

Analysis of Henry James's *Paste* from the Perspective of Literary Stylistics

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ABSTRACT: *Paste* is a short story of the American writer Henry James, which is written at the latter period. The novel, which revolves around the truth of the deceased Mrs. Plame's pearl necklace, is simple in plot, but shows the binary opposition between innocence and smoothness, morality and hypocrisy in the early 20th century with its unique writing style and skills. From the perspective of unreliable narration, the author presents four main scenes, and through the rhetorical devices such as symbol, rhetorical question and irony, entrancing the reader. Therefore, this paper will analyze the specific linguistic features of *Paste* from the perspective of rhetoric strategy and narration, to dig out its deep symbolic meaning, and elucidate the thematic meaning and aesthetic effect of the novel more comprehensively.

Key words: *Paste*; rhetorical strategy; narrative perspective; thematic significance

I. INTRODUCTION

Henry James is a famous realist writer in the history of English and American literature. *Paste* (1899) is a masterpiece. The short story was published in the middle of James's career. The origin of *Paste* said Henry James, "was to consist but of the ingenious thought of transposing the terms of one of Guy de Maupassant's admirable contes". "It seemed harmless sport," James continues, "simply to turn that situation round-to shift, in other words, the ground of the horrid mistake, making this a matter not of a false treasure supposed to be true and precious, but of a real treasure supposed to be false and hollow."

The plot of the novel is extremely short, but the implication is profound and thought-provoking. The story begins when Arthur Plame attended the funerals of his stepmother and father and discovered a box full of imitation jewelry left by his stepmother when she was an actor before marrying a priest. Arthur gave them to his cousin Charlotte, who thought they might be valuable. Arthur rejected the idea which hinted his stepmother's love affairs in the distant past. One day, Charlotte lent the "fake" jewels to Mrs Guy, who saw at a glance that the pearls were real and offered to buy them from her. Charlotte, loyal to moral values, returned the necklace to Arthur. Later, Arthur wrote to tell her that the pearls were fakes and he smashed them. But soon Charlotte finds out that Mrs. Guy

is wearing Arthur's pearls. Mrs. Guy told Charlotte that she bought them at the store, but she wondered if Mrs. Guy really bought them directly from Arthur. At the end of the story, Charlotte recalled that she once gave Mrs. Guy his address.

The author thinks that the novel's profound theme and unique artistic practices are inseparable, so this article will analyze the vocabulary and sentences of the novel from the perspective of literary stylistics, such as symbol, irony, comparison, and using rhetorical strategies, unreliable narration to interpret the theme of the significance and aesthetic effect.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS' CHARACTERS IN *PASTE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RHETORIC STRATEGIES*

The characterization in the novel is dramatic and full of irony. This effect is mainly reflected in the application of irony and symbolic rhetorical devices.

The first scene happened in rectory. At her aunt's funeral, Charlotte Plame found her cousin "not sad" and herself "snubbed and neglected", but she still followed Arthur to have a look at her aunt's belongings. Charlotte asked several times if these things were worth nothing to make sure that she just want to keep the things as a souvenir. And for Arthur's answer, "They look awful." "Not a nobody to whom somebody—well, not a nobody with diamonds. It isn't all worth, this trash, five pounds." "The whole thing's rotten paste." The author described with an affirmative and decisive tone, and using words like surprised and screamed without thinking to set off a tone of irony. To Charlotte's question, Arthur gave a small sniff of impatience and thought she was simple-minded enough to think the pearl was true. When she mentioned that it might be a gift, the author used two negatives and added an absolute tone to express the taboo of Arthur's stepmother's stage career. He did not want to leave anything related to his stepmother in his home, and Arthur had his own "moral standards". In his mind, the stage experience of his stepmother was beneath his "dignity" and beneath his "family".

The second scene is at Charlotte's master's estate. Charlotte, a governess, met Mrs. Guy by chance and happened to lend her the jewel. Mrs. Guy knew the jewel was valuable because there was a time-honored tact in her eyes, and the tone of her voice showed that she had a knack for humiliating others. Mrs. Guy loved the beads as Charlotte showed them to her. At first she bargained with Charlotte. After the Charlotte's unwillingness to sell the beads to her, she used a rude manner to satire Mrs. Plame's passed experience, said that "they're things of love!" "she must have been 'rum.'" "They're things of passion!" which were the words that Charlotte and her cousin did not want to hear. It was these words that made Charlotte fall into her trap. Although Charlotte had nothing, she could exchange it for money, but as she was a loyal an innocent girl that she decided to return it to its original owner. Hence, Mrs. Guy regard her as "a really fool". From all these, the character of these two are self-evident.

The third scene is in the reception room of senior officials of the law society. When Arthur knew that it was an real jewel. Arthur's face was strangely troubled. On the one hand, he declared that they're still the paste once he said, but playing with the beads with his own hands, and picking them up and striding over to a drawer and putting them in, "locked" like a treasure. However, he secretly dealt with the string of pearls in a mean way. Arthur's actions represent the value concept of western society, which is a microcosm of the mercenary and treacherous behavior of the western bourgeoisie (Wang Yuehonng, 1998:155).

The fourth scene is at Eaton square. When Charlotte met Mrs. Guy again, she is wearing a pearl necklace, "very proud", "very happy". Charlotte instantly recognized the string of pearls as "really wonderful pearls" that she had "lost and won," and Mrs. Guy confirmed that it was "Arthur's string," before saying, "it took a lot of thought to make this a good deal." Charlotte was shocked to discover that her cousin had lied to her. She was

suddenly enlightened and even went the length of asking herself what sort of a bargain Mrs. Guy had driven and whether the marvel of the recognition in Bond Street had been a veracious account of the matter. Her series of self-questioning, which seemed to be idle, actually played a positive role in deepening the theme -- "it's too scary". She couldn't help but look at the world calmly, think about life, and explore the magic of the western society.

Through four scenes, three faces, two hearts (Arthur and Mrs. Guy are of the same kind), one center -- through the description of the whole process of "gain and loss" of a string of pearls, reveals profoundly the cold and harsh social reality of innocence and tact, morality and hypocrisy. In addition, the author's ingenious artistic techniques have been appreciated by numerous scholars at home and abroad.

III. THE THEME AND AESTHETIC EFFECT OF *PASTE* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NARRATIVE STRATEGY

Henry James, the American novelist of psychological realism, was once described as a historian of fine conscience by Conrad, a British writer. His narrative style has changed from an omniscient narrator to a third-person unreliable narrator, and his short story *Paste* is a successful example of his unreliable narration (Shang Biwu, 2011:103) .

According to Ferran, unreliable narratives occur mainly on three axes: the "fact" axis, the "value" axis, and the "perception" axis (Ferran, 2005:49). There are six subtypes: misdescription, misinterpretation and misjudgment; Inadequate description, inadequate interpretation, inadequate judgment. This paper will also analyze the *Paste* of James' novel from the three axes and six unreliable narration. *Paste*, the narrator isn't the narrator, but the focus is Charlotte, so readers often followed the perspective of Charlotte, but there are many direct quotations, so unreliable narration is not only reflected on the narrator and Charlotte, also reflected on Mrs. Guy and Arthur.

The "value" axis

In the second paragraph, the narrator says "If the vicar's widow, now in her turn finally translated." (27). As the author has said before, although the narrator isn't the narrator of the story, the focus is Charlotte. According to the common sense of ethics, Charlotte would not call her aunt Widow. Therefore, it is known that the narrator makes unreliable narration here, and the unreliable narration here lays the tone of irony of the novel.

The day after Arthur and Charlotte had decided whether the jewels were fakes, Arthur explained to Charlotte why he had gone too far the day before, saying that he had simply meant to show that his stepmother was not to blame. If readers do not read on, they will be moved by his "filial piety". But later the reader will discover that Arthur hated his stepmother, and his grief was only feigned. When Mrs. Guy verified that the jewels were genuine, he was very surprised and asked Charlotte who had given them. Charlotte replied that it was her cousin Arthur, and Mrs. Guy commented, "But it's HE who must be a dear kind thing!" So to put in a good word for him here is an inadequate judgment to cover up the scandal. HE is capitalized. Mrs. Guy did not know Arthur but praised him a very good man because he had given Charlotte these precious jewels. From all these, Arthur is actually a very hypocritical person, and Mrs. Guy's wrong judgment here is a rhetorical irony.

The "fact" axis

Inadequate reporting in *Paste* is mainly reflected on Arthur. When he gave his stepmother's belongings to Charlotte, emphasized several times that they were "rotten paste" and were always of a deliberately low value, saying that the necklaces were "worth at most thirty shillings", and that the pearls were "that trash" and "five pounds", and that they were ugly and had no luster. All in all, Arthur wants to use almost any derogatory term to describe these fakes, but we can know that the so-called "paste" is the real thing and worth a lot of money. To come to the conclusion: Arthur has been reported as inadequate, because he has been know these are true, It is her gift which someone gave to her before his stepmother married his father, so he is ashamed of his stepmother, but he

don't want to let others know this shameful thing, so he was not fully reported.

After Charlotte found the paste were valuable and returned them to him, he wrote to tell Charlotte that he had destroyed them, but made a deal with Mrs. Guy on the sly, which showed that Arthur was under-reporting. His hypocrisy and immorality were also exposed.

The false reports in the novel are mainly reflected in Charlotte's description of these jewels: Arthur called them worthless garbage, while Charlotte considers them as souvenirs left by her aunt, with their melancholy and dignity (Booth 1961:158-59). "They are relics, I think They have their melancholy and even their dignity." Charlotte do not know the origin of these jewels, just take them as a souvenir of aunt, believing they also have the dignity. The false reports here embodies the innocence of Charlotte.

The "perception" axis

What happens on the perception axis is mainly misinterpretation and inadequate interpretation.

When Charlotte asks him if the jewels could be genuine, he replies: "they are all terrible fakes, and if not, why does Miss Bradshaw hide them?" Arthur, who had already known they were genuine, had also stated his reasons for trying to mislead Charlotte into believing they were fakes. Here we can understand that he could not accept them as genuine, so he did not fully interpret them.

When Mrs. Guy saw Charlotte's jewels for the first time, she exclaimed, "great! Now we can play ivanhoe!". (30) as we all know, to put on a good drama performance is not only a luxury of setting can be done, but also need the actor's good acting, the writer's good script and so on. But Mrs. Guy said she could do ivanhoe with the jewels. So you can see that Mrs. Guy is misreading this. Although Mrs. Guy's account is unreliable here, it produces a rhetorical effect that allows the reader to see the value of the jewels.

When Charlotte learns that the jewels are not fakes, she tried to give them back to Arthur, but Mrs Guy tries to stop her, saying: 'he won't believe they are not fakes. He hates them. It follows that Arthur did not return them to Charlotte, but sold them to Mrs Guy. So Mrs. Guy's statement here was unreliable and misinterpreted, partly because of her selfish desire for the jewels and partly because she had guessed their origin, and he thought Arthur would be ashamed of it and would not believe it or accept it. Therefore, the unreliable statement here reflects not only Arthur's hypocrisy, but also Mrs. Guy's smoothness and Charlotte's honesty.

IV. CONCLUSION

As booth said, when the narrator's narration is presented unreliably, a tension will be formed, and this tension will usually produce an ironic effect (Booth, 1961). In *Paste*, unreliable narration appeared many times to express the narrator's hypocritical satire on Arthur. It also presents the themes of James' works: Innocence and Smoothness; Honesty and Hypocrisy; The binary opposition between morality and immorality. The focus is Charlotte, so readers mainly follows the steps of Charlotte, due to the limitation of single perspective, readers cannot understand the events fully, so there are always unreliable narration, which is the process of people understanding things in real life, it proved unreliable narration's aesthetic effect again.

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