Zhang Shuang and so on, have all discussed with the film as the main subject of their analysis. In summary, it can be seen that scholars in China have not attached importance to the study of the original novel *Ready Player One*. The film may well present the visual effects that cannot be described by the novel, but the film also has the adaptation and deletion of some plots in novel. Therefore, it is meaningful and valuable to do research on the novel *Ready Player One*.

Forms of Space Construction in *Ready Player One*

The novel *Ready Player One* describes the two spaces, one is the dilapidated real world and the other is fantastic virtual world, which form the opposite. These two spaces form the opposite visual image, highlighting the contrast between the rapid development of technology in the future and the low level of human life, as well as the current situation of the technology leads and controls human life.

Cruel Real Space

The background of the novel *Ready Player One* is set in 2045, when the world is on the verge of collapse. The real space is dilapidated and decadent. The stacks are the slum in the novel, and also the place where the protagonist Wade and his aunt live.

We live in the Portland Avenue Stacks, a sprawling hive of discolored tin shoeboxes rusting on the shores of I-40, just west of Oklahoma City's decaying skyscraper core... The dark, narrow strips of ground between the stacks were clogged with the skeletons of abandoned cars and trucks, their gas tanks emptied and their exit routes blocked off long ago. (Cline, 2011, p. 34)

Almost all the stacks are arranged longitudinally. Each small house is placed on each floor of the huge network of recycled pipes, girders and footbridges, and the houses are precarious on it. "Stack collapses weren't that uncommon" (Cline, 2011, p. 35). We can see that the living environment described in the novel is very awful. The protagonist Wade is a child whose parents are both dead. He lives with his aunt and is bullied by his aunt and aunt's boyfriend. Due to the unhappiness in the real world, Wade immersed himself in the virtual world "OASIS" all day long. But he could only find a shelter in a pile of abandoned cars and enter his own game world. Stacks are the epitome of the decadent world. In order to escape the cruel real world, people can only enter the virtual game to find the goal and spiritual happiness.

As the plot moves forward, the villain IOI in the novel wants to plunder the control of the "OASIS" to seek benefits, and does not hesitate to investigate and kill the innocent people around Wade in the real world. When Wade saw his relatives and friends being killed, he began to notice the cruelty of reality. He no longer indulged in virtual happiness. He began to make up his mind to fight against the greedy villain. Wade also felt the positive side of real life in the process of fighting against the villains. He established trust and emotional ties with his friends to help him out of difficulties and overcome the cruel reality.

Pleasant Virtual Space

The story of the novel *Ready Player One* is set in the middle 20th century, when VR technology was highly developed and the software development system was constantly improved. Ernest Cline created a virtual game world "OASIS" which can be entered through VR devices in his novel.

Luckily, I had access to the OASIS, which was like having an escape hatch into a better reality. The OASIS kept me sane. It was my playground and my preschool, a magical place where anything was possible. (Cline, 2011, p. 31)

"OASIS" is regarded as a spiritual refuge, and people can achieve everything they want in this virtual world. "OASIS" is a utopia built by Halliday. Wade, the protagonist, lives an awful life in real world. When he logs in "OASIS", he turns into a tall and handsome character—Percival, escaping from the real life and enjoys an unprecedented sense of achievement. Virtual space makes up for Wade's lack of happiness in real life, and also establishes a new interpersonal relationship for him. After Wade solved the puzzle of the first Easter Egg left by Halliday, he became the number one player on the list and became a hero sought after by everyone.

But "OASIS" is not all that wonderful. Everything in "OASIS" is also related to reality. Many people born in slums gamble on everything to make money in the "OASIS" which is like a fishing net, controlling these people. Some people will lose everything in the "OASIS" and choose to commit suicide in reality. People are deeply attracted by the colorful virtual world and give up real life: the mother who indulges in the "OASIS"

and has no time to take care of children; A man who invests all the money he plans to spend on buying a house into buying game equipment. People are immersed in the fascinating virtual world and seem to have completely abandoned the real-world life.

Effects of Space Construction

Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One*, as a combination of technology and literature, also plays an important role in the prosperity and development of science fiction. Ernest Cline, as a writer with a strict attitude towards science and technology, the sci-fi space he constructed in his works not only shows his expectations of future science and technology, but also plays an important role in promoting the narrative process of the novel and presenting the theme to readers.

To Promote the Development of Story

Sc-fi space plays a narrative role as the place and scene of the story. The real and virtual space constructed by Ernest Cline is the place where the story takes place. Space is the geographical environment background of characters' behaviors and stories. The basic function of these two spaces constructed by Cline is to provide a physical area for narration.

The virtual space "OASIS" is the main scene of the story in this novel. Cline describes the virtual space of "OASIS" as the living space used by adults to escape from the real space. "You could log in and instantly escape the drudgery of your day-to-day life" (Cline, 2011, p. 80). However, the greed and atrocities of the villain IOI threaten the people who live in this space. Wade, the protagonist, while collecting Easter Eggs in the virtual space to break the plot of IOI, evades the pursuit of IOI's employees in the real world. From the beginning, only virtual space was used as the main stage. With the development of the story, the protagonist shuttles between reality and virtual, which made the two spaces indispensable for the main content of the novel.

The narrative process of the novel has been developing with the improvement of Cline's space construction, forming the cause, process, climax and ending of the story. The construction of space plays an important narrative role in the process of the plot of *Ready Player One*, making the work full of reality and fantasy.

To Emphasize the Theme of the Novel

In *Ready Player One*, Ernest Cline constructed two forms of space—real space and virtual space. The interaction and conflict between these two spaces portrays the relationship between human beings and the rapid development of science and technology in the future.

There is a strong contrast between the real world and the virtual world constructed by the novel—the broken and chaotic real world and the wonderful and colorful virtual world. Faced with the huge gap between rich and poor and the decline of the economy, people have indulged in virtual games and abandoned real life. There is such a sentence at the beginning of the novel: "Being human totally sucks most of the time. Videogames are the only thing that make life bearable" (Cline, 2011, p. 23). They regard the virtual world as the supplement to support their spiritual world. People seem to prefer to degenerate into nihilism rather than face up to the dilemma of reality. This contrast deeply satirizes that human beings place their emotions on the technology they created, and are ultimately enslaved by it and lose themselves.

Although the characters in the novel constantly shuttle between virtual and reality, Ernest Cline has always made a very clear distinction between reality and virtual in the novel. The real world in *Ready Player One* is lifeless and depressing, which is in sharp contrast to the prosperity and carnival of the virtual world. But no matter how brave and bold people are in the virtual world, they will eventually return to normal in reality. At the end of the novel, Halliday teaches people who addicted to the virtual world “OASIS” to live a life in the real world, because “reality is the only real thing”. Ernest Cline made a profound reflection on the relationship between human beings and technology in the form of prophecy. The novel is warning people not to be enslaved by technology. When people are disappointed with the real world, they will hide in the “OASIS” and can completely ignore everything that happens in reality in the novel. In the world created by science and technology, human beings are being controlled by science and technology step by step and become the puppet of it.

Conclusion

This paper takes the novel *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, a science fiction novelist, as the research object, and takes its space construction as the starting point. Through grasping the forms of space construction in the novel, the thesis explores the effects of space construction for this text. Different forms of space construction have important effects on pushing the storyline and presenting the theme. In promoting the development of the plot, the author sets events and difficulties in both spaces to make the character shuttle back and forth between the real world and the virtual world to unfold the story. While in the presentation of the theme, the author mainly used the huge distinction and conflict between the real world and virtual world to discuss the relationship between science and human in the future. The development of VR technology has brought convenience in life and spiritual dependence to human beings, but it has also made people addicted to it. People's escape from real life has also made them become the “slave” of technology.

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