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VOICES AND FOG: NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE AND FRAGMENTED MEMORY IN *UN PIANISTA ENTRE LA NIEBLA*

Voces y niebla: arquitectura narrativa y memoria fragmentada en Un pianista entre la niebla

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Abstract

This article presents a contemporary reading of *Un pianista entre la niebla* (2016) by Raúl Serrano Sánchez to examine how the novel interweaves memory, affect, and perception within an unstable narrative framework. The discussion draws on postclassical narratology, memory studies, and affective and cognitive approaches to narrative (Fludernik; Caracciolo and Kukkonen; Meretoja; Landsberg; Hutton; recent neurocognitive research). The analysis reveals that fragmentation, temporal disruption, and enunciative instability shape a narrative experience driven by embodied perception, affective persistence, and sensory residues. Figures such as Purificación and Mademoiselle Satán function as affective surfaces that activate grief, desire, and evocation. Fog operates as both a perceptual regime and a structuring principle, shaping the dynamics of memory. The novel frames memory as a non-subsumptive narrative practice and advances a poetics of instability that turns narration into an aesthetic exploration of fractured consciousness.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una lectura contemporánea de *Un pianista entre la niebla* (2016), de Raúl Serrano Sánchez, para examinar cómo la novela articula memoria, afecto y percepción en un régimen narrativo inestable. El análisis se basa en narratología postclásica, estudios de la memoria y enfoques afectivos y cognitivos (Fludernik; Caracciolo y Kukkonen; Meretoja; Landsberg; Hutton; investigaciones neurocognitivas recientes). Se observa que la fragmentación, la dislocación temporal y la inestabilidad enunciativa configuran una experiencia narrativa sostenida por percepciones encarnadas, emociones persistentes y restos sensoriales. Figuras como Purificación y Mademoiselle Satán funcionan como superficies afectivas que activan duelo, deseo y evocación. La niebla opera como régimen perceptual y principio estructurante que modela el proceso de memoria. La novela dramatiza la memoria como práctica narrativa no-subsumptiva y despliega una poética de la inestabilidad que convierte la narración en experiencia estética de una conciencia fragmentada.

Keywords

Postclassical narratology, affective memory, experientiality, poetics of instability, Ecuadorian literature.

Palabras clave

Narratología postclásica, memoria afectiva, experientialidad, poética de la inestabilidad, Literatura ecuatoriana.

1.

Introduction

Un pianista entre la niebla (2016), by Raúl Serrano Sánchez, proposes an aesthetic of memory grounded in persistent losses, discontinuous evocations, and desires that return as partial images. The narration adopts an introspective register in which the affective dimension of the past conditions the protagonist's gaze and shapes his experience of the present. The voice develops through an elegiac tone that combines emotional density with atmospheres bordering on the oneiric, elements that enable the exploration of the vulnerability sustaining the narrator's subjectivity.

The novel is situated within an authorial trajectory marked by formal experimentation and a sustained interest in the thresholds between perception, memory, and affect. Works such as *Las mujeres están locas por mí* (1997), *Catálogo de ilusiones* (2010), and *Lo que ayer parecía nuestro* (2015) form a poetics centered on interiority, sensory ambiguity, and the subtle affective modulations that organize consciousness. *Un pianista bajo la niebla*, deepens these procedures and directs them toward a space where memory acquires materiality and moves through impulses, detours, and fragments that drag the narrator into zones of emotional instability.

Early critical responses emphasized the symbolic force of fragmentation, the unsettling atmosphere, and the way the narrative voice incorporates affective modulations that persist even when referential clarity weakens. Building on these insights, the present study examines how the novel converts these tensions—persistent grief, female presences that radiate emotional intensity, and

an urban environment filtered through altered perception—into narrative mechanisms that sustain its internal poetics.

Understanding this initial configuration—an exposed consciousness shaped by an ambiguously defined space and by presences that intervene in the construction of memory—allows us to delineate the perceptual regime that orients the narrative and sets the stage for a closer examination of the novel's formal procedures. To pursue this line of inquiry, the study now turns to a conceptual framework that accounts for the text's enunciative instability and affective density. The following section outlines the narratological, cognitive, and memory-based approaches that guide the analysis.

1.1 Literature Review

Critical approaches to *Un pianista entre la niebla* remains limited and largely exploratory. The few existing readings approach the novel primarily through its emotional tonality and thematic concerns rather than through sustained narratological analysis. Báez Meza (2018) and Carrión (2019) emphasize the text's atmosphere of loss and its engagement with grief and desire, underscoring how memory emerges through evocative images rather than through plot-driven development. These studies highlight the novel's reliance on suggestive imagery and emotional resonance to convey the instability of remembrance, but they stop short of examining the formal mechanisms that structure this experiential effect.

More broadly, scholarship on contemporary Latin American narrative provides practical frameworks for understanding the novel's poetics of instability. Studies of fragmentary and affect-driven writing highlight the prevalence of introspective voices, atmospheric ambiguity, and the dissolution of linear temporality. Within this critical landscape, *Un pianista entre la niebla* aligns with a storytelling mode that foregrounds the embodied dimensions of perception and the vulnerability of the narrative voice.

Postclassical narratology offers additional tools for interpreting the novel's formal mechanisms. Fludernik's concept of experientiality (1996) underscores the centrality of perceptual and affective experience in generating narrativity. This premise resonates with Landero's shifting consciousness and the prominence of sensory images in the text. Caracciolo's more recent work on embodied cognition (2021) extends this framework by demonstrating how narrative meaning arises from the interplay between bodily perception and affective response. This interaction shapes the protagonist's attempts to reconstruct a past that resists coherence.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Critical approaches to *Un pianista entre la niebla* remain scarce. However, the few existing commentaries converge on the novel's affective atmosphere, its fragmentary narrative structure, and its exploration of memory as an unstable experiential process (Báez Meza, 2018; Carrión, 2019). These readings underscore how Serrano Sánchez constructs a world governed by sensory impressions, emotional residues, and perceptual fluctuations rather than by plot-centered causality. To examine these dynamics, the present study draws on postclassical narratology, cognitive approaches to narrative, and contemporary memory studies.

Monika Fludernik's (1996) concept of experientiality provides a central axis for this framework. For Fludernik, narrativity emerges through "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" and through "experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature" (pp. 13, 26). This model clarifies how the novel organizes its narrative movement: meaning arises from perceptual modulations, affective intensities, and embodied impressions even when linear chronology dissolves.

Unnatural narratology further illuminates the novel's resistance to conventional mimetic expectations. Brian Richardson notes that many contemporary fictions depart from "naturalized models of representation" (2015, p. 7), a tendency that aligns with the novel's coexistence of

confessional, epistolary, visionary, and delirious registers. These heterogeneous modes do not signal structural inconsistency; they generate a polyphonic field in which competing perspectives and shifting enunciative positions shape memory.

Memory studies refine this interpretive model. Hanna Meretoja's theory of non-subsumptive memory proposes a mode of remembering that resists totalizing closure and preserves the opacity of the past (2021). This perspective resonates with the novel's refusal to clarify Purificación's fate and with its investment in ambiguity as an ethical dimension of recollection. Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory (2004) also proves helpful, highlighting the role of mediated, affectively charged images in shaping mnemonic experience—an idea that aligns with the novel's dense visual fragments, fog imagery, and sensory distortions.

Research on perspectival memory further nuances this framework. Chris McCarroll (2019) distinguishes between remembering "from the inside" and "from the outside," a distinction that helps describe Landero's oscillation between interiorized experience and externally imposed interpretation—particularly in scenes involving the doctor, the priest, or the journalist.

The affective-cognitive turn in narratology offers additional insight. Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen argue that narrative meaning emerges "at the intersection of consciousness, corporeality, and world-building" (2021, p. 14). Their formulation clarifies how the novel inscribes memory in bodily gestures, sensory residues, and emotional textures that anchor the narrator's subjective experience. Complementarily, Patrick Hogan and Bradley Irish expand the discussion of how emotions and cognitive processes shape narrative structures, especially in contexts permeated by grief, longing, or anxiety.

Finally, Hayes and Gilbert's reflections on the autonomous life of images (2020) help explain how visual elements—such as fog, silhouettes, and partial bodies—function not as passive illustrations but as affective agents that recalibrate the narrator's internal orientation and generate memory from within the perceptual field.

Together, these approaches outline a conceptual framework capable of describing the novel's central narrative mechanisms: enunciative dislocation, polyphony, fragmentary temporalities, and the embodiment of memory as an affectively charged process. They clarify how *Un pianista entre la niebla* transforms grief, desire, and perceptual instability into formal operations that define its poetics of recollection.

2.

Methodology

This study adopts a contemporary narratological approach to examine how *Un pianista entre la niebla* constructs memory through perceptual, affective, and enunciative operations rather than through mimetic reconstruction. The analysis proceeds through a close reading of the novel, attending to the interaction between experientiality, affective memory, and embodied perception, while integrating insights from postclassical narratology, cognitive narrative theory, and recent memory studies. Textual citations were selected based on their relevance to the novel's poetics of recollection—passages in which voice, atmosphere, and perceptual instability materialize narrative procedures that shape Landero's consciousness. The analytic procedure consists of identifying the novel's key formal devices (shifts in voice, polyphonic pressures, spatial ambiguity, recurrent fog imagery, and the affective function of female figures) and connecting them to the theoretical concepts outlined in the previous section. All English renderings of the Spanish quotations from Serrano Sánchez's novel are my own translations.

2.1. Plot Summary

Un pianista entre la niebla follows Landero, a man living under undefined supervision, as he attempts to reconstruct his past through notes, recollections, and a shifting constellation of voices. Purificación's absence—rooted in an unresolved and emotionally charged bond—activates memories marked by guilt, desire, and disorientation. In parallel, Mademoiselle Satán introduces a darker perceptual current associated with the city's liminal spaces. Other voices—Grass, Nerón, Father Zamper, and a journalist—intervene by commenting on, reframing, or questioning Landero's testimony. These interferences reveal an institutional environment that mediates the narrator's experience and complicates any stable account of what occurred. The storyline advances through discontinuous episodes, confessions, letters, interviews, and sensory impressions, producing a narrative that resists linear reconstruction and foregrounds the instability of memory.

3.

Results

3.1 Fragmented Architecture: Form, Rhythm, and Discontinuity

The narrative architecture of *Un pianista entre la niebla* is built upon a poetics of disruption. Rather than organizing memory through chronological reconstruction, the novel privileges a mode of perception governed by partial images, sudden intensities, and temporal fissures that fracture the continuity of experience. Fragmentation is not a stylistic ornament; it constitutes the fundamental principle through which Landero's consciousness becomes legible. The reader encounters a voice

that moves in uneven pulses—slowing down as an image gains emotional weight, accelerating when a recollection intrudes, and interrupting itself whenever the past returns through unexpected sensory cues.

This discontinuous rhythm emerges from the affective pressure that memory exerts on the narrator. Images do not simply appear; they impose themselves, altering the narrative tempo and generating oscillations among introspection, sensory immediacy, and reflective distance. The novel transforms each recollection into a minor fracture in the narrative surface, making visible the tension between the desire to understand and the past's resistance to being organized. The effect is a dynamic interplay between opacity and revelation: flashes of insight coexist with shadows that cannot be dispelled.

Temporal structure reinforces this instability. The novel shifts fluidly between moments without relying on explicit transitions, allowing recollection to follow the associative logic of affect rather than the order of events. Memories erupt like pockets of compressed time, interrupting the present and folding it into other experiential layers. These temporal ruptures create a multidirectional sense of duration in which the past is neither distant nor fully present; it circulates as a force that reshapes the narrator's perception and destabilizes the boundaries of his identity.

The spatial dimension mirrors this temporal uncertainty. Interiors, streets, and urban contours emerge through fluctuating densities of light, texture, and atmosphere, reflecting the narrator's emotional and perceptual state. Spaces possess no fixed outlines; they are filtered through impulses and sensations that determine their visibility. The built environment becomes an extension of Landero's affective instability, serving as a stage on which memory generates distortions, intensifies specific details, and erodes others.

Within this framework, the novel cultivates a syntactic and rhythmic variability that reinforces its fragmentary design. Short sentences condense affective shocks; extended phrases enact the drift of thought as it attempts to stabilize an image that immediately dissolves. Repetitions, echoes, and

abrupt shifts in tone create a sense of resonance that blurs the distinction between memory and perception, evoking a profound sense of familiarity. The text listens to itself as it advances, revisiting gestures and impressions that return altered, as if charged by the emotional turbulence that governs the protagonist's consciousness.

This architecture of discontinuity does not merely depict a fractured mind; it represents the ethical and experiential condition of remembering. The novel suggests that memory cannot be reconstructed without acknowledging its ruptures, its inconsistencies, and the affective intensities that exceed explanation. Fragmentation materializes the unfinished work of grief, desire, and uncertainty. It transforms the narrative into an aesthetic expression of a subjectivity that seeks clarity yet remains caught in the shifting patterns of perception.

In this sense, the fragment becomes the privileged form through which the novel articulates its exploration of experience. What seems incomplete gains expressive value: each break marks a point where affect disrupts coherence, where the past reasserts its force, and where the narrator must renegotiate their relationship with what they remember. The reader moves through these narrative fissures as through chambers of reverberation, sensing the weight of what cannot be fully said. Fragmentation shapes not only the rhythm of the text but also its emotional topography, allowing *Un pianista entre la niebla* to reveal the pulse of a consciousness navigating the instability of its own memory.

3.2 Narrative Situation

From the outset, *Un pianista entre la niebla* places the reader within a vulnerable consciousness that narrates from a space whose nature remains deliberately ambiguous. The apartment in which Landero remembers—an enclosure filled with objects that serve as sensory residues—intertwines with the possibility of institutional confinement, which filters his perception and conditions the way he organizes the past. This spatial uncertainty does not aim to offer a factual datum; it functions as a mechanism that intensifies the narrator's fragility

and as a field from which affective impulses, fragmentary signals, and unstable modulations emerge. The voice advances through broken confessions, pauses that alter rhythm, and flashes that erupt with the irregularity of a memory under external pressures. Each partial image—a disrupted gesture, a fleeting reflection, a sound without identifiable origin—reorders his perceptions and exposes a subject attempting to orient himself within a present saturated by insistent evocations.

Within this setting, Purificación and Mademoiselle Satán emerge as affective focal points that shape the narrative's emotional dynamics. Purificación returns through eroded contours that activate persistent grief and destabilize the voice each time she appears; Mademoiselle Satán introduces a disturbing energy that advances from the peripheral zones of the urban experience, immediately altering the narrator's sensory disposition. Both concentrate forces that shape how Landero remembers, feels, and revises his consciousness, and they do so within an environment in which the presence of the doctor and the priest adds layers of mediation that influence his discourse. This constellation of fractured voice, fluctuating spatiality, affective presences, and perceptual surveillance establishes the regime that organizes the novel and prepares the ground for analyzing its formal procedures.

This initial narrative configuration also provides a starting point for situating the novel within the emergent critical field around it. Before examining the formal mechanisms that structure its internal poetics—fragmentation, enunciative dislocation, and perceptual modes that define its atmosphere—it is helpful to review how early readings have interpreted the emotional instability of the text and the roles of its central figures. This map of initial receptions helps clarify the axes guiding the analysis and outlines the elements developed here in greater depth.

3.3 Voices in Tension: Polyphony and Enunciative Dislocation

This dynamic emerges from the way memory reorganizes the act of speaking. Each recollection triggers adjustments in the voice: the rhythm quickens, the syntax bends unexpectedly, and the

internal perspective either intensifies or dissipates depending on the type of image that surfaces. The evoked experience directly shapes the form of expression, producing a narrative texture marked by interference. The voice becomes a surface on which tensions among introspection, altered perception, and reflective distance converge. In this process, the narrating self acquires affective depth while losing any semblance of stability.

Grass introduces an additional layer to this dynamic. His presence does not unfold through extended interventions or explicit confrontations; it appears instead as a tonal reverberation that subtly shifts the narrator's register. Each reference to Grass produces a slight displacement within Landero's internal voice, as if certain linguistic turns or mental rhythms were inherited from contact with an interlocutor operating at the margins of consciousness. Grass functions as an affective and discursive echo, absorbed earlier in the narrator's life. Memory thus emerges as a weave of internalized voices and modulations that coexist within the self without fully forming secondary characters.

Nerón makes this configuration more visible by momentarily displacing Landero from the enunciative center and reconfiguring the narrative's internal balance. He describes, interprets, and comments on the narrator's gestures, introducing an external gaze that reframes Landero's image and unsettles any illusion of self-authority. Subjectivity does not dominate the discourse; it remains exposed to the scrutiny of an observer who illuminates contradictions, omissions, or gestures the narrator overlooks. Unlike Grass, Nerón operates with greater textual agency, offering a perspective that disrupts Landero's attempts at self-understanding.

Father Zamper's testimony amplifies this logic by demonstrating that even those who attempt to organize the narrator's story remain trapped in the opacity of his recollections. His uncertainty regarding the coherence of what has been confessed and what has been written reveals the limits of any effort to reconstruct a verifiable past. As he states:

“[...] I do not know if the contents of his notebooks are equal to or different from the content of the confessions—thinking that this creature may be what he is supposed to be is somewhat paradoxical...” (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 136).

(*Original Spanish*: “[...] no sé si los contenidos de sus cuadernos son iguales o diferentes al contenido de las confesiones —pensar que esta criatura sea lo que se supone que es, resulta algo paradójico...”)

Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Spanish are mine.

The priest adds no alternative version or moral validation. Instead, he intensifies the uncertainty that already permeates Landero’s discourse, confirming that the narrator’s subjectivity is continually shaped by external mediations that refract, filter, or question his memory.

The journalist radicalizes this dynamic. Her intervention introduces not only a new voice but a new dispositif: interview, transcription, and editorial summary become mediating frameworks that reshape the testimony. Memory does not flow as a spontaneous emanation of the self; it moves through institutional, technical, and narrative filters that reorganize it. The novel incorporates this mediation to underscore that recollection never emerges from a unified center. It arises through interactions among devices that record, edit, and rearrange the material of the past, much as perception transforms remembered experience through the conditions of the present.

The female figures also participate in this polyphonic regime through the affective modulation they impose on the narrator’s voice. Purificación activates an intimate register in which the voice grows more tactile, more exposed to emotional tremors. Mademoiselle Satán opens the perceptual field to a darker energy associated with unease or sensory disorientation. Neither figure speaks extensively; their influence is encoded in the texture of the voice, in the shifts of rhythm, and in the subtle affective modulations that reorganize Landero’s inner orientation. They function as gravitational nodes that reshape the enunciation through embodied and affective memory.

Together, these voices—internal, lateral, spectral, institutional—create a persistent tension that structures the narrative. The narrator’s subjectivity emerges as a field of interference in which diverse intensities collide, overlap, or run in parallel. Memory operates within a force-field that never stabilizes. Each incursion of the past triggers new resonances that interrupt linearity and expose the heterogeneous composition of the self. Within this interplay of modulations, the fragility of the remembering subject becomes visible: a consciousness advancing through absorbed voices, affective residues, external perspectives, and presences that exceed any attempt to contain them.

This polyphony articulates a conception of memory as a relational phenomenon. The self recalls through interactions with voices sustained within it and through external discourses that reshape its perception. The novel portrays a memory that fluctuates according to the modulations that traverse it. Dislocating enunciation becomes the mechanism through which fragmented memory is represented: each inflection of the voice signals an adjustment in the affective intensity of the past as it returns. The narrative deepens by turning subjectivity into a resonant fabric that captures the living process of recollection in its full formal and sensory complexity.

This configuration does not simply reveal the instability of voice; it also situates the narrator within an institutional framework that conditions how he remembers and interprets what happened. This enunciative scaffolding warrants a closer examination to understand how the novel navigates the fragility of memory and the ambiguity surrounding past events.

3.4 Female Figures as Affective Devices

The female presence in *Un pianista entre la niebla* plays a decisive role in the emotional architecture of the narrative. Rather than crystallizing into characters with linear trajectories or stable profiles, these figures operate as condensers of affective intensity, redirecting the narrator’s perception and reorganizing the course of the evoked experience. Their appearances introduce deep modulations in Landero’s internal voice, altering his sensitivities

and displacing the narrative toward registers where memory emerges as partial images, sensory vibrations, and tensions that reshape consciousness. The text constructs a constellation of presences that function as perceptual forces charged with emotional voltage.

The novel articulates this perceptual logic through eroded images that expose the difficulty of fixing Purificación into a stable form. The narrator presents her as a fugitive figure, always half-emerging, as when he describes her as:

Hablar de Purificación es hablar de alguien que se parece a una fotografía desleída, rota en medio de la lluvia de un domingo, con un piano sonando en algún rincón de la ciudad y una mujer (¿es una mujer?) dibujándose en medio de la niebla, de esa sensación de desvío que no deja de pesar en ti cuando has tenido cerca, muy cerca, a un hombre como el maestro Grass... (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 22)

To speak of Purificación means evoking someone who resembles a faded photograph, torn in the rain of a Sunday, with a piano playing somewhere in the city and a woman (is it a woman?) taking shape in the middle of the fog, in that sensation of displacement that continues to weigh on you when you have had, very close to you, a man like Maestro Grass... (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 22; translation mine)

Purificación embodies the most intimate expression of this mechanism. She surfaces as a residue of mourning, a contour that persists at the edge of perception. The narration retrieves dispersed fragments of her body: a suspended gesture, an unexpected flash of movement, a contour illuminated from the side, a motion captured at the threshold of memory. Purificación never consolidates into a defined shape; she moves within consciousness as a presence that leaves a powerful trace precisely in her incompleteness. Each time she returns, the atmosphere thickens: the narrator's voice shifts, the rhythm changes, and the affective orientation intensifies.

Purificación exemplifies this dynamic the clearest. Her presence returns as an intensity that advances through fragments, activating an emotional field marked by grief. The novel materializes this

appearance through bodily images that concentrate the affective pulse of memory, transforming the body into a perceptual surface. The narrator captures this with striking force:

"above all, a torso where her navel shone as in no other body or plaza—a navel like a black hole charged with mysteries... a navel that acts like a radar detecting the steps you take, those you thought were secret, hidden from her." (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 13).

"Pero sobre todo un torso en el que resplandecía como en ningún otro cuerpo o plaza su ombligo que, a su vez, era como un agujero negro cargado de misterios (...) un ombligo que es un radar con el que detecta los pasos y movimientos que das, esos que suponías eran secretos, ajenos a ella." (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 13; translation mine)

This image condenses the logic assigned to Purificación: a presence that functions as a sensory node, organized around partial zones of the body that radiate affect and alter the narrator's perception. Her return emerges as a force that shifts his emotional orientation and reshapes the internal atmosphere of the narrative. Purificación becomes a site of high affective density, capable of concentrating grief, desire, and perceptual residues that persist beyond any narrative clarity.

Her name operates as a trigger for a wound that remains active with each recollection. Purificación mobilizes a mourning whose energy circulates through the narrative in irregular waves, reopening sensitive zones that memory cannot order. She becomes an affective surface where losses, anxieties, and desires accumulate. The novel transforms this insistence into a structural principle, since every reappearance of Purificación propels a new narrative movement, a tonal shift, or a perceptual displacement that reconfigures the narrator's subjectivity.

Mademoiselle Satán introduces another dimension within this affective field. Whereas Purificación emanates from the intimacy of grief, Mademoiselle Satán embodies an energy that emerges from the city's margins and the experience of disturbance. Her appearances unfold through minimal signals: a rumor without a clear origin, a shadow that

distorts the environment, a sign perceived without verification. Her name, charged with resonance, projects ontological ambiguity and activates a more unsettling register within the narrator's perception.

Mademoiselle Satán transforms the city into a vibrating scenario where edges, corridors, and thresholds become zones susceptible to new perturbations. Her presence pushes the narration into spaces where consciousness moves between alertness, fascination, and disorientation. She functions as an external force that penetrates the protagonist's mind, multiplying disruptions and expanding the field of the possible.

The relationship between the two figures forms a complex affective arc. Purificación introduces the enduring dimension of fractured intimacy and grief; Mademoiselle Satán activates the disruptive force of the unknown and the sensory inquietude that rises from the city's borders. They form not opposing poles but complementary intensities: one producing internal reverberation, the other external destabilization. Landero's subjectivity remains suspended between these vectors, and that tension animates the narrative's affective movement.

The novel deepens this configuration by presenting the female figures as essential components of memory's mechanics. Each introduces a particular mode of return: Purificación summons impressions arising from vulnerability and loss, while Mademoiselle Satán provokes interpretations grounded in sensory uncertainty. Neither needs explicit speech; their influence emerges through shifts in atmosphere, changes in the narrator's perception, and tonal modulations that alter the emotional texture of the text. Their impact is visible in the way Landero observes, recalls, or imagines—and, through this, the novel constructs memory as a space where multiple affective intensities converge.

This design positions the female figures as aesthetic devices sustaining the novel's poetics of instability. Each emergence pushes the narrator toward zones where perception reorganizes itself; each recollection introduces variations that shape the construction of memory. Purificación and Mademoiselle Satán embody forms of sensitivity

that reshape how the narrative conceives the past and its persistence. They translate the logic of fragmented memory—its impulses, remnants, and intensities—into figurative terms.

Taken together, these female figures operate as affective vectors that define the emotional and perceptual structure of the novel. Their appearances modulate the narrator's voice, expand the narrative's internal resonance, and reconfigure the relation between memory and perception. One energy emerges from intimacy and grief; the other from the city's edge and its unsettling signals. Together, they give the narrative a dimension that exceeds representation, functioning as sensory principles and structural motors of evocation.

3.5 Fog as a Poetics of Memory

Fog occupies a structural role in *Un pianista entre la niebla*. More than an atmospheric resource, it functions as the sensory medium that organizes the relationship between perception, memory, and subjectivity. Each appearance of this visual element establishes a fluctuating regime of visibility that shapes how Landero relives, interprets, and reconfigures his past. The novel constructs fog as an aesthetic device that dilates image contours, alters the narrator's orientation, and redefines the texture of narrative time.

From the opening pages, fog introduces a distinct mode of perception: a gaze that moves through shifting densities, fleeting glimmers, incomplete contours, and figures that emerge from diffuse darkness. The narrator observes from a threshold where images never fully settle and each gesture flickers attention without stabilizing. This mode of seeing determines the mode of remembering: the act of evoking follows the unsteady rhythm of filtered light, and each return of the past acquires the texture of an apparition sustained by ambiguity.

The novel formulates this dynamic through a visibility that always arises amid uncertainties, as when the narrator perceives a presence barely taking shape at the edge of his gaze:

“...a woman (is it a woman?) tracing herself in the middle of the fog, in that sensation of displacement that keeps weighing on you...” (*Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 22*).

“...una mujer (¿es una mujer?) dibujándose en medio de la niebla, de esa sensación de destierro que no deja de pesar en ti...” (*Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 22; translation mine*).

This initial gesture reveals how fog becomes the sensory medium that conditions perception and directs the narrator’s manner of remembering: figures half-formed, advance from blurred contours, and return to the narrative as traces that persist without consolidating.

The first silhouette that emerges “*in the middle of the fog*” offers a key to this poetics. The female figure does not appear clearly or a defined profile; she emerges as a vibration within a field saturated with mist. The narrator moves toward her tentatively, and this approach sets a logic in which perception and evocation become equivalent. To remember is to traverse the same terrain the gaze traverses: a space where clarity recedes, where each image demands interpretive effort, and where sensitivity governs access to the past. Fog thus becomes the lens that condenses the bond between affect and perception.

Temporality reorganizes itself within this visual regime. Fog generates an atmosphere that suspends linearity and favors eruptions from overlapping temporal layers. Memories emerge as apparitions that interrupt the present, producing pauses that capture the emotional intensity of lived experience. Time loosens and adopts an undulating movement in which the past enters the present as a gust that disrupts the narrator’s emotional equilibrium. Within this perceptual climate, each evocation oscillates between the tactile immediacy of memory and the distance imposed by its fragmentary nature. Fog mediates this relationship by introducing a texture that blends affective density with referential dissolution.

Purificación occupies a privileged place within this poetics. Her reappearances unfold from the penumbra and take form through the vibration introduced by the fog. Her contours arise weakened

by dispersed light, and her presence activates a type of memory that flows through intermediate zones: it does not retrieve an event but an intensity that invades perception. The images linked to Purificación function as partial revelations that move between glimmer and erosion. Each flash summons an emotional cluster that dominates the narrator’s gaze, transforming fog into the ideal medium for visualizing what still wounds. Fog acquires symbolic value as the matter that shelters the persistence of grief.

Mademoiselle Satán expands this poetics into a more unsettling register. Her figure advances through scattered signals that cut across the urban haze: shadows moving without clear direction, veiled corridors, echoes from peripheral zones that alter the narrator’s spatial behavior. Fog transforms the city into a vibrant space where streets, corners, and passageways take on a life of their own, generating sensations that perception cannot immediately order. Mademoiselle Satán intensifies this effect: her appearances transform fog into a surface where strangeness grows and expands. She injects the narrative with an abrasive dimension, a sense that the environment responds to forces exceeding recognizable experience.

Together, Purificación and Mademoiselle Satán shape a perceptual mode built on intermittent signs. Each activates a different dimension of fog—wounded tenderness and disquiet, reminiscence and disturbance, the texture of grief and the vibration of the unknown. In both cases, fog mediates affect by regulating the amount of information that enters the narrator’s consciousness and determining the emotional density of each scene. Images return in waves that open and retract, defining the internal economy of remembrance.

Fog thus functions as the aesthetic core that articulates the novel’s internal logic. It sustains a perception in which clarity yields to suggestion and the image moves between revelation and concealment. The book builds its poetics around this fluctuating material because its emotional structure depends on this sensory regime. Fog translates the narrator’s state: a consciousness moving among traces, residues, and reverberations that continue to shape his way of seeing. The story adopts the form of this perceptual climate,

attenuating definitions, dissolving boundaries, and enabling the past to enter as affective wake.

In this sense, *Un pianista entre la niebla* proposes a conception of memory rooted in perceptual experience rather than chronological reconstruction. Memory unfolds within a space where images pass through layers of emotional density, and fog becomes the medium that renders that process visible. The narrative suggests that to remember is to approach the lived through shifting textures, persistent shadows, and glimmers returning from an intermediate zone between perception and evocation. Fog, as a narrative substance, encapsulates both the fragility of memory and its capacity to alter consciousness; it is, ultimately, the material poetics that shape the text's sensibility and sustain its emotional architecture.

3.6 Enclosure and Mediation: A Narratological Framework for Altered Memory

The progression of the narrative suggests that Landero's recollections unfold within a setting of confinement whose exact nature remains deliberately ambiguous. This indeterminacy serves as a formal strategy that aligns with the novel's poetics of fragmented memory. From a narratological standpoint, such liminal environments align with what Fludernik defines as experientiality: a mode in which narrative is organized not by the reconstruction of verifiable events but by the activation of perceptual and affective modalities. Confinement does not operate as a factual datum; it serves as a mechanism that intensifies the narrator's fractured interiority and the unstable modulation of his voice.

Within this framework, the relationship with the doctor acquires structural significance. The medical presence introduces a device that redirects the flow of discourse and subjects it to continuous assessment. Landero's voice emerges permeated by what Genette describes as enunciative filters—instances that condition the production of discourse without fully assuming the status of secondary narrators. The doctor functions as a figure of control, transforming each recollection into a monitored testimony. When Landero tells him,

“you are a doctor who knows more than anyone...” (Serrano Sánchez, 2016, p. 85), he exposes the cognitive imbalance that shapes his discourse: a self that does not command its own memory and depends on an external gaze to legitimize its account. The original reads: “usted es un doctor que sabe más que cualquiera...” (p. 85).

Purificación's letters further intensify this tension. Her voice erupts as an autonomous instance that questions, contradicts, or displaces the narrator's versions—an arrangement resembling what Richardson terms unnatural structures, systems of enunciation in which voices overlap without yielding a clear hierarchy. When she writes, “you left me alone... without breaking because it would be like killing you or killing myself” (pp. 126–127), the intervention introduces more than emotional content; it alters the tone and rhythm of the main discourse, forcing it to reorganize its syntax and cadence. *Original Spanish*: “me dejaste sola... sin romper porque sería como matarte o matarme.” The result is a field of dislocation in which memory is narrated in the plural, through resonances that the narrator cannot fully control.

Father Zamper's intervention adds yet another mediating layer that further unsettles the narrator's authority. His testimony exemplifies what Meretoja calls non-subsumptive memory, a form that resists interpretive closure and preserves the opacity of the past. When the priest expresses the need to “discern his memories” (pp. 136–137), he confirms that the protagonist's recollections do not present themselves as a closed system but as a process in tension, continually shaped by external voices. This mediating function aligns with the principles of institutional narratology: the narrative emerges edited, filtered, and classified by instances that reorganize its materials from outside the self. *Original Spanish*: “discernir sus recuerdos.”

Within this network, Purificación's fate remains a deliberately preserved blind spot. The ambiguity surrounding her disappearance—or potential death—constitutes a productive narrative void, a category contemporary narratology associates with texts that mobilize uncertainty to generate meaning. The novel does not seek to resolve the enigma because its purpose is not to clarify an event but to reveal the fragility of affective consciousness

and the impossibility of accessing a stable truth about the past. Landero's oscillation—"I did not speak of killing you" (p. 127; original Spanish: "no hablé de matarte")—exposes a memory marked by grief and fear, but also by an enunciative architecture that destabilizes any certainty.

From this perspective, the novel inscribes guilt, suspicion, and disorientation as formal operations rather than thematic content. Confinement, medical intervention, Purificación's letters, and the priest's testimony form a polyphonic network in which each voice exerts pressure that redefines how the narrator speaks. Memory emerges within a field of forces where identities, affects, and perceptions compete for control of the narrative, producing what Fludernik understands as a relational narrativity shaped by the interaction of perceptual and affective modes. The result is a text that, at the formal level, materializes the impossibility of reconstructing the past without the intrusions, corrections, and distortions produced by present voices.

4.

Discussion

The analysis shows that *Un pianista entre la niebla* constructs memory through formal operations that foreground perceptual instability, affective saturation, and enunciative fragmentation. Rather than organizing recollection through verifiable events, the novel advances through sensory residues, partial images, and modulations in voice that correspond to what postclassical narratology identifies as experientiality. This emphasis on perceptual processes clarifies why the narrative sustains ambiguity regarding Purificación's fate and Landero's confinement: uncertainty functions not as a thematic gap but as a structural principle that shapes the narrator's relation to the past.

The polyphonic network formed by the doctor, Purificación, Father Zamper, and the journalist expands this instability by revealing how memory emerges within a field of competing pressures. Each external voice redirects the narrator's discourse, producing what unnatural narratology describes as an enunciative architecture that resists hierarchy. These interferences expose a subjectivity that never commands its own recollections; instead, it negotiates them under the weight of institutional authority, affective bonds, and spectral presences that reconfigure the act of remembering.

The novel also demonstrates that memory acquires materiality through the body. Purificación and Mademoiselle Satán operate as affective intensities that reorganize perception and alter the narrator's orientation toward the world. Their presence confirms the insight of embodied cognition theories: narrative meaning arises from the interaction among sensation, emotion, and consciousness. The recurrent imagery of fog, silhouettes, and partial bodies reinforces this embodied dimension, showing that memory does not reconstruct events but generates atmospheres that condition the subject's experience.

Taken together, these findings reveal that *Un pianista entre la niebla* articulates memory as a discontinuous and relational process shaped by perceptual fluctuation, affective pressure, and institutional mediation. The novel transforms grief, desire, and uncertainty into narrative procedures, demonstrating how the work of remembering unfolds through formal mechanisms rather than through causal reconstruction. This perspective situates the text within contemporary discussions of non-subsumptive memory, underscoring its contribution to broader debates on the narrative representation of loss and fragmentation.

5.

Conclusions

Un pianista entre la niebla constructs a narrative poetics that rethinks the relationship between memory, perception, and affect through a set of formal strategies that sustain a subjectivity in a constant state of vulnerability. The novel employs a structure composed of fragments, modulations, and returns that emerge from the most sensitive zones of consciousness, transforming this constellation into the axis around which Landero's experience is organized. The writing advances through autonomous scenes, sudden images, and disruptions that shift the narrator's internal orientation. This design presents a model of memory shaped by embodied perceptions and persistent affects that directly influence the narrative voice.

The fragmentary architecture constitutes the first layer of this elaboration. Discontinuity generates a rhythm that mirrors the movement of memory, and each fissure materializes the way past images appear in the narrator's consciousness. The novel converts fragmentation into a compositional principle, creating a mode of reading governed by jolts, gaps, and reverberations that reveal the inner breathing of recollection. Subjectivity appears to be traversed by overlapping registers, and this superposition renders the act of narrating a process of ongoing reconfiguration.

Poliphony intensifies this effect. Landero does not recall from a stable center; his voice incorporates inflections absorbed from past relationships, echoes of external discourses, lateral interventions, and modulations arising from presences that accompany him even in silence. Grass, Nerón, and the journalist contribute layers that disalign the enunciation and push the narrator toward shifting perspectives. This network of resonances reveals that memory circulates through complex channels, where voices intervene to transform, shade, or distort the perception of the past. Subjectivity becomes a field saturated with interference, and these disturbances reveal the limits of recollection when it attempts to consolidate itself.

The female figures articulate the affective core of this process. Purificación radiates an intimate energy whose persistence activates mourning; Mademoiselle Satán introduces a perceptual register marked by inquietude that amplifies the narrative's instability. Each figure reorganizes the narrator's sensitivity and extends its influence into the text's formal construction. Their appearances do not propel a linear plot; instead, they reshape the emotional surface of the narrative and generate movements that traverse perception from complementary angles.

Within this constellation, fog synthesizes the perceptual regime governing the novel. It serves as an aesthetic substance and sensory medium, capable of capturing the fragility of memory. Its shifting texture, its ability to dilate contours, and its function as a visual filter establish a model for understanding the way the past returns. Fog transforms each recollection into an apparition charged with affective density, turning perception into the site where memory's force intensifies. The narrative takes shape within this atmosphere of suggestion, shadow, and emotional vibration.

The analysis of *Un pianista entre la niebla* allows us to affirm that the novel advances a conception of memory grounded in embodied perception and in the circulation of affects that interrupt any aspiration toward continuity. The narrative integrates this fragility and converts it into a method, transforming instability from a limitation into an aesthetic instrument. The text opens a space where remembering means living with residues, intensities, and dislocations that remain active within consciousness and shape the narrative's materiality.

Ultimately, the novel makes a significant contribution to postclassical narratology, particularly by embodying concepts such as experientiality, the relational nature of memory, and enunciative dislocation. Its affective architecture reveals how body, perception, and memory form a shared territory in which subjectivity expands, fragments, and becomes permeable to multiple sensory and discursive forces. In doing so, Serrano Sánchez's novel positions itself within contemporary debates on how literature thinks the past, produces knowledge, and represents experience from the edges of linearity and interpretive certainty.

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