



## A Study on the Narrative Clues and Rhetorical Styles in *The Woman in White*

WANG Wenjing<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities, Tongliao, China.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 6 April 2015; accepted 19 June 2015

Published online 26 July 2015

### Abstract

In terms of narrative clues and styles, excellence and omissions are combined together in the novel, *The Woman in White*, which is consisted of three main clues to construct the overall story throughout the whole book. Around these three clues, the writer uses three rhetorical styles in the novel. When these three different types of narrative clues and language usage mix together, it appears so difficult to be coordinated in the situation on the style of the novel. So it is hard to regard the novel as a fusion system on the whole.

**Key words:** Detective novel; Narrative clues; Rhetorical styles; Romantic; Gothic; Mode

Wang, W. J. (2015). A Study on the Narrative Clues and Rhetorical Styles in *The Woman in White*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 11(1), 62-65. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7265>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7265>

### INTRODUCTION

The British novel, *The Woman in White*, created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is one of Wilkie-Collins' masterpieces. In the development process of early British detective novel history, with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of creation techniques about this novel to study rhetoric, although it is slightly inferior to the other contemporary writers' works in the social influence, popularity, sales and writing techniques, it will have a certain guidance and reference significance for us to understand and analyze

the suspense novel. This article mainly gives an insight into the narrative clues and rhetorical styles.

In the layout of creative style and narrative clues, the novel, *The Woman in White*, shows excellence and omissions coexisting at the same time. It seems too limited to take account of the two aspects with high quality. The novel, *The Woman in White*, includes some interesting color senses in the structural designing, the writer using three frameworks to build all the plots throughout the whole book. The main clue is concerning love and marriage. Hart-Wright was attracted a lot by Laura, which made Hart-Wright care for her more and be willing to get close to the Limmeridge manor. When he knew Laura had already set up an engagement with the other man, Hart-Wright made up his mind to choose to stay away from her and not to disturb her present existing life just because of his noble moral love integrity. Deep down, he was too bothered to extricate himself. The heroine Laura inherited her father's wishes with tame obedience in an attitude of filial piety, walking into the castle laid down by her father before he died for her marriage. However, the marriage which was based on the establishment through the interest relationship finally resulted in many disadvantages and misfortunes which made Laura experience a series of disasters and damages. After Hart-Wright returned to his motherland, his spiritual world got healed and his emotion was recovered in the process of helping Laura just owing to his sincere love for Laura. The second clue of the novel is the mysterious woman in white. Hart Wright encountered a woman in white on his way to the job and helped her escape from the hardship out of kindness. Later he noticed that Laura bore the striking resemblance to the mysterious woman in white in appearance. But for the woman in white she is ignorant and her identity is a mess of mist. Then unexpectedly the mysterious woman in white severely told Laura that she could not marry to Sir Percival. But at that time Sir Percival had a good social reputation,

so here people will question and be confused about Sir Percival's true character. But the wedding ceremony went on as it was planned and Laura became the wife of Percival legally. The woman in white tried to get near to Laura, intending to let out of Percival's secret to Laura, but she could not implement it just because of jazz and earl's intentional interference. At that moment, the secret that the woman in white was eager to tell Laura became the focus of the both positive and negative camps. Unfortunately, the woman in white died of the heart attack, which resulted in the interruption of the revealing clues. Later Hart Wright tried to restore Laura's true identity in the aspect of law. Faced with all varieties of difficulties due to the lack of evidence, he was again reminded of the woman in white who wanted to reveal the secret, so he went to search for the mother of the woman in white, Madam Kaiser rick. This key clue became the fighting point between the plot and the anti-plot, persecution and anti-persecution between the two hostile camps. This is a typical British detective novel expression and narrative layout method. In the novel the earl planned the serial conspiracy while Hart-Wright and Harcombe analyzed it carefully, observed and manoeuvred it deftly, reasoning and exploring in the midst of events, eventually they got the satisfactory result. It seems clear that three frame clues are developed in a parallel manner in the novel. However, the author added more minor clues and unrelated scenes making the main clues and secondary clues entangled together. The overall layout is chaotic. The framework clues are often minor. In respect to this kind of layout it is difficult for readers to see the main vein, feel and control the rhythm of the article. It is certain that there is no good effect for this kind of reading state. Meanwhile, the messy clues produce another disadvantage, that is, a specific narrative clue must be matched with the style of narrative, but Mr. Collins' creation ability is not capable enough to complete the complicated writing layout. It is not easy for him to control the shape of the different elements and melt them for an organic whole. This creates a different shape of creative elements and clues from the narrative of dislocation. On the whole the novel seems to be a hard grafting between the genre and the style in order to correspond to the three framework clues. So in the novel the three very different styles of rhetorical methods emerged together.

---

## 1. ROMANTIC NOVEL MODE

---

When Laura-Fairlie's debut appears in the novel, the narrator Hart-Wright introduces her with the following words

Eye color is beautiful and lovely, the shape of eye is also beautiful and lovely, big and soft, which gives a meditation in elegance, but the most beautiful is the emotional sincere eyes... the charming from eyes spreading to the entire face, very

delicate, but the very clear indicators of charm mask and also change the natural tiny defects of elsewhere...

It is similar to the most romantic novel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Laura-Fairlie, a young and glamorous lady, whose simple and innocent disposition contrasts with her noble origin, which seems not to match each other so much. The words adopted in the novel are the same idiomatic language style of the romantic novel at that moment: concise, magnanimous, sincere, bright. This kind of language itself clearly marks the rhetoric meaning as follows: The vibration was in his mind for the first time to meet her and she gave him a sweet impression. The heroine is holy and lovely. So there should be the purest and truest love to match all this, which is the idealist. As it is described by the narrator that "it is this woman who first brings us life, light and image from our unclear aesthetic consciousness, but also enriches us. We don't realize the emptiness of the spirit until she appeared."

But the real life distorts the love combination just because of the inequality of the social status and wealth difference. As a result there is no hope for Hart-Wright's love for Laura. However, Hart-Wright's words are full of the color of gentleness and quietness. It is remorseful for him to cover his hopeless and sorrowful mood in accounting for such a nice and sweet feeling.

The consensus in the literary world shows that the rhetoric methods contain the rich meaning of language beyond the surface meaning. That is to say, the rhetoric method reveals the author's inner thought and attitude—the mysterious subtext of language.

Hart-Wright repeatedly expressed his inner sadness and self-mocking. However, owing to his mild and exquisite narrative vocabulary, it can reveal the narrator's sincerity and firmness. His description about his inner honesty gives the readers an impression that he has obtained a moral right for this love. The romantic novels created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost adopted this popular rhetoric methods which made love affair in the writing reasonable. Even if the emotion of both sides is disproportionate, even it should not take place, through the ingenious layout of rhetoric readers will eventually tend to have the hero's value orientation and emotional trade-offs. Such true love is worth pursuing and certainly is agreeable and blessed. So with the development of the plots when Hart-Wright is desperate to rescue Laura, the former rhetoric effect is evident and the former casual bedding plays an obvious role.

---

## 2. GOTHIC NOVEL MODE

---

Compared with the previous romantic novel, another narrative mode is Gothic mode novel whose description of scenery and character is depressed and cold with an atmosphere of solemnity as the rhetorical characteristics, which are in a sharp contrast with the romantic novel. For

instance, once the story plot of the novel is concerned with the woman in white or involved in the gloomy and evil aspects, the narrators will at once take advantage of the nervous and suffocating languages full of horror, with the color of panic and stagnation. The whole language frame also becomes twisted and obscure, the tone dignified and sluggish. Before each particular action and scene, the detailed language setting and atmosphere rendering are already in place. When the woman in white in the novel was presented before the readers for the first time, the novel was completely adopted the Gothic novel architecture scene mode. The first appearance of the woman in white and the process of her escaping from the asylum, her obvious neurotic traits of character, the sense of fear and the fierce expression born into her, together with her bloodless pale and small face, as well as her neurotic changeable and big eyes, all of these elements prove that she has become a typical Gothic character in the novel.

Then in the following plots this ghostly character is always intertwined with the untold secrets, perplexing mystery and even a great deal of evil scene. This kind of scene description, all with a way of a Gothic novel technique to narrate, full of weirdness, mystery and coldness, makes people feel the terrifying atmosphere pervasive around. On one hand this kind of frame structure is embodied in using the proper terms to foreshadow the scene and create a certain atmosphere. On the other hand this kind of frame structure is also expressed in a specific structure. For instance, in the process of revealing the life of the woman in white, the descriptive structure that is used is based on the inner activities of Hart Wright as the major way, but also with the help of Harcombe's reading her mother's letter about a certain girl many years ago, as well as the method of the scene description when Laura in the white dress walks by herself under the romantic love in the courtyard. The author put the three clues interspersed and rotated, hoping to be able to make these three aspects echo with one another, pushing forward in the cleverly mixed whole. This process has occupied a considerable space and the writer wants to create the weird atmosphere to the fullest effectively. In the end the three seemingly unrelated but actually interrelated suspense streams into one point. The intersection point of these three clues reveals that the surprising similarity in appearance between the woman in white and Laura makes people generate a sense of foreboding. Originally Hart Wright's inner suspense, the recorded events by the elder mother and Laura in plain white, these three things themselves are never frightening. However, the author intertwined the three contents into one organic body in the structure, which are mutual backgrounds and inspiration, thus creating an awesome drama effect. The author suggested this kind of similarity was tragic setting the stage for the later related evil. Then the author continues with the Gothic way to give the structure for

those particular geographic coordination, the evil scene, the earl's Blackwater manor and the relevant atmosphere. The author also goes on with the Gothic structure through Miss Harcombe as a narrator with her lot of narrative. The dense trees produced the effect of rock wall, which delineated the crime scene to a relatively closed space. They not only laid siege to the victims who could not escape, but also cut off from the outside views, which are extremely perfect disguise isolation device.

The Blackwater manor looks so ordinary under the sunlight, but it is bestowed the obvious symbol meaning by the writer. It is full of evil trap in good camouflage waiting for its prey—Laura. This is revealed to the readers by the author through the former structure layout with large space.

Such arrangement is provided with all the elements of Gothic novel. The Gothic icons are all here: The neurotic woman in white, the target of the sin—the soft and beautiful heroine Laura, the perpetrator of the evil (Jazz and Earl), the implementation site and environment of the sin and so on.

---

### 3. THE DETECTIVE NOVEL MODE

---

Throughout the development history of the British detective novel, the detective characters in the novel from Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Gul to the detectives of all kinds of images emerging into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the streets, stations, wharf, airports like the tide water. They all possess the special ability of analyzing the social phenomena, an insight and perception into all the nature of crime phenomena, with the superb detective smell and reasoning ability. In these novels any item, any trace can be understood the key breakthrough of the puzzle. Therefore the novel *The Woman in White* also adopts this model. In the scene accounted by Harcombe, she can trace back to Laura's route by observing the footprints in a specific site and the woman's clothing fiber scraped by the branches and other clues. Hart Wright discovered the tombstone that had just been cleaned and according to that inferred that the woman in white must appear here again, so he hid near waiting for her. In the process of restoring Laura's identity by Hart Wright, he went to call in on Mrs Clements and the mother of the woman in white, Mrs Kaiser, getting the historical truth that Percy was a bastard and obtaining the exact evidence of wedding registration materials in the church. On the basis of the law at that time it was illegal for the bastard who has no right to inherit the parents' property. Percy can be sentenced to death by hanging because of his fraud to get the title of nobility.

In terms of the law of literary creation, the detective novel needs to construct rigorously and cleverly, all linked with one another. Most of the novels adopt the traces construction, from result to reason, and every material requires accurately to serve the making and disintegrating

of evil, without having the phenomena of waste and redundancy. In the novel, *The Woman in White*, the author overuses the premonition, signs and the fulfilled material in the dream. Apparently in the real life, in the story with the means of obtaining evidence and reasoning, with justice as the target, it is not harmonious which does not conform to the conventional narrative principles of detective stories.

In the novel, *The Woman in White*, three different types of rhetorical style are arranged together. There bounds to be the result of the collision, attending to one thing and losing sight of another. The overall layout is not harmonious.

The specific figurative speech must be matched with the corresponding subject, otherwise it will interfere the subject matter. The novel *The Woman in White* lacks the overall planning in constructing the narrative strategy, with a mess of the narrative style and clues, constraining each other, obviously reducing the effect. As the color auxiliary tactics the Gothic mode and romantic one can be used in the detective novel, but they should be reasonable and moderate, serving the whole narrative principle of the detective novel.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

Therefore every novel should have a general rhetoric when in creating on a whole. As a main outline, in the process and structure of different novels, the novel, supplemented by the necessary color properties and the narrative rhetoric techniques, has a clear clue and vein, with the rigorous and fluent narrative. The main and secondary rhetorical styles are easy to be recognized, both

of them coordinated organically. The secondary rhetoric figure is auxiliary to the main leading rhetoric figure of speech. So the secondary rhetoric figurative speech should be used less and ingeniously increasing its color and becoming its necessary and organic part. The works created in this way will attract readers more deeply.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Aristotle. (1962). *The poetics*. The People's Literature Publishing House
- Buss, W. C. J. (1987). *The rhetoric of fiction*. Peking University Press.
- Collins, J. W. (2007). *The woman in white*. Shanghai Translation Press.
- James, F. (2002). *Narrative as rhetoric: Skill, reader, ethics, ideology*. Peking University Press.
- Kerr, P. D. (2000). British fiction and the scene of the crime. *Foreign Literature*.
- Lane, J. M. (2006). *Multiple interpretations of literary works*. Peking University press
- Northrop, F. (1998). *On criticism*. Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Oster, J. P. (2007). *Oracle night*. Yilin Press
- Shen, D. J. (2004). *The study on narratology and stylistics of fiction*. Peking University Press
- Susan, S., & Lancer, J. (2002). *Fiction of authority: Women writers and the narrative voice*. Peking University press
- Xu, Q., & Huang, X. H. (2004). Several female images in the woman in white. *Journal of Han Shan Teacher's College*, 25(1).
- Zhang, L. X. (2006). *The Tao and logic Gus: East and west literary hermeneutics* Jiangsu Education Publishing House.