

Analysis on the Writing Techniques of *Sister Carrie*

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Abstract: Dreiser is one of the greatest American writers. His novel *Sister Carrie*, set in Chicago in the early 20th century, truly reflects all aspects of American society and reveals the existing problems. The novel features a country girl, Carrie, who tries to become a superstar and get rid of poverty in a big city. Analyzing *Sister Carrie* from the perspective of writing and sorting out the author's ideas can not only enable us to have a better understanding of the characters, but also give us an accurate grasp of the novel's themes.

Key words: *Sister Carrie*; narration; contrast; metaphor; writing techniques; analysis

1. Introduction

Theodore Dreiser was a famous American realist writer and journalist in 20th century. His first novel tells the story of Carrie, a farm girl, who leaves her hometown to live in the city. Dreiser, who created Carrie, has been controversial since the publication of his books. He witnessed the brutal oppression of the American poor and the vanity and degradation of the "bourgeois lifestyle of the poor writer". However, due to a variety of reasons, the work has not attracted enough attention and in-depth research. Some critics pointed out that the novel unabashedly revealed the maladies of social reality, did not incorporate idealism, did not enlighten the masses, and deviated from the essence of novel creation. Therefore, the verbal attack on *Sister Carrie*, and Carrie's depraved behavior should be retribution rather than a high-flying ending. Other critics were ambivalent about Carrie's decline, and contemporary critics shifted from initially extreme repression to later defamation. Later, some argued that *Sister Carrie* represented the "new woman" in American society. Undeniably, whether analyzed in terms of the characterization of the work or its social value, *Sister Carrie* is undoubtedly an intriguing masterpiece.

Besides, from the perspective of writing, *Sister Carrie* can also give a great deal of inspiration to writing, which is an excellent work with a compelling plot, strong characters, distinctive personalities and a brilliant writing style. It is generally accepted that writing skills consist of three parts: expressiveness, writing method and rhetorical method. In this book, the author provides an objective and realistic portrayal of the material and social life of Chicago. The novel uses many contrasts and symbols as well as various environmental descriptions to give the characters a rich sense of reality, and in addition to light-hearted humor, it also uses many rhetorical techniques such as exaggeration and metaphor to make people think about the tragic fate of the characters.

2. Analysis of the Expression

Narration is a way of expression. In theoretical research, narration, in a sense, is a theoretical reproduction of research results; in literature, narration is the most common literary means of expression and the most direct means of literary creation. It generally consists of six elements: time, place, character, cause, process, and result. In a descriptive narration, the focus is on the background of the story, the appearance and feelings of the characters and objects. The goal here is to be completely immersed in the world of stories, which is different from the viewpoint narration. Viewpoint narration strives to immerse in the character's inner world and has a limited perspective on the world of the story. A well-known example of a descriptive narration is Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*. After murdering a victim and hiding his heart beneath a floorboard, the narrator hears a heartbeat-like thumping, which gets louder and louder until he confesses his crime. The narration is structured like a conversation between the reader and the narrator, with the narrator's distressed mental state and strong emotions expressed through Poe's word choice, sentence structure, and manner of addressing the reader. Descriptive narration techniques are essential to discuss the topic, including the use of vivid imagery to introduce specific objects and ideas, personification, and similes. In the narration of *Sister Carrie*, through descriptive narration, the author shows the readers the journey of Carrie's life from her identity to her later experiences. From her external behaviors to her internal expressions, all of these reflect the overall perspective of the narration, revealing Sister Carrie's inner growth.

Another expressive feature of the novel is the interposition of narration and commentary. The author adds arguments to the narration to express his perceptions, attitudes and judgments about the characters and some events. The first chapter is a good example, which specifically presents how Carrie leaves her hometown of Chicago. "When a girl leaves home at the age of eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into the hands of the savior and gets better, or she quickly adopts the global standard of virtue and gets worse." This observation is not only a concern about Carrie's future away from home, but also points out Carrie's experiences in the big city. This writing technique, along with a touching point of view, adds an aura of cothurn to the whole story as well as an illumination to readers.

3. Analysis of the Writing Methods

Contrast is a mode of expression in which two sides with clear differences, contradictions and opposites are put together to be compared and contrasted. Comparison is the juxtaposition of two opposing meanings, two aspects of a thing or an issue so as to help readers distinguish between the pros and cons. In addition, through the comparison, one can fully and easily express the contradictions of things, emphasize the essential qualities of the things expressed, as well as increase the artistic impact and attractiveness of the articles. This novel contains two biographies that are completely balanced and juxtaposed.

There are a lot of costume comparisons in the text. The author describes Carrie's dress from different angles in the novel, which not only highlights her identity and status, but also explains her inferiority complex, showing incisively and vividly after she met Drouet on the train. "Her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small lunch in a paper box, and a yellow leather snap purse, containing her ticket, a scrap of paper with her sister's address." This is what Carrie was wearing when she left. And what did the author say about Drouet? We can see, "From his coat sleeves protruded a pair of linen cuffs of the same pattern, fastened with large, gold plate buttons, set with the common yellow agates known as "cat's-eyes". His fingers bore several rings-one, the ever-enduring heavy seal and from his vest dangled a neat gold watch chain, from which was suspended the secret insignia of the Order of Elks. The whole suit was more like tight-fitting, and was finished off with heavy-soled tan shoes, highly polished, and the gray fedora hat." Here Drouet was clearly a man of extravagance and frivolity, suggesting that he and Carrie came from two different classes, and Carrie's inferiority complex therefore came evidently.

Through the comparison of clothing, the author skillfully shows the completely separate identities and status of the two, and lays a foundation for the marvelous transformation of Carrie in the future. What's more, the contrast between Hurstwood and Carrie is the main point of the book, which is again based on a comparison between luxury and poverty and focuses on Carrie's rise and Hurstwood's failure. Through many contradictory and contrasting events, the heroine achieves fame and comfort, while the hero loses his wealth, social status, pride and ultimately his life, which is one of Dreiser's best storytelling qualities. In his autobiography, *Indiana Music Festival*, he states, "Without confrontation, there is no life."

4. Analysis of Rhetorical Devices

Metaphors are "implicit analogies that equate one something with another in an imaginative way and impose the characteristics of the former on the latter, or attribute the emotional and imaginative factors associated with the latter to the former. Metaphor is not only a figure of speech, but also a mode of cognition and an important means of discourse structure, especially scholarly discourse."

The metropolis of Chicago is not only the natural setting in which the story unfolds, but also a metaphor for the social ecology of "materialism," with a strong referential function and realistic representation. In the second chapter, Dreiser devotes a great deal of space to describing Chicago's prosperity, comparing it to "a great magnet" that "draws people from all sides, full of hope or despair." Human and animal instincts drive all human behavior, and the desire for sensual pleasure and the goods of life is the most fundamental characteristic of human nature. Taking advantage of the singularity of desire in the bustling city and the tools that carry it, Dreiser shows the materialized reality of American capitalist society by depicting the scenes of desire and the farce that occurs when people are driven by their desires. Our main characters lived in such a prosperous metropolis. Carrie and Hurstwood, metaphorically represent human greed. Hurstwood is an upscale bar manager, businessman and prominent family man.

Sister Carrie is a controversial figure in contemporary American literary history, which is highly regarded in the United States and around the world. In the context of the emergence of "new woman" in 19th-century America, the purpose of this essay is to provide a feminist reading of the figure of Sister Carrie, revealing her "other" identity in a patriarchal society where the satisfied Hurstwood, like Drouet, sometimes goes out for pleasure and searches for novelty and excitement. We can conclude that the hardships of survival give rise to Carrie's material desires, while the siege of marriage gives rise to the desires of Hurstwood. The desire for material goods and beauty is the truest and most interesting things hidden in human nature. Hurstwood's lust leads him to a reckless elopement with Carrie to steal the bartender's money, implying his tragic fate.

5. Conclusion

The literary and social value brought by *Sister Carrie* has received great attention from both the subject matter and the method of creation. At that time, American literature was full of banter and frivolity. However, instead of conformism, Dreiser insisted that "Life is a tragedy, and I just want to describe it without tolerance and write something that has never been written before." The rich metaphors and ironies of Carrie and Hurstwood's vanity, greed and stubbornness are vivid and powerful. He presents a world of real, absurd and complex characters with a unique perspective and a unique language and narrative approach. Symbolism and exaggeration are widely used in novels, shaping a wealth of featured characters. All these writing techniques also give the novel a deeper meaning including the criticism of American consumerism and luxury, and the expression of the despair over the tattered American Dream.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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